

Jon Gregory



Cardinal

the dawn of reality

(a novel – first of 2 parts)

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These are the first 3 chapters of Jon Gregory's
forthcoming debut novel; Cardinal

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August 1939 Peconic – *Mountains of Sand*

Walking along the beach he scuffed the sand with the new sandals he bought in Rothman's store. He welcomed the conversation he had with Rothman. It was to one of these conversations he returned. Pulling the rope at his trousers tightly he went over the mathematics in his head. The implications were inevitable. Staring at the sand he saw the late sun catch minute grains in the sand. Turning around he followed his footsteps back to the dock. In time he thought these would vanish in the changing tides. He looked at the shadowed impressions realising he could not undo time's arrow. Returning to the sand beneath his feet he pushed his foot this way and that and watched as each grain tumbled into the other cascading over each other forming and reforming miniature sand dunes. He imagined the sand growing and growing firstly to the size of a sand dune and he imagined the same action occurring, grain upon grain shifting under the action of gravity and motion. Then he imagined a mountain of grains and then imagined an avalanche of grains. He visualised how each grain impacted the next in an uncontrolled cascade of energy. He walked a bit further. Then he imagined a great chain of sand mountains and these he imagined stretching across the sea towards Europe. He imagined that the balance of form and content was held on the precipice of possibility held by a fragile peace. Then he imagined a jackboot as he stomped through that ridge forming a cascade which impacted the next and then the next in a great chain reaction until it reached him there in the quiet autumn of Long Island. His hair fell forwards in the evening breeze and extending his gaze towards the horizon. He sensed that it would be inevitable. Like sand he and many of his colleagues had been scattered to the four winds. Turning to face the boardwalk he made his way to The Belvedere. The short walk allowed him the time to consider his next course of action. He retrieved Szilard's letter from the hall bureau. At the end of the letter were the signatures of Leo Szilard, Edward teller and Eugene Wigner.

Taking the letter to the porch he sat down and read the contents again, slowly going over each line following the cascade from sentence to sentence, word to word, letter to letter. Finally he flattened the paper on the table where he had a small portable typewriter. Inserting the onion skin paper he began;

Albert Einstein

Old Grove Rd.

Nassau Point

Peconic, Long Island

August 2nd 1939

F.D. Roosevelt

President of the United States

White House

Washington, D.C.

Sir:

Some recent work by E.Fermi and L. Szilard, which has been communicated to me in manuscript, leads me to expect that the element uranium may be turned into a new and important source of energy in the immediate future. Certain aspects of the situation which has arisen seem to call for watchfulness and, if necessary, quick action on the part of the Administration. I believe therefore that it is my duty to bring to your attention the following facts and recommendations:

In the course of the last four months it has been made probable through the work of Joliot in France as well as Fermi and Szilard in America - that it may become possible to set up a nuclear chain reaction in a large mass of uranium, by which vast amounts of power and large quantities of new radium-like elements would be generated. Now it appears almost certain that this could be achieved in the immediate future.

This new phenomenon would also lead to the construction of bombs, and it is conceivable - though much less certain - that extremely powerful bombs of a new type may thus be constructed. A single bomb of this type, carried by boat and exploded in a port, might very well destroy the whole port together with some of the surrounding territory. However, such bombs might very well prove to be too heavy for transportation by air.

The United States has only very poor ores of uranium in moderate quantities. There is some good ore in Canada and the former Czechoslovakia, while the most important source of uranium is Belgian Congo.

In view of the situation you may think it desirable to have more permanent contact maintained between the Administration and the group of physicists working on chain reactions in America. One possible way of achieving this might be for you to entrust with this task a person who has your confidence and who could perhaps serve in an unofficial capacity. His task might comprise the following:

a) to approach Government Departments, keep them informed of the further development, and put forward recommendations for Government action, giving particular attention to the problem of securing a supply of uranium ore for the United States;

b) to speed up the experimental work, which is at present being carried on within the limits of the budgets of University laboratories, by providing funds, if such funds be required, through his contacts with private persons who are willing to make contributions for this cause, and perhaps also by obtaining the co-operation of industrial laboratories which have the necessary equipment.

I understand that Germany has actually stopped the sale of uranium from the Czechoslovakian mines which she has taken over. That she should have taken such early action might perhaps be understood on the ground that the son of the German Under-Secretary of State, von Weizsäcker, is attached to the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut in Berlin where some of the American work on uranium is now being repeated.

Yours very truly,

(Albert Einstein)

Year One

September 1939 – London – *Four by four*

The fire in the Oak Room crackled. Several of the collective stood with their backs to the flames, their hands warming as they spoke quietly. Someone volunteered to open a window to the room to clear the air. A cool breeze was pulled through the room and up the chimney. Meanwhile Simon Cleverly moved from the crowded Holborn Tube Station towards Gate Street. His pace along the footpath confirmed his sense of mission. As he weaved his way through those heading home he was a little anxious about who would attend the meeting. It had taken 6 months of conversations, letters, and accidental meetings to assemble a select list of sympathetic voices. Now the day had come to place the material before the assembly. Outside the Tube Station the street sellers held aloft their sheets. Across the crisp white paper the word War stood out. The radio stations had relayed Chamberlain's address to the nation on every radio that worked. Arriving simultaneously with his plans he considered it fortuitous but complicating them in turn. It was moreover an opportunity to be turned in his favour.

At times the crowd would ask for quiet to hear the radio before return to chaotic conversation. A sense of excitement flowed through the crowds infecting each person with expectation and fear in equal measure. Young women pulled scarfs back from the ears hear the news emanating from radio shops and pubs. The Ship's Tavern on Gate Street was filled with young men talking about Poland and the possibility of what a second war with Germany would mean. He stood at the threshold looking at the crowd, half-drunk beers in froth edged glasses. Skirting the largest group he edged along the pub towards the stair. At the turning of the stairs he bumped into William Barron.

"Simon, hello."

"William, thank you for coming. Is everyone here?"

They continued climbing the stair, awkwardly.

"I think so, that is apart from Carrington. I tried again yesterday but he is deeply suspicious."

"We will be continuing regardless."

“Maybe he will change his mind now because of war.”

Cleverly moved ahead and opened the heavy door to the Oak Room. It swung slowly open. The murmuring conversations were silenced on his arrival. The room had been prepared for the meeting, with several tables combined to make a large banqueting arrangement covered by a white cloth. Cleverly placed his brown leather satchel, neatly, in the centre, at one end. As he circumnavigated the table he pulled out each chair inviting the assembly to sit. He greeted each one by name even though some he had only spoke to by telephone. Nonetheless he made no mistakes. By the time he had returned to the start, Barron had seated himself.

At the table there were 15 men of aged between 30 and 53. Barron would have squared the group. He thought that he might have to co-opt another member. Standing at the end of the table he looked up and around the table he called the meeting to order.

“We have been preparing for over 3 years. It seems that history is upon us and we are not ready. We must not be displaced from our path. We must say our course, be vigilant and purposeful. Moreover we cannot tell anyone of our objectives. If the opportunity arises we must bend history to our will our destiny. I believe however history itself will deliver us that opportunity.”

The room narrowed its focus on the man at the end of the table. He did not attract a natural following by his stature, looks or standing in society. His corralling of the group was by working within the limits of existing organisations and societies. It was his organisational skills that dominated the arrangements and the argument offered in the vacuum of clear direction led to the opportunists that emerged in the post war period. Whatever the reasoning that allowed a man like Simon Cleverly to emerge as a potential leader among men was unclear but the men found themselves in a darkened room in the middle of London on the eve of war facing this individual nonetheless.

The men took their place at the table and sitting down found a manila folder in front of each place. “Gentlemen, we have a plan, regardless of the news today. Inside the folder in front of you there are a number of sheets which outline the arrangements. You have been chosen because of your sympathies and your place in various parts of society and especially government. We are about to find ourselves in the middle of a war and I am sure, I know, that our world will be wielded to that end. You must rid yourselves of the certainty that there will be only one way. We will take our time to organise, persuade and influence. There will never be such an opportunity again.”

The room was silent but for the crackling of logs on the fire and the rustle of sheets as the pages were pulled from their protective cover. No words were exchanged. From time to time a head looked up and scanned for acknowledgement from the gathering. Even a glimpse of a knowing smile or wink perhaps would ease themselves on their way. Inside the folder there were diagrams outlining the organisation, the relationship to other groups in other countries. Each participant received individual instructions about their role and place in the organisation.

“Gentlemen I propose that you commit the contents of your folders to memory. This is important until there is time for the unveiling. Once unveiled we will be bathed in the light of transparency, but it will have to wait for the right time. On the last page there are details of emergency contacts and notification rules. As time demands you will be called to a meeting to discuss progress. I had hoped....”

Interrupting the presentation Frank Carrington burst through the door.

“Sorry I am late, the tube was full and the streets are all awash with news of war. I had terrible problems getting from Paddington.”

Though the room had turned to meet the gasping man swinging on the door, no one spoke. He hung on the door now waiting to be greeted, welcomed even but none was forthcoming.

Acknowledging the silence he stood upright and closed the door firmly.

“Please take your seat.”

Taking the last of the available seat Cleverly inwardly acknowledged the last of the 16. He also made a mental note of Carrington’s tardiness.

In the street below the noise of chatter and cheers rose progressively. Excited talk about recruitment stations had begun to make its way through the crowd. The memory of the last war had barely faded and here it was to begin again. As he waited for the material to be absorbed and digested Cleverly remembered his work in the last conflict.

In a barracks behind he had arranged for images to be processed from cameras deployed in aircraft across the front. From this distance the world looked clear, unambiguous and horrific. From above none of the promises or boasts of the generals could be substantiated. As member of the experimental air reconnaissance unit he had established the mapping necessary to put order on the war experience. At the same time an idea was seeded in the harrowed soil of Flanders. Twenty years of planning and manipulation had now led to this meeting. Today would be the lens through which the future would be known. The image of the lens came to him as sudden as the memory of that time in Flanders as he saw himself hunched over the map table, spy glass in hand. As he marked up gun emplacements, troop and barrack locations and other strategic positions he was struck by the transparency of the world from above.

From a distance the dance of man could be determined instead of guessed. He remembered in particular the result of his work when the Lochnagar mine tore the largest man made hole out of the earth in an instance. On the bright summer's day in July 1916 was his first lens moment, a point between the past and the future, at least his imagined future. Now that he sat here in this room he wasn't sure if this was exactly the future imagine back in 1916 but he knew that the path was correct. He looked around at the taut faces as they examined the typed documents. As he studied the smallest reactions, the twist of a mouth, the scratching of an ear, the hand as it was pushed through hair he knew the seriousness of the task and the commitment that was being honoured. He looked intently at Carrington to discern if there was any hesitancy about the man but was cheered by what he noted. Carrington had a short stubby pencil in hand which he sent about underlining passages of the notes.

"Gentlemen, I trust that you are committing the essentials to your memory. It is important that you take note of your alternative contacts above all else. If there are any changes..... because of the war or disruption it will be important to keep our structure. We have been discussing how we should explain and broadcast our ideas. In time I believe the opportunity will be provided for us. The tools will also become known to us. We must commit ourselves to this idea, to be strong and united in our ambition."

In time each man placed the material back in their folder and sat back on their chair awaiting the others. When the last man returned the material Cleverly stood up. He took a small instrument from his satchel and placed it on the table directly. The instrument was not recognisable, a long pen like handle with a wheel at the end. Those closer saw small cogs or needles around its circumference. Beside this he placed a small bottle and removed its cap. Carrington recognised it as an ink bottle. Then Cleverly rolled out a small hand towel. No one spoke. Instead they looked around for some clue from their neighbour.

“Now that you have had time to memorise the information and before we destroy the material I ask that you take our oath again.”

Carrington thought that the first time he took the oath that it was medieval. Unlike other members of the cabal, he did not come with pedigree. No Masonic Lodge, Public School or even Boy Scouts for him. A scion of a once wealthy family who had fallen on very hard times he found himself out of place in the well tiered British society. With some doubt he swore his oath and now he was faced with a repeat of the esoteric practice. This time he was more comfortable with the necessity sensing the authority and the importance of the moment. Major Cleverly had received a distinguished service medal for his work with the Royal Engineers. Along with his medals and decorations from the Great War he had been rewarded with a place in politics. Carrington watched the man carefully remove his jacket and hang it on the rear of his chair. Unbuttoning his right shirt sleeve he rolled the cotton back to reveal his forearm. From the whiskey bottle on the table he poured a full glass and into it he rattled the instrument. He dipped the instrument in the ink and ran the instrument in two lines to mark a cross near to the base of his elbow. The instrument had short needles that pierced the skin in a series of punctures depositing ink under the dermis to make a tattoo. The holes were small and the blood was minimal. Watching more intently now than ever silence descended. He lowered his arm onto the towel wiping the blood and ink onto the white cotton. He returned the instrument to the whiskey glass where red and blue rivulets twirled around in the ochre liquid. Using his index finger he rubbed at the inked wounds. The men understood the meaning of the brand and began to divest themselves of their jackets. In turn each man took the instrument and made their own mark. Once complete they regained their place at the table and Cleverly enacted the oath by making fists, crossing his arms at the wrist, before leading the group in the oath.

*“This is our staff, this is our order,
This is our line, this is our destiny.
We swear to do right by this ordinance,
We swear to uphold the order of things.
For the future we mark our place now,
With science at our back our path will be clear.”*

The men were conscious of the murmur that reverberated from the Oak panelling. Outside the crowd sensed the unison of voice halting their excited chatter for a moment before returning to the excitement of the earlier news. Inside the oak room was another story, another country. Cleverly gathered the manila folders and with the bloodied towel condemned the record to the fire. Even the whiskey contributed to the conflagration enveloping the room in a red glow and a great roar. Cleverly returned the instrument and ink to his satchel. The mood of the room had changed. Suddenly what was hesitant was replaced by camaraderie, by a cosy knowledge of unified purpose and identity. They were members of an elite, unique group. The warmth of the room infused them with courage in spite of the terror that some had known will eventually, inevitably come. As they left the room with its cocoon of conservation they shook hands with Cleverly, gripping hard as if for the last time. Cleverly sensed it would be the last for some but hoped that most would see their task through to the end. In the fireplace a log displaced by the burning materials sent a cascade of embers into the room. He watched them dissipate on the parquet.

October 1939 – Washington – *The Leaves of Autumn*

Roosevelt stared out of the Oval Office into the bright sunlight. Outside the leaves had turned rust, red and orange. Large piles had been raised on the front lawn overlooking the mall. He could see the gardener's breath hang in the air. He longed to be outside in this chilled air. He longed for its cleansing touch as it seeks out the tiniest parts of his lungs. However he had just commenced a chain of events that for him might lead to the worst of outcomes. Britain had barely called for war and through the entreaties of the Ambassador was seeking support from America. It had been done, the cause clear, the import even clearer. For now history will be the only judge. What may become of anything he could not tell? The future was dark to him, darker now that Britain had pulled the trigger. Nothing could stop the war. He had begun to recognise how the machinery of the age had become steadily more powerful, more destructive, the only thing that was certain was that the losses experienced in the Great War would be nothing compared to this one. Worrying reports of purges and concentration camps in the east of Europe only increased his anxiety. He began his dictation to the secretary.

The White House

Washington

October 19 1939

My dear Professor;

I want to thank you for your recent letter and the most interesting and important enclosure.

I found this data of such import that I have convened a Board consisting of the head of the Bureau of Standards and a chosen representative of the Army and Navy to thoroughly investigate the possibilities of your suggestion regarding the element of uranium.

I am glad to say that Dr. Sachs will cooperate and work with this Committee and I feel that this is the most practical and effective method of dealing with the subject.

Please accept my sincere thanks.

Franklin D Roosevelt

As he was completing the dictation, his senior staff had knocked and entered the room.

“Sir, sorry to disturb you. I have been going over the notes for your radio address for later in the month. You highlighted a couple of passages and we want to make sure that they are recorded correctly.”

Roosevelt dismissed the secretary asking that she return later in the day with the typed letter for signature.

“Which date has been set for the radio broadcast?”

“ October 26, a week today...”

“Let’s see the passages? What is the concern?”

“You know the British Ambassador has actively sought our intention in regard to the possibility of war with Germany..... “

“Yes, I have also been in touch with the First Lord of the Admiralty. I am fully aware of the situation.”

“But Sir, the speech has specific references to the fact that no one has suggested sending American Soldiers to a possible war in Europe.”

“Let me see that.”

The young man handed over the typed paper. The President took the notes to the window and allowed the sunlight to play along the creases of the paper as he read the notes he had partly dictated. In turn various suggestions and other points were raised and added in discussion. He read quickly through the material, recognising the parts he had already updated. When he arrived at a necessary passage he read it aloud;

“There are, therefore, two distinct dangers to democracy. There is the peril from those who seek the fulfilment of fine ideals at a pace that is too fast for the machinery of the modern body politic to function—people who by insistence on too great speed foster an oligarchic form of Government such as Communism, or Nazism or Fascism.....”

“Because the country is so profoundly interested in the world situation today, I do want to leave with you one thought bearing on international relations. I make bold to do this because the topic of this evening's discussion, as I understand it, is "The War's Challenge to the United States."

In and out of Congress we have heard orators and commentators and others beating their breasts and proclaiming against sending the boys of American mothers to fight on the battlefields of Europe. That I do not hesitate to label as one of the worst fakes in current history. It is a deliberate setting up of an imaginary bogey man. The simple truth is that no person in any responsible place in the national administration in Washington, or in any State Government, or in any city Government, or in any county Government, has ever suggested in any shape, manner or form the remotest possibility of sending the boys of American mothers to fight on the battlefields of Europe. That is why I label that argument a shameless and dishonest fake.

The fact of the international situation—the simple fact, without any bogey in it, without any appeals to prejudice—is that the United States of America, as I have said before, is neutral and does not intend to get involved in war. That we can be neutral in thought as well as in act is impossible of fulfilment because again, the people of this country, thinking things through calmly and without prejudice, have been and are making up their minds about the relative merits of current events on other continents.”

Taking a pencil he underlined the section *“the United States of America, as I have said before, is neutral and does not intend to get involved in war”*, to remind him to emphasise this section to his audience.

Secretly however he thought to himself that the fake might be he himself. The conversations with the Lord Admiral had become tenser over the last few months. He could not see just how America could be involved at such a great distance from Germany. Perhaps it was the special project that really worried him. If Einstein’s projections are to be treated as real then nowhere might be safe. For a moment he considered an alternative prospect, that of the race. If America could secure the technology first then maybe a war could be avoided, if only to have the bigger stick. It was still not clear just who would yield this stick first.