

# **Singularity**

by

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ISBN: 078-0-9782564-6-3

Published by N.J. Matthews  
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## Chapter 1

Dr. Arnold Soper poured two fingers, more or less, of Glenfiddich into the crystal glass. As he put the cap on the bottle, the telephone rang. It was his wife Ashley.

“Arnie? So, you're back. I wasn't sure when you were arriving. How was the trip?”

He paused before answering her and took a comforting sip of the liquor. “Yes I'm back, where are you?”

“I'm at the club of course, where did you think I'd be?”

He could tell from her voice that she had been into the Manhattans. This was not going to be pleasant. He was glad of the distance between them.

Before she could continue the conversation he said, “Ashley, I've done some thinking while I was in Nairobi. I'm going to call it quits.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean us, we're done. I am moving out of the Condo. You can stay if you like. I'll send for my things tomorrow. I can make it part of the settlement”.

There was a sharp intake of breath on the other end of the line.

“You sonofabitch. I had an idea something like this was going on. Who is she?”

“There isn't anybody, I am simply tired of you. Tired of the bullshit games you play, I want my freedom. I'll start the process tomorrow. You'll be hearing from Ted Franklin.”

“You bastard.”

He hung up the phone and took a long pull at his drink. It was done.

*I'll see that she and Ellis are looked after in the settlement. Better to make this arrangement now than after the news breaks. There'll be no way to control the media once this goes public. All hell will break loose.*

He refilled his glass and moved out onto the balcony. *Spring in Toronto and a nice evening breeze off the lake. It was good after the heat and humidity of Nairobi.*

*Why the hell they had to have a Pharmaceutical Conference in Nairobi is beyond me. But I did find a replacement for Peter Mytryk.*

He'd lost trust in Mytryk since the episode of the security leak. An American Company had been able to obtain patents on a significant new product that Soper Research had been just about to file. They missed filing by only a matter of days. The similarity between the two products was striking, but still different enough that Soper was unable to challenge the patent.

Although Mytryk had been exonerated by the ensuing investigation, Soper's gut told him he could never trust the man again.

He smiled as he looked out over the city skyline from his balcony. The sun was setting. He loved the city. But with impending developments at Soper Research, it might not continue to be head office for his company. His legal and accounting people were preparing recommendations for his consideration regarding the best tax haven location. He needed to get to his office. He didn't need any snags or problems that might complicate the biggest deal of his life.

He downed his drink picked up his car keys and a small overnight bag and headed for the parking garage. He gave a quick glance back as he pulled the door shut. He knew he would never be back.

His Mercedes SL55 AMG was parked exactly where he had left it. He had insisted on securing the two adjacent stalls as a condition of the condo purchase. There was some wrangling with the developer but he prevailed. At \$195,000, he didn't want anybody doing damage with car doors or fender scrapes.

He stopped and admired the sleek lines of the coupe. He chuckled as he remembered the look on the face of the dealer when he insisted on “British Racing Green” as his colour of choice. But he knew that the 'square head' wouldn't let that be a deal breaker.”

Turning the key and pressing the start button, the SL55 roared to life. It didn't matter how many times he got behind the wheel. There was always a thrill.

He drove out of the underground parking garage and headed west on Lakeshore Drive to the Queen Elizabeth Way. His office and research lab was located in Sheridan Park about 30 kilometers west of the

city.

Reaching over he caressed the soft kid leather of the passenger seat. He smiled as he remembered the car salesman's comment, "As soft as the thighs of a beautiful woman." He was right, but he cared for this car more than any woman. Soper always equated possessions with his achievements. The SL55 was just the most recent.

He maintained the same speed as most of the other cars, about 20 kilometers over the posted limit. It was just about 7:30 on a pleasant May evening as he settled back to enjoy the 30-minute trip. He put a Diana Krall CD into the player.

The sun was just beginning to set and he was driving into it. The light in his eyes began to bother him, in spite of the sunglasses. He began to feel the onset of a slight headache, probably as much from the lack of sleep over the last 48 hours as anything else. He would pop a couple of Tylenol's when he got to his office.

He sensed a fuzziness that affected his peripheral vision. An overwhelming tiredness overtook him. *I'll just do a quick check at the office to see how things are going and then I'll go to the hotel.*

Soper Research maintained a permanent suite in the Hamden located in the Research Park. It was useful for visiting dignitaries as well as for the many times he worked late and chose not to return home.

It became harder for him to keep the SL55 in his lane. He kept drifting to the right and tended to over correct when he tried to bring the car back. He slowed his speed to the legal limit.

Although he had the top down, he was beginning to feel very warm. He cranked up the air conditioning. That seemed to help. The spell passed, and taking a deep breath, he began to feel somewhat better.

He arrived at Soper Research at about 8:00 PM A modernistic 3 story building of stainless steel and green tinted glass which made it impossible to see inside. He pulled into his parking spot, again with permanently reserved stalls on either side.

The building had a "state of the art" biometrics security system. Unauthorized visitors were not allowed in the building. However, there was a telephone kiosk outside the main door where prospective visitors could contact their "minders" and, if they had an appointment, they work be escorted into the building.

For the people that worked at Soper Research, the first level of security to gain access to at least the front door was a fingerprint scanner. This would identify the employee, open the front door, and log them into the computer system. Even greet them by name.

This procedure applied to Soper as well. He placed his finger on the scanner pad. After a few seconds, he heard.

"Good Evening Dr. Soper," and the heavy glass door swung open onto an atrium. In the center of which sat a security guard. An array of video screens was linked to security cameras at strategic locations throughout the building and grounds. Each camera output was taped for posterity.

"Evenin' Dr. Soper, glad to see you're back. Good trip?"

"Travel is a pain in the ass Ben. But yes, and I am glad to be back. Have you been looking after things while I've been gone?"

"You betcha Dr. Soper. Will you be in long sir?"

"No, just got to check my mail and messages. Shouldn't be more than an hour or so."

Soper's office was located in the high security wing of the building and as such required a retinal scan in order to access the area. He put his chin in the rest and looked into the lens with his right eye. At the same time, he pressed the push button activating the device. He peered into the blue light and after a short time the door to the high security area swung open and he was again greeted by a disembodied voice.

As he passed down the hallway to his office, he was aware of a dull ache originating from behind his right eyeball. His headache seemed to be coming back.

"Hi Arnie. Welcome home." It was Peter Mytryk. He followed Soper into his office.

"Thanks Peter, it's good to be back, I still can't figure out why in Hell they have to go all the way to Nairobi to hold a conference. Seems like I have been awake for a week straight. My biological clock is still screwed up."

“Pete, give me an update on the FDA situation. We can’t leave anything to chance. This is the biggest thing we have ever done.”

“I know that Arnie. I have been on top of our contact at the FDA and he assures me that we will have approval to release the vaccine for public use by June 15th No question about it.”

“It had better happen. That sonofabitch has sucked a lot of cash out of me so far. It’s time we had the opportunity to make some money on this thing.”

“Our contact has done everything we asked of him. We have had inside information all the way through the process. We have been able to amend our submission as needed. We’ve even be able to adjust some of our test data and he approved it,” said Mytryk.

“Yeah, yeah, and he has \$250,000 of my money in his pocket. We’ve been putting out. Now it’s time pull some profits in.”

“Arnie have you decided when to take the company public? I think I deserve to be in on the IPO. I’ve put a lot into this company. I want an opportunity to cash in too.”

“You Asshole. You put a lot into this company? This is MY Company I built it from nothing. I’ve taken all the risk. You’re nothing but an employee and a highly paid one too, maybe too highly paid. What I may or may not decide to do is none of your business just remember that you are under a personal service contract to me. You observe the confidentiality clause of that contract to the letter or you will never work again. Make sure you keep your mouth shut regarding anything you think you know.”

“Arnie, Arnie, calm down. I know it is your company. I know how hard you’ve worked to build it. It’s just that I would like to be acknowledged for my part. Albeit a small part, in the success of this company.”

Soper hit his fist on his desk. His right eye was twitching violently and he began to shake. Mytryk stood with his mouth open and watched.

Soper struggled to talk. Grasping his throat, he was unable to utter a sound other than a strangled rasp. His body began to convulse and he collapsed to the floor. Shortly after, he became motionless. Mytryk was sure he was dead.

He felt at his neck, there was an irregular pulse. But he was extremely warm to the touch. He got security on the telephone and directed them to get an ambulance immediately,

“Dr. Soper has been taken ill. This is urgent Ben, get on it right away and then notify the hospital immediately.”

“Yessir Dr. Mytryk, right away.”

Mytryk went to Soper’s desk and checked the Rolladex. In spite of all his high technology gadgets, Soper preferred the Rolladex. He found the direct number to Soper’s physician, Jim Nelson, and placed the call. Nelson was not just Soper’s personal physician, but was as close as the man had to a friend.

Surprisingly, Nelson answered on the third ring, “Jim Nelson here.”

Dr. Nelson, this is Peter Mytryk at Soper Research. We have an emergency.”

Sensing the anxiety in his voice, he responded.

“Calm down Dr., Mytryk, what is it.”

“It’s Arnie, he’s had some kind of attack. A seizure I think.”

Mytryk repeated the facts of the episode, omitting of course the argument. But included the fact that Soper was comatose and that an ambulance was enroute.

“You will direct them to the University Hospital, ” Nelson demanded.

“Yes of course.”

“Good, I’ll meet them there. Please be there as well.”

“Of course.”

Just as he hung up the telephone, the paramedics arrived, escorted by Ben. They checked Soper's vital signs and got him on a gurney. His colour was beginning to return to his face and his breathing seemed less laboured.

“University Hospital Emergency, right?”

“Yes, and hurry. This is a very important man.”

The female paramedic muttered, under her breath, to no one in particular.

“Ain’t they all.”

\* \* \*

Jim Nelson arrived at the Hospital just shortly after Soper was placed in the Emergency Room Ward. The duty nurse was preparing the paper work as Nelson walked in. The nurse was not a particular favourite of his.

“What have you got so far?”

She gave an insolent shrug and responded.

“Considering he just got here. Not much.”

“Do you have any idea of who this man is?”

“Should I?”

“This is Dr. Arnold Soper and for your information he is a major benefactor of this hospital. He donated the MRI machine on the third floor as well as funding several research projects within the hospital. So a little special attention is deserved, don’t you think?”

The nurse was flustered. “Yes Dr. Nelson, of course.”

“Get the 'on duty' doctor in here. Stat.”

“Yes Sir.” There was no hint of sarcasm this time.

The doctor in charge of the Emergency Room came up behind Nelson.

“Hi Jim, what have we got here?”

“I think you know Arnold Soper, CEO of Soper Research. He seems to have some kind of attack or seizure at his office, sometime in the last 45 minutes. I’m his family physician, his office notified me just after the occurrence.”

“Hmm, any history of seizures in the past? Do any family members suffer from epilepsy?”

“Not to my knowledge, and I have been treating him for the last 10 years. Generally I could say he has been as strong as an ox.”

“OK, I’ll order a complete work up, blood tests, X-rays: EEG, EKG, and the whole schmeer. We’ll see what we can find.”

“Pull out all the stops. This man has been good to this hospital, as you likely know.”

“You got it.”

Soper’s breathing had become much more regular. His blood pressure, while still elevated, it was dropping. He seemed to be in a rather deep sleep.

Nelson held open Soper’s right eyelid as he aimed his flashlight at the eyeball noting the fact that the pupil was constricted to a tiny point. As he checked the other eye, the two orderlies arrived to move Soper down to the X-ray Lab. He caught up with the Emergency Doctor in the hall,

“I’m going down to the cafeteria for a cup of coffee. Please have me paged as soon as you get anything. And thanks for the prompt action.”

“Not a problem.”

He sat at an unoccupied table in the corner of the cafeteria, close to the pay phones. He took his coffee to the phone with him.

Nelson was not only Arnold Soper’s physician, but he was on the Board of Directors of the company and was an important member of the Executive Committee. He was fully aware of the significance of the impending new product development and the impact that Soper’s collapse might have on the future of the Company.

He placed a call to Declan Mahoney at Mahoney Associates. Mahoney Associates handled Public Relations and Security issues for Soper Research. He gave Mahoney a ‘heads up’ with what had happened with respect to Soper’s attack. Nelson told him that he would keep him posted on any developments so the appropriate press releases could be prepared should Arnie’s condition worsen.

Declan advised him that he would be in contact with hospital security. To make sure that if any members of the press got wind of the situation, they would block access to any staff treating Arnie and to Arnie’s room as well.

His coffee had gotten cold during the conversation. He went to the urn, refreshed it, and ran into Peter Mytryk.

“How's he doing? I can't seem to get any information. He isn't in Emergency and it doesn't look like he has been admitted.”

“No, he hasn't been admitted. He is undergoing a battery of tests. It will be some time yet before he comes back down. As nearly as I can establish, there has been little change from what you saw when the paramedics arrived. His breathing has improved but he was still comatose when I last saw him.”

“Jim I am not sure that it means anything, but I think that you should know.”

He paused before continuing as if he was weighing what Nelson's reaction might be to his next statement.

“Arnie injected himself with the vaccine.”

“What? What in God's name for did he do that for?”

“Just before he left for Nairobi.”

“What the hell would have possessed him to take such a risk?”

“He didn't believe there was any risk. Certainly any of the clinical trials we conducted did not evidence anything like the reaction I witnessed today. As to why, call it macho I suppose. This is the most significant development project in the history of the company. I think he just got carried away.”

“You're probably right, this is likely not related to the vaccine. But it is important that you not discuss this with anyone else. If it gets out it would be blown out of all proportion. We'll see what the tests reveal, I'll inform anyone that needs to know of this. If and when it becomes necessary. Thanks for letting me know about it Peter, it could be important.”

The two men proceeded to the Emergency Ward and found that Soper had been returned to the area. He was still not conscious, but seemed to be resting comfortably. Breathing was regular and the fever had receded. As much from habit as anything else, Nelson reached down and took Soper's pulse. It was normal as well.

Leaving Mytryk in the room, he went to the nurses' station and spoke to the same duty nurse.

“Would you get the doctor for me.”

She went to a curtained patient area and advised the doctor. It took a few minutes but the young man joined him.

“You saw that the patient is back?”

“Yes, any idea when we will see any results? I'd really rather not be here all night.”

“Shouldn't be more than 20 minutes longer. We got the best guy on it. It just happened that our Chief of Neurology is in the hospital tonight. I asked him as a special favour to look at the traces and x-rays. When he heard who the patient was he promised to get right on it.”

It was just at that point that a studious looking little man with a gray goatee approached the two men. He was carrying a docket and an x-ray folder with him.

“Hi Cyril, that was quick, sure appreciate it. You know Jim Nelson of course?”

Cyril looked quizzically through his rather thick lenses. Then his eyes widened.

“Of course, of course, it's been some time Dr. Nelson”. Jim Nelson knew Cyril Pickard well. He knew him to be not just a brilliant neurologist but a crafty manipulator. This ability had paid off for him and made him a wealthy man outside of his medical practice. Nelson thought just how similar Cyril and Arnie were in that regard.

“What do you have for us Cyril?”

“Well, I am afraid not too much. All of the tests came back pretty much normal. What is the patient's current condition Doctor?”

“Still not awake but he appears to be breathing normally. Temperature is OK and his colour is good. I just checked his pulse and that's normal as well.”

The little man nodded, “Let's go see him.”

Peter Mytryk was standing at Soper's bedside when the three men arrived. Nelson touched Mytryk's arm and whispered.

“Peter would you mind? We want to examine him further.”

“No, no of course not.”

Cyril stroked his goatee and muttered to himself. He raised one of Soper's eyelids and peered at the

pupil. He moved his light horizontally from right to left and back. He did the same thing to the other eye. There was no sign of responsiveness to the light.

“He is unresponsive and even though the tests so far have produced normal results, they are really inconclusive. I would recommend that you admit the patient and place him under observation. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to schedule an MRI. That could be more definitive”

Nelson responded. “I would agree Cyril. we can’t afford to take any chances, will you make the necessary arrangements Doctor? It’s Bob isn’t it?”

“No problem Jim, I’ll look after it right away.”

Jim touched Cyril’s arm as Bob went to the nurses’ station,

“Cyril might I have a word with you?”

“Certainly come to my office. It’s just down the hall a bit.”

When the two men were seated in the office, Nelson provided the Neurologist with additional background. He told him of his recent visit to Africa and then paused for a moment before proceeding.

“Cyril you know something of the activities of Arnold Soper and his company Soper Research.”

“Yes of course, in fact I have been personally involved in several research projects here at the hospital that were funded by Soper Research and funded quite generously I might add.”

“Good, good. Cyril I am going to tell you something in the utmost confidence. And I’m telling you because there is a possibility that the information I am about to give you may help you in your diagnosis of Arnie’s problem.”

“Whatever you tell me will remain strictly between us.”

The little man’s eyes seemed to sparkle at the promise of intrigue.

Nelson continued, “Soper Research is on the brink of a breakthrough that could be considered of very great significance to much of the world population.” He paused, wondering just how far was safe enough to go.

“The Company has developed a vaccine that will revolutionize the treatment of a disease that has affected millions of people for decades.”

“What vaccine? For what disease?”

Nelson hesitated. He had been sworn to secrecy by Arnie. But this information could be of significant value in any recovery. Conversely, Arnie could awake at any time and be normal. In which case he could expect to get his ‘ass fried’ nine ways to Sunday.

“He swallowed hard and said, “A vaccine for Alzheimer’s.”

“What?”

“I said, a vaccine for Alzheimer’s”

“Do you mean to tell me that Soper has found and identified a virus responsible for Alzheimer’s? That’s not possible. All the papers I have ever read on the subject, never has it even been discussed that it might be a virus.”

“Nevertheless, Soper Research has discovered it and developed a vaccine. It is on the verge of being released for human trials by the FDA.”

“Astounding. If this is true, this could be worth millions.”

“Exactly, which is why it must be treated with the utmost confidence.”

“Of course, of course. But it surprises me that you are telling me this at all. Why did you?”

“Because Arnold Soper injected himself with the vaccine before he left for Africa two weeks ago.”

“What? But that’s stupid. Why would he do such a thing?”

“I can’t answer that question. But if his current condition is related to the vaccine and he does not fully recover, the trials could be over before they begin. The potential of huge earnings would evaporate. It is even conceivable that the company could fail.”

“I understand.”

“Arnold Soper must recover fully Cyril. If he doesn’t, then whatever happens to him, must not be related to the vaccine. We must buy enough time to make whatever modifications to the vaccine that may be necessary .”

“I am not sure what you are asking of me.”

“I think you do. Just remember, how you deal with this case could make you a very wealthy man.”

“I see.”

