

GEMP

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Chapters 1 - 3 preview

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It is one of those things that armchair scientist and professionals have in common. They think about the possibility of genetically engineered life. Is it possible? Is it worth the risk? Should Humans actually engage in such an endeavor of producing life? Is it just a waste of time? And like the lot that these thinking professionals and the like have in common they understand one thing. Anyone can break a few eggs. It's the omelet that's important.

Chapter 1

Steve Launse began, “One of the things to remember is that Religion was the key to all creative endeavors. We are technologically advance not because of war, or intelligence, or creativeness, but because of religion . . .” He walked down one of the isles. Class was coming to an end and he had to finish the rest of his spiel. “. . . All the things I’ve mentioned has helped, but it has been Religion that has given us a reason to achieve. Religion was a natural outcome to our survival . . .”

Steve looked at his watch. Ten minutes to go, then the bell will ring he told himself. Steve faced his class. All those eager faces out there except for Bill – the school sports hero, yawned and scratched his belly. Bill would be getting a D this semester if he didn’t start applying himself. He was good at football, but not at objective thinking. “. . . When we evolved our religion was right alongside us. We were motivated by a need to please God and without . . .”

Someone interrupted and raised a hand.

“Yes? A question is out there?”

Tim Hackerman raised his arm. He was the class nerd and boy genius. Some speculated his IQ was in the two hundred range. Steve knew better. He checked his personal files. Tim was smart, but not the super genius folks hoped, maybe even wished, he could be. “Professor, is it true that Religion was the first true science?”

Tim asked an easy question. Those who read last night’s assignment would know the answer. Tim either wanted to quickly establish his brilliant dominance in class or he was suckering him up for one of his famous ‘make the teacher look bad’ moments. Steve nodded. “I’m glad you asked that question, I was just getting to that point. Religion at its very core tried to explain all the unknowns in the world. Now let me ask you a question, Tim.”

Tim had started to sit down, but stopped.

“What was the first unknown religion tried to explain?”

Tim straightened up and had a reflective expression on his face. Within a few seconds he answered, “We wondered what made the Sun shine.” He smirked and sat down figuring the question had been settled.

Steve smiled. “Are you certain?”

Tim nodded, “It would be the first thing we would notice. This big bright shining orb floating in the sky.”

Steve considered that. “How about the Moon?”

“The Moon?” Tim said.

“Yeah, night time was probably the scariest thing we could have encountered. It’s very dark outside without

light and we hear all these strange noises and sounds. We would see shadows moving about and sometimes the shadows would take solid form and grab one of us.”

Tim remained silent.

“The Sun probably was not equated to daylight. It was probably one of those items that came with the bright light and not the creation of the light. That type of thinking would come later. We probably hoped the light would return until we realized that as the Sun rose it got brighter. That would be an example of a causal effect model, but the Moon, that was different. The night would consume and eat the Moon only to regurgitate it later. A simple explanation for the phases of the Moon. Was the Moon a living thing? Was it part of the natural world? Think about it. The Moon was probably the first object we tried to explain because it . . .”

The bell rang.

“Read chapter 5 through 7 this weekend. A test will be given Monday morning.”

A collective groan made its way to the door.

Kelly Kirkwhen, a fellow teacher, had been standing in the doorway listening. She stepped aside and allowed the flow of students to pass. She walked over to Steve. “Nice stuff. As usual you speak a mean class.”

Steve smiled. He liked Kelly. She was about his height, had pretty hair she kept in a pony-tail, dressed teacher sexy, and laughed at his jokes. “Thanks . . . mind if I buy you a cup of coffee?”

Kelly grimaced. “The school mud?”

“How about I let Oscar make you a cup? He’s gotten better.”

Kelly smiled. She liked Oscar. He was fun. She also liked Steve. Her problem was she thought he was gay. In all the years they’ve known each other he never mentioned a wife or a girlfriend. He never seriously flirted with her, but he was not a cold fish either. Their conversations were always good and he had a great sense of humor. They seemed to be just friends. “You’re on.”

Steve and Kelly walked down the hallway to his office. Both caught the sound of loud music. As they turned a corner a wave of Metal hit them. Steve recognized the guitar rift and smiled. A favorite.

“Oscar!” He yelled out as he pounded on the door. “Open up.” He pounded several more times. “Oscar! Open . . .”

The music stopped and the door suddenly opened.

Steve and Kelly stepped into the modestly furnished office. A desk was cramped in a corner with a stack of books to one side.

A 24 inch monitor sat on the desk. Oscar, behind it, tapped several keys on the keyboard. He looked up and smiled. A full mouth of teeth showed.

Steve used sign language as he spoke, “Oscar, music loud. No!”

Oscar gave Steve a raspberry.

Steve mocked impatience. He said and signed, “Oscar. Come here please. We have guest.”

Oscar noticed Kelly and jumped out of the chair. He leaped into her arms and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

Kelly kissed him back and placed him gently on the ground.

Oscar signed, “K-pretty, happy I see you.”

Steve said, “Oscar is happy to see you.”

Kelly squatted down to meet Oscar at eye level. “Oscar, I’m always happy to see you.”

With his right hand he spread his fingers near his chin and made an “and” sign over his face. He finished by signing female.

Steve smiled. “Oscar said pretty girl.”

Kelly blushed. “Thank you, Oscar. And I think you’re very handsome.”

Oscar smiled teeth, hooted, and ran to his cage.

Kelly looked up to Steve. “Amazing progress, Steve.”

Steve nodded, “Too bad it took too long.”

“What do you mean?”

“The school is pulling the plug. They don’t think I’m making any real progress.”

“That’s absurd!”

“I had been thinking about taking my sabbatical.” He shrugged and gave Kelly a slight smile. “Looks like I’ll have no choice now.”

Oscar made a raspberry. He clicked on the TV set in his cage and signed, “Done good job.”

Steve replied and signed, “Oscar. Kiss hug.”

Oscar did another raspberry.

“Oscar . . .”

“Hoot,” Oscar answered and dragged himself away from the TV. He was half-way across the room when the door suddenly opened.

A rather short chubby man walked in. The suit he was wearing was ill-fitted. A step behind him was a man with a military hair-cut. His suit was expensive and well-tailored.

Oscar ran back into his cage.

Steve said, “Mr. Landers, what brings you here?”

Landers scowled at Oscar. “This is Mr. Grenier. He wants to talk to you.”

Steve looked Grenier up and down.

Grenier stuck out his right hand. “Mr. Launse, I am a fan of your work.”

Steve griped his hand. “Which work?”

Grenier sized up Steve before he entered the door. “Motivation, sir.”

Steve let go. He signed O and brushed the index and middle fingers stiffly off his nose. Then continued with, “Please get Mr. Grenier a chair.”

Oscar stepped out of his cage and walked up to Grenier.

Grenier stared Oscar in the eyes and smiled. “Hello.”

Oscar gestured with an open hand, palm down, to his forehead. He moved it out slightly. He finished with the sign “G” and placed a right hand “A” at his left shoulder. A left handed “A” was placed below the right hand.

Grenier looked at Steve.

Steve cocked his head, signed at Oscar and said, “Really?”

Oscar nodded yes.

“Well, Mr. Grenier. Oscar, for some reason thinks you’re military.”

“Interesting.”

Steve nodded. “Are you?”

Oscar hooted and held up two horizontal “L”s, one in front of the other. He pumped his thumbs several times.

Grenier said, “I assume that means shooting or soldier.”

Oscar back flipped and he smiled teeth.

Steve said and signed, “Can you make us some coffee, please?”

Oscar walked over to a special wash area in the corner. He washed his hands from a small basin, dried them and started assembling everything he needed. Coffee pot, coffee grounds, and Styrofoam cups.

Grenier watched as the little chimp made coffee. “Oscar is a reason, I suppose, I’m here.”

After several minutes everyone but Landers had a cup of coffee. Oscar held out a cup for him, but decided at the last minute the cup was his. He sat down and took a sip before turning his back on a saddened Landers.

Steve smiled, sat back, and sipped his coffee. Perfect. He placed his cup down and signed the word. A right hand “P” moving to a left hand “P” with the middle fingers touching. He resumed sipping.

Landers said, “It would be nice if I could find out for myself.”

Oscar gave him a raspberry.

Grenier cleared his throat. “I represent a branch of the

government . . .”

That got him a raspberry.

Grenier continued, “. . . I agree, however, we are focused on Human behavior.”

Kelly said, “As in controlling?”

Grenier replied, “As in understanding it. Control is easy. We’ve done that for hundreds if not thousands of years . . .”

Steve nodded, “The Dark Ages comes to mind.”

“Exactly,” Grenier answered, “but this is not about out right controlling . . .” He held up a finger to stop an obvious interruption, “this is about natural development.” He paused.

Steve slowly said, “My theory states that mankind developed to present day behavior, not because of environmental implications, but more so, because of social interacting – good, bad, or indifferent.”

Grenier nodded. “Exactly!”

“But what exactly are we talking about?”

“We want to hire you as a Research Consultant.”

Steve replied, “A consultant to and for what?”

Grenier reached into his briefcase and pulled out a book titled, ‘Therefore We Are’.

“Yes?” Steve said.

“We want to put your theory to work . . .”

“Mr. Grenier! I wrote that book to show mankind was ultimately shaped by accidental and random opportunistic circumstances that dictated a need for approval. We are the way we are, not because of a God, but because of the

‘what’ we thought God wanted us to be.”

Grenier nodded, “And you’ll be given a chance to work that theory out.”

Steve, suddenly exasperated, “Play God? People should not be toyed with . . .”

Grenier smiled, “I wasn’t talking about people.”

“People are not . . . pardon me?” Steve said.

“I wasn’t talking about people.”

Steve looked at Kelly.

She shrugged.

Steve then looked at Oscar, then back to Grenier.

“Are you interested?”

Oscar jumped into Steve’s lap and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

“The pay is substantial.”

Steve frowned.

“Very substantial.”

“Show me what you have in mind first.”

“You’ll have to pack for the weekend.”

Steve looked at Kelly. “I’ll need someone to watch Oscar?”

Kelly said, “I’d be happy to watch Oscar. Just give me a list of things to do and what most likely to say.”

“You can stay at my place. Oscar has a routine.” He shrugged, “He can practically take care of himself for a month. He’s that self-sufficient.”

Oscar kissed Steve on the cheek and jumped into Kelly’s lap. He gave her a kiss on the cheek.

Steve looked Oscar in the eyes and signed, “You

understand I'll be gone for the weekend?"

Oscar nodded.

Steve turned to Grenier. "May I have a few hours to get them set?"

Grenier stood up, "Of course, Mr. Launse. I'll send a car to pick you up at 0400."

Everyone else stood up.

Grenier shook Steve's hand and bowed his head to Kelly. He walked out with Landers several steps behind.

Steve sat thinking, 'now what?' He turned to Kelly, "Wanna go out for dinner?"

"I'd love too, but what about Oscar?"

"He'll be fine . . ."

Oscar started making kissing sounds. He signed out, "S-knowledge and K-pretty sitting in bed when K-pretty reached down and grabbed . . ."

Steve said, "Oscar! Bad, Oscar."

Kelly said, "What?"

"Nothing. Oscar has a dirty . . . never mind. He can take care of himself for a few hours." He turned to Oscar. "Food in fridge. 3 minutes, no more. You can have snack of chips."

Oscar hooted and did a right hand "A" underneath his chin and moved it forward. He followed it with a right hand "H" and moved that up and down as it moved forward. He went back into his cage and turned the volume up slightly. I Love Lucy was playing, his favorite. He was good for the next half dozen hours.

Steve smiled as he and Kelly walked out. He locked the door and gave Kelly a quick side glance.

She blushed and gave him a quick smile. Tonight she'll find out if he was metro, gay, or bi.

Steve looked over and saw Kelly drooling lightly on the pillow. They had a wonderful dinner with drinks afterwards. It was after ten when they picked up Oscar and brought him home to Steve's modest apartment. Oscar had his own room with lots of toys, stuffed animals, CDs, and games. He had a shelf with picture and first reader books. Most had the edges chewed a bit. Kelly picked up *The Little Caterpillar* and leafed through it as Steve placed Oscar in bed. It had the most damage.

Kelly woke up and smiled at Steve. "What time is it?"

Steve said, "3:07 am."

"Is that enough time?"

He nodded, "I'm already packed and the checklist is on the refrigerator door. I left two books on the kitchen table for you."

Kelly had worried how effective she would be with Oscar while Steve was away.

"*The Joy of Signing and Signing for Kids*. They're for you. Oscar understands English, but you know that. Let him go through the pages of the books to point out his words. He also has flash cards he'll use when he wants something."

“You’ve thought of everything!”

“Hoping so. Oscar really is a good chimp, but he’ll take advantage. Indulge him and we’ll clean up the damages later.”

“Indulge? You really want me to let him get away with being naughty?”

Steve gave her a slight smile with nearly closed eyes. “He’s an adult chimp with the strength of three grown men. I’d rather you placate him with treats and attention than me visiting you in the hospital and having to euthanize him for hurting you.”

Kelly suddenly became afraid.

Steve noticed it and reached over. He kissed her softly on the lips. “Seriously, Oscar’s had babysitters before with no incidence. Oscar is looking forward to this. Really. He’ll dote over you because you are the gatekeeper to yummy treats.”

She took a deep breath and sighed. “Does he like me?”

“Like you? He talks about you all the time. That’s why your name is K-pretty.”

She blushed again.

“I got 30 minutes to wash up. Money, spare keys, and emergency contacts are on the table by the door.”

Kelly reached over and kissed him. Definitely not gay, but he was metro, which could make for interesting dating experiences.

Chapter 2

The V-22 Osprey cleared a mountain top and veered down at a steep angle. Steve clenched his harness strap tighter as he felt the Osprey bank sharply.

Grenier sipped his coffee. The cup's lid was sealed tight.

The Osprey banked again, then suddenly stopped.

Grenier saved his coffee and took another sip.

The Osprey floated to the ground and the rear door opened.

Grenier said, "Here we are. Another smooth ride. These guys are good." He undid his harness and yelled toward the flight cabin, "Thanks guys! See you in a few hours."

Steve hurriedly undid his harness and followed Grenier out the door. The light from the Sun hit him full in the face and he had to shield his eyes. Through a view of hazed light he saw Grenier walk up to another man in ACUs. Grenier called them Army Combat Uniforms. They talked for a few seconds. Steve stepped closer to the two men.

Grenier said, "Colonel, this is Steve Launse. Our new Research Consultant."

The Colonel had a solid handshake.

"Steve," Grenier began, "This is Colonel Codper."

Codper said, "Nice to have you here." He guided them

away from the Osprey. “Please follow me.”

The small group walked into a large concrete building. Steve guessed it to be about two football fields wide and maybe a dozen deep. They walked through several “Top Secret” doors with some requiring retina scans. The last door was marked “Observation room 20.” This required retina, voice, and keycard scan.

Steve frowned.

Grenier said, “You’ll see.”

Steve nodded and followed Codper through the door. Once inside he immediately noticed several rows of upholstered chairs set at an incline. A large window filled one side of the room.

“Have a seat, Steve.” Grenier said.

Steve moved to the center seat, front row, and sat. He stared out the window and saw a dozen cribs lined up neatly in front of the window. He saw some tiny furry feet stick out the blankets. In one crib, a furry face. He frowned and whispered, “What the?”

Grenier watched the man with interests. Steve’s face went from bewilderment to recognition to anger to confusion in under two minutes. “Steve,” he said. “These are your students.”

“Students?!?” Steve replied, “But they are . . . chimps?”

“Better.”

Codper watched the two men. He rather liked Grenier, even though he wasn’t a religious man. There had been many nights over a shared bottle of whiskey the two talked about God, philosophy, this project, honor, discipline, and

a whole range of items. Grenier talked about the wisdom of this project. Codper argued how it was against God and a sin. Grenier conceded that humans were indeed tampering with things unknown, but he also said that if God had not intended for us to think we would never consider such things. Codper followed with, “Remember Adam and Eve. He had never intended for us to have infinite knowledge.” Grenier finished a glass of watered down whiskey, Codper drank his straight up, thought a moment and said, “Colonel, you make a good point. I can’t argue against that, but here we are. The damage is done and after devastating earthquakes and forty days of rain, we are still here. Is he allowing us to hang ourselves with all this rope we are making?” He shrugged. He poured himself another glass of whiskey, no ice or water this time. “I feel he is watching us from a distance. We’re adults now, and he has other children to watch.” He up-ended the glass. “When he calls to ask how we are doing, we’ll just have to give him the news.”

Codper finished his glass. “I’d hope we can say, fine Dad.”

Grenier kept his mouth shut, nodded, and got up. He smiled. “Tomorrow, Colonel, is another day before that phone call.” And he walked off to sleep away the booze.

Steve asked, “Better? How?”

Grenier said, “GEMPs.”

“Come again?”

“Genetically engineered chimps. Their IQ is theorized

at 140 . . .”

Steve exclaimed, “140! My God! What have you done?”

Grenier matter of fact said, “Invented fire, created the wheel, built the pyramids, crossed the oceans, conquered the atom, built the computer, sent man into space, visited distanced worlds, sequenced the genome, and created life.”

Steve stared at one Gemp. Its tiny face slipped out from behind its blanket. A nurse walked over, kissed it on the cheek and tucked it back under the cover. “What do you need me for?”

“Interested?”

“Maybe?”

“Teach them.”

“Teach them what?”

Grenier nodded, “Teach them to be human.”

Steve wheeled around quickly, “Seriously?!?”

Grenier simply nodded.

Steve turned back again.

Grenier said, “Uncle Sam has given us a blank check.”

Steve asked, “For what?”

“Does it really matter?” And before Steve could answer he continued, “You’ve got a chance to prove your theory. Your direction, your control, your guidance.”

Steve rubbed his chin and bit his lip.

“Steve, you in or out?”

Steve looked away. His mind racing. “If I agree I’ll need an assistant.”

“As long as they pass background you got it.”

“I’ll need Oscar as well.”

“Of course. Already approved.”

Chapter 3

Five Years Later

Mos ran through the jungle avoiding most low level branches. The night was dark as the sun had descended hours ago and the moon hadn't risen yet. He slipped on wet fallen leaves, but stayed upright. He looked back and ducked.

A hooded figure swooped overhead, stopped, and floated in front of Mos.

Mos froze as fear gripped tightly. He heard stories from the Elder about a great and mighty force but thought them to be fables used to scare young gimps into being good. Had he been bad? Was he going to be punished?

The hooded figure's hands' glowed red. It boomed, "I am watching you, child. Do not run."

Mos fell back and mewled. "Please don't hurt me."

The hooded figure's hands stopped glowing. "I have no reason to hurt you." The voice said softer. "Do not fear me if you obey. Understand, child?"

Mos nodded and looked down.

The hooded figure boomed out, "Do not look down when I am here! Look up!"

Mos snapped his head up. His eyes darted from the figure to the ground several times.

The control room was crowded. A row of large monitors were bolted to the wall showing images of the hooded figure and Mos. One monitor had rectangle boxes of various sizes focused on Mos' face. Text of data flowed alongside each one. Another monitor had Mos' face in infrared with temperature readings surrounding it. A third had an aerial view of Mos and the figure.

Codper and Grenier were seated in the back observation room watching his staff control and record everything. Oscar, wearing a dark colored robe, sat in a specially made chair for him, in the corner eating popcorn and watching. He occasionally hooted at the scene.

Codper said, "Ken, I'm not comfortable with this."

Grenier nodded. More than once he heard this from the Colonel. More than once he kept his mouth shut.

"God, all-mighty himself was not someone wearing a hooded robe scaring abominations." said Codper.

Grenier nodded again. The Colonel often said that too. Grenier noticed that as the project moved further along the Colonel grew more religious. Their discussions turned more into arguments instead of 'let's agree to disagree,' and 'coming to the table in good faith.'

"Look at the beast."

Grenier took a deep breathe. "I am. And I see someone who is frightened."

Codper blurted, "Someone? How can those creatures be a 'someone'?"

Grenier wished he had kept his mouth shut.

Codper continued, “That thing,” he stabbed the air, “is un-holy. It doesn’t have a soul.”

Next time Grenier thought, ‘I swear, I’ll shut up. I’ll say nothing. I won’t fight, argument, grunt, or groan. Nothing, nada, zero, zilch.’

“We need to get rid of those things.”

Grenier forgot everything he had just thought. He turned on the Colonel and whispered in a deep voice, just loud enough to be heard.

Codper stopped talking, “Pardon, Ken?”

“You need to shut the fuck up.”

Codper scowled, “I’m not sure I heard you right, son.”

Grenier sat straight in the chair, “I’m not your son, first. And second, what are you doing here?”

“Son, I’m . . .”

“Not your son. And, of late I’m questioning your reasons.”

The Colonel took a deep breathe, but held it in. With clenched teeth he said, “Witnessing the fall of Man’s grace. I’m . . .”

“Seriously, not believing that?”

“I’m a man of God, son, and this is not making me happy. I’m . . .”

“. . . not my father, and you’re not supposed to have feelings. You are the Security. Not the judge. Not the jury. You have one function. Protect the interest of the US Government.” He pointed to a large image of Mos’ tear covered face. “And he is the interest of the US Government.”

Codper slowly stood up.

Grenier followed suit.

Codper said, “Until the Government comes to its senses. Election is around the corner and a new wave of change is upon us. The people are speaking out . . .”

Grenier put his finger in front of the Colonel’s face. “Don’t! Just don’t lecture me about the people. One job! Just one.”

Codper resisted the urge to bite the finger off. In all the years he had known Ken, this was the first time he really wanted to deck him. They had good discussions in the past, but in recent months the discussions turned ugly. This was becoming the worse.

Oscar remained silent. He could tell G-Soldier was very upset with C-Righteous. It took Oscar months to understand the concept of religion. It took him longer to understand the word ‘righteous’, but once he did it didn’t take him long to see the Colonel in a different light. He had wanted to give the Colonel a new name, but S-Knowledge said the name would be very hurtful and mean. So, instead of C-Satan, the Colonel remained C-Righteous.

Codper sucked in his lips for a moment. He tried to outstare Grenier.

Grenier stood his ground. ‘Never give a bull a chance to be a bull’ his father used to tell him. Today was not the day.

Codper blinked and conceded the moment. He would go back to his office and send an email to the Chair of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. He

often did, but this email would be different. By the grace of God, the Chairman belonged to the same church and he had known him for over twenty years.

Grenier watched as the Colonel walked away. Once the Colonel walked out of the room did Grenier let himself breathe.

Oscar walked over and stood next to him. He sent a raspberry at the Colonel's departure.

Grenier looked down and smiled. He picked up a few signs over the years. He placed an open right hand palm to his chest, then made a small swirly circle with his index finger over his forehead. He finished with a right hand "Y" moved back and forth a couple of times between him and Oscar.

The hooded figure said, "Go tell the others."

Mos took a right hand index finger and made a small circle counter-clockwise around his mouth then moved it forward and gave a shrug. He said, "Who is?"

"God." The figure pointed a right hand "G" in front of him at face level, then drew the hand down to an open palm stopping at his heart.

Mos replied and signed, "I don't understand this word 'God'." He'd seen the Elder use the word several times, but didn't pay much attention.

The figure spread his arms wide and the sky flashed lightning and boomed thunder. "I am God. I made you

and the others. I sent you the Elder to teach you hand language. I sent you emissaries to teach you spoken language. I gave you knowledge. I. Am. God!”

And the night sky turned bright. Thunder sounded near and Mos cringed.

He signed and said, “God. No hurt Mos. Please, no hurt Mos.”

“Tell the others.”

Mos frowned, “God must come with Mos. Mos need to show, not tell.”

The hooded figure stepped closer to Mos. He pulled the hood down.

Mos gasped and signed, “God.”

Steve said, “Now that you’ve seen the face of God you may believe in God. Mos, tell them. I gave you shelters. I give you tools. I give you food. I am God.”

Mos hesitated.

Steve spread his arms wide and he roared, “Go!”

And night turned into day. And the sound of thunder rang through the silent night.

“Go! I command you! Go!”

Mos ran. Through the fading bright sky Mos ran toward the village. He had a message for them. God had finally revealed himself. God was here.

