Extract 1: We have a Problem

The laboratory was quiet, freezing; frozen. Julius lay upon the bench, his head slowly adhering to the surface, the icy breeze in the room stealthily ruffling his hair. Blood was slowly pooling from the wound in his head- as it spread across the surface it slowed, and rippled as the breeze caught it, before it too became part of the furniture and the dreadful cold. As his right arm twitched a note fluttered down by his side, upon it lay a complex formula which had already threatened everything.

Of course, man had always been playing with matter, attempting to change it's form and mould his environment according to his ever more complex needs and social structures. This day was inevitable, when it came, because the forces involved were such that man did not really understand them. There was little in truth, that man did understand, even when it came to his own inventions and discoveries. Quantum physics has always left a great deal to the imagination, an although computers certainly appeared to work according to plans, scientists, even as Julius lay bleeding, still had no idea precisely why. They assumed quantum had it's own logic because it obeyed the laws of probability, however this was probably a naïve assumption. The universe has no logic or order, and the rules of time and space govern it all. Everything we know, or at least think we know, is wrong. It's a fundamental truth, as fundamental as the flaws in the human brain. The brain too, no matter how spectacular a machine it appears to be, is not understood. How and why people act is a mystery to all. To all.

Julius is a scientist. The scientist. Julius Walton pioneer of nano engineering, producer of the smallest and most remarkable technology, literally with the power to change the face of the planet. They gave him the nobel price of course. It's the currency of science, I think everyone would have been disappointed if they hadn't. His nano technology had the power to alter matter, organic or inorganic; to remove impurities and blemishes at a molecular level and ensure that flaws, be it on a bridge girder or a heart bypass, were eliminated. These little semi biological machines were the latest step in the pursuit of perfection. They were small. Their smallness is very hard to comprehend so let me try and explain: Compared to one of these machines, just a single one of the red blood cells comprising the sticky pool in which Dr Julius was now lying in would appear to be the size of a football field. That's small.

Despite the miniscule size of these nano marvels, they appeared to have a degree of built in intelligence. They could be programmed, and left to do their job, which could be anything from eliminating cancerous cells or viruses to removing impurities on concrete so that it would set better. In theory, they were the ultimate tool.

There were problems. Being so small they were rather hard to find. Test subjects had been lost. Then quarantined. There was no means of detection of these tiny vehicles outside of the heavily restricted lab environment, and it had been a long time since an of the scientists had been allowed to go home and mix with their friends and families without a lengthly an complex decontamination process. In fact, it was thought to be safer that they didn't leave at all. No one knew what their

effect on the environment might be. No-one knew really what the limits of their powers were, how long they might last in various environments, how likely they were to go wrong. Once again man had triumphed over nature. Once again the victory was somewhat hollow. Practical application was some years, perhaps even decades away, although the problems of detection and containment were paramount, the functionality of the little beasts was already such that on occasions the scientists forgot this imperative, set them loose in n apple or a lab rat to see if they could be turned inside-out. It soon became apparent that the technology should not be allowed to fall into the wrong hands. Perhaps it already had.

So Julius sat as he did every day, in his little lab. This lab was now up there with the most secure places on the planet, he was not usually allowed to leave and no-one else was allowed in. Food was supplied to the inner sanctum through airlocks, and the scientists looked after themselves. The site was secure, contained; until the scientists solved the rather major issues they were facing, they need not leave and the world need not know about them. At least that was the theory.

The Special Forces team burst into the room in customary fashion. Only this team were all dressed in vacuum suits, and far from the usual crisp Hollywood movements seemed stilted an unsure of themselves, feeling their way around with fear rather than confidence. The little beams of light cast from the torches on the ends of their assault rifles illuminated the chill air around them, as the beams his small curls of condensation from the air gave the room the appearance of a jazz club. Well not quite.

One of the team came upon the lifeless form of Julius, spoke sharply into the communicator inside his helmet.

“We have one civilian down, vitals failing. Request urgent medical backup!”

Not the words the free world really wanted to hear about the only man likely to be able to sort out the mess. Still, Julius seemed happily oblivious, welded to the desktop by a pool of his own blood. There were difficulties. Julius could not simply leave the facility. Despite the obvious breach of quarantine that had already occurred, there was an understandable desire by the authorities not to make things worse. Julius, with some difficulty, was bundled carefully into the airlock for decontamination. Signed sealed and scanned, Julius and his rescuers soared into the black night borne by the rotor blades of a tuned Nighthawk to a secret location not far away.

“Doctor we must save this man”
“I’m a doctor, not a saint, I can’t tell you he’ll survive”
“Understand this doctor, he’s our only hope. We lose him, we lost the planet”
“I’ll do my best”

Unfortunately, the doctor’s best was not good enough.