

## **Chapter 7**

### **The Seminar**

The important stuff being over, most of PMW’s bankers would continue to abuse the goodwill of their employer and then wobble home. Now that Doug, Rich, and Van had been seen by upper management, which was the entire purpose of coming at all, there was no point in hanging around. Once they were out in the hall, they headed for the atrium to find out where the Seminar was taking place.

The Free Majority seminar was taking place in a conference room on the same floor as the PMW party, at the other end of the building. The three walked along the large corridor that looked out over the street below. They could see the packed restaurants and bars, and the valets standing in front of the more upscale establishments, looking cold in their thin valet jackets. They usually wore thick down coats for the winter, but they were probably caught off guard by today’s quick change in the weather, just as the trainees were.

The marble floor mirrored the dark windows and the hanging light fixtures. This gave the corridor a cold feeling, even though it should have been room temperature. Doug felt a draft as they neared the seminar room. Vanessa had folded her arms again, so he figured it was not his imagination.

They turned a corner and immediately found themselves at the entrance to the seminar room. It was a tall double door made of frosted glass, with large panels on each

side made of the same glass. Several of the Free Majority folks were outside the room, handing out their flyers and asking passers-by to attend. There was nobody else from the party walking this way.

The meeting had obviously not started yet. The group members standing in front of the doors looked at the three hopefully, and beamed when they realized that Doug and the others fully intended to enter the room.

“Hi! Thank you for coming,” one of the girls said. She was at the lunch table the day they first met the group. There was no sign of Eric, the long-faced leader of the organization.

Doug nodded at the girl and her friends, and entered the room. It was practically empty. The walls were pastel green, and dimly lit. All of the light came from backlit coffers in the ceiling. In the center of the room was a large, dark conference table with 20 plush chairs surrounding it. Just inside the door was a large poster on an easel. Another easel with a large flipchart stood at the opposite end of the room.

“Doug!” said a voice. It was Jonathan, his dad, standing by the door looking at the poster.

“Dad, glad you made it,” Doug said as they shook hands.

“And who are your colleagues here?” Jonathan asked.

“Oh, sorry, this is Vanessa, and Rich. They both work with me at PMW. Guys, this is my dad.”

Rich and Vanessa shook hands with Jonathan. “Yes, I’ve heard a lot about you guys,” Jonathan told them.

“Thanks, you too,” said Vanessa.

“I was told you founded a line of bookstores,” Rich said.

“That’s right, nothing special,” Jonathan answered.

“Nothing special? Are you kidding?” Rich said in surprise. “Only 5% of people have ever started a business.”

“Well, there’s something to that,” Jonathan said. “I hear you are a fellow entrepreneur.”

“I was. That was just a little consulting gig.”

“Still. 5%. It’s not for everyone.”

Doug and Vanessa watched Rich and Jonathan trading their stories of business ownership. They really did seem excited just to be talking about it.

“So, we heard you were once part of this group, is that right?” Vanessa asked.

“That’s right,” he answered. “A long time ago. The group was trying to put more free-market thinkers into the business world, and they found me.”

“They told us it they were trying to fight the anti-globalist movement,” Rich said.

“You mean the people who cause riots at the WTO and G8 summits. It wasn’t originally about that, but as those groups appeared, the Freemers had to change strategy.”

“Freemers?”

“Yeah, that was what we called ourselves,” Jonathan said. “I guess they feel now there is a movement to bring down the establishment, so they have to fight it.”

“I guess,” Vanessa said. “You would think they’ve already won.”

At that moment, several of the people in the hall entered the room. They were followed by nobody else.

“So, I guess we should have a seat,” Jonathan said. He sat down at the head of the table. Doug sat down next to him, and Rich and Vanessa sat down opposite them.

There was a dark blue folder, notepad, and a pen in front of each chair. None of the items had logos or graphics on it. Doug was used to branded collateral material, but the purpose of the Free Majority was clear enough already.

Jonathan wanted to complete his thought. “It’s not like the group is out there protesting and burning cars,” he said quietly. “They recruit MBAs like you, and they act as a think tank and political advocacy group.”

“Ah,” said Rich. “So we’re supposed to think about this crap every time we make a decision in our work.”

“Something like that,” said Jonathan with a chuckle.

Doug started reading through the material and thinking up flippant comments. He looked at their history, and the long list of actions they had taken. Rich started to examine the pen, and finally stuffed it into his pocket.

After a few minutes, when it became clear that nobody else was coming, the “Freemers” took positions around the perimeter of the room. Eric, the leader, came in from a rear door and walked to the front of the room. He nodded at the four attendees and waited until they closed the brochures and

looked up at him. Now that he had their attention, Doug realized that his demeanor reminded him a little of Mr. Molin.

Eric began with very little small talk. “Thank you for coming,” he started. “The Army of the Free Majority was founded by Dr. Reginald Currier more than 30 years ago. He has run for president in every major election since.”

The group turned to their folders, where there was a bit of information on Currier.

Eric continued, “He is a leader in modern economic thought. He has published a dozen books on economics, politics, and the globalization trend that has been in effect for decades. He has also discovered a way to teach basic economics that was relevant to people 10,000 years ago, and still is today.”

Doug looked up at him. he had no idea what he was talking about.

Eric looked at Doug, and then at the group. “Please open to page three in your folders,” he said, turning to the flipchart. He wrote a number 3 at the top in red marker. Rich and Vanessa smirked, but followed. Jonathan did nothing but watch the young man intently.

Doug turned to page 3 and saw the same grid that he and the others had seen on the suit of armor in Copley Square. Some of the logos appeared to be different, but the general idea was the same.

Eric pulled a medallion out of his shirt pocket. He handed it to Jonathan, who handed it to Doug. It was bronze,

and had the same symbols as the image on the page. It was blank on the back. Doug handed it across the table to Vanessa.

Eric started to draw the symbol on the chart. It was a circle that was sectioned into ninths, like a rounded tic-tac-toe board. In the bottom left square, he drew a tree. Then he turned toward the group again.

“This tree represents all natural resources,” he explained. “Think of it as also standing for water, earth, air, light, ore, and of course, wood, among other resources.”

Next, he drew an arm above the tree. “This represents labor,” he said. “All manual human energy.”

In the top left square, he drew a scale, and said, “Law.”

Rich looked at the chart and at Eric. “Okay, he said. We’ve seen this symbol around. What is it?”

“It’s called the Global Grid,” Eric said. “The elements found on it represent the essential components of civilization. The first three, that I have just drawn, are the components of life. Without these, no life can exist.”

“I understand resources,” said Rich, “but there are plenty of creatures that don’t have labor or laws.”

“Actually, they do,” said Eric, clearly gleeful that Rich was getting engaged. “All creatures work, and the laws they live by include seasons, light and darkness, weather. Every plant has to reach for the sun at the right time. Lions know when to sleep and when to hunt. It’s like you said before. You sell, you eat. You don’t, you starve. Every creature follows the same principle.”

Rich nodded. The rest of the group looked to Eric to continue. It was clear that argument was welcome, but he had sold them so far on the three essential elements.

Next, Eric drew an ear of corn next to the tree. “This is agriculture,” he said. He drew what looked like a see-saw above it and pointed to it, saying, “This is a lever. It represents mechanization.” Then he drew a cross above that. “This,” he said, “is religion.”

“Now wait,” Doug said. “These are not three essential components of life.”

“No, they are not,” Eric answered. “These are a new paradigm, the components of civilization, and they are what separate humanity from all other forms of life.”

“I don’t see a BMW on here,” said Rich.

“That would be a machine. A form of mechanization,” said Eric, pointing at the lever. “This is next to labor for a reason, since machines help to extract resources and build structures. Agriculture is the control of resources, and religion, up here, is the first method for codifying and enforcing law.”

“Wait a minute,” asked Vanessa. “I know religions have codified laws, but how does it enforce law?”

“It was an extremely powerful method of enforcement for millennia. People cowered before the notion that there were beings that could control their lives and their afterlives. It was extremely scary not to understand death, and religion helped reduce these fears as well. By controlling fear, it was possible to control people, and regulate behavior. Still is, actually.”

“Ah,” said Vanessa.

“Sorry about the cross, by the way. It translates best in the western world as a religious symbol,” said Eric.

“I was wondering about that,” Vanessa said.

“Now, finally, we reach the paradigm we live in,” Eric continued as he drew a dollar sign in the lower right. “This is pretty obvious, it’s money.” Then he drew a computer above it. “Communication,” he said. Above that, he drew a building, saying, “This is government. These are the most recently developed methods of representing resources, labor, and law.”

“So that fills in the grid,” Doug said.

“Right. Of course, the computer and the dollar sign are current to our place and time. The grid can represent new developments in technology, and will change again.”

“Wait a minute,” said Vanessa. “The versions we have seen mostly have the first symbols in the middle. I know I’ve seen the tree there.”

Eric nodded slightly. “There is another version that puts the symbols out of order. I do not know why. I put them in the order of progress. Someday, a new paradigm will replace the current one, and the oldest will be eliminated from the grid.”

“So manual labor will no longer be necessary,” said Rich.

“Right. We will have gone beyond the need to do any human work, and machines will replace that need. Humans will all be free to think, and create.”

“We could not possibly exist without laws,” Doug said.

“No, actually, codified laws will become so ingrained in our minds that we won’t need to write them down. Think about it. There was a time when thou shalt not kill was actually a new idea. In the earliest days of humanity, a hunting party crossed a mountain pass and found another group of people. They had to be killed.”

“C’mon,” Vanessa said.

Eric looked at her and held up his hand. “But as societies grew, they needed to preserve life instead of eliminating it. They needed the family that knew how to make rope. They needed that other village because they raised wheat. Killing became detrimental.”

“So it was written down,” said Vanessa.

“Right, and they are still written today, but the older ones become ingrained. Government has replaced religion, machines have replaced labor, and money has replaced resources. Each paradigm will replace the one before.”

At this point, Jonathan looked up at Eric and said, “So, how does the Army of the Free Majority fit into this?” Doug thought this was strange, since he had been a member and already knew. He was either testing Eric, or felt that something was still unsaid.

“I am glad you asked. Our role is to find the next paradigm, and bring it about.”

“How,” asked Jonathan.

“First, we recognize that civilizations develop at different rates, but technology can help them converge. Many

countries undergo technological shifts very slowly, because there is a tug of war between the corporations, the people, and the governments. We believe that if we speed up this trend to where all civilizations are equal, we can limit the suffering.”

“That is why you are Globalization activists,” said Jonathan.

“Right, we seek to spread the word about Globalization. We need people in business and government to understand what is going on, and apply this into everything they do.”

“If this is meant to help people,” said Vanessa. “I guess I like it.”

“It uses the power of economics to bring about a better world,” said Eric.

“So there is no evil plot or anything like that?” asked Rich.

“No.”

“Are you sure there aren’t people who won’t be hurt by this?” asked Rich.

“Well, think of it this way,” said Eric. “You’re at the opera, trying to open a bag of pretzels. You carefully pull at the bag, trying to keep quiet, crinkling and crackling, but in reality you’re pissing off everyone within three rows.”

“Okay.”

“Why not just rip open the bag in one pull, and make a loud noise, but it’s over in a second? Everybody can get back to enjoying the opera,” Eric said.

“But when it is global events, not an opera, what does that loud noise look like on the news?” asked Rich.

“I cannot deny there could be upheaval,” Eric answered. “But Globalization is like the sunrise. You can’t stop it, but you can put everyone in position to prosper from it.”

“So you’re saying there is a utopia on the other side of this threshold,” Doug asked.

“Exactly right,” said Eric.

As the others continued to talk, Doug thought about their decision to come at all. He was glad to see that there was nothing strange or subversive about this group. He was usually worried about the motives of people he saw protesting in front of the State House. Whatever their cause was, it always seemed to be so fringe and unimportant that it was easy to ignore.

At least this group was fighting to help people using the best possible method, economics. Businesspeople like Doug and the other trainees would someday be decision-makers, and by targeting them, the Free Majority people were going about this the right way.

Doug took a tally of the others in the room. His dad had buried his head in the brochures, Vanessa was intently watching and listening to Eric, and Rich looked down, but not at the brochures. He had a dour look on his face. Doug last saw it when he was shut down cold by a woman in a bar a few weekends before.

Doug could tell that they were nearing the end of the meeting. Eric told them one last thing. “There are groups out

there that have begun to resist Globalization in a more organized way. Their motive is to destroy the economic fabric, and create a socialist regime everywhere.”

Rich and Jonathan both looked up.

“What do you mean?” asked Vanessa.

“You’ve heard of them causing riots at World Trade Organization meetings. They are against commerce, trade, and entrepreneurship. They want to stall economic growth.”

“Why would they do that?” Doug asked.

“We don’t know exactly. You should know that our organization is poised to counter-act against groups like this, and we are connected. We have members in the media, on Wall Street, even in government. We can get our word out more effectively. What helps is that we talk about prosperity, which is what people want to hear. They want to be part of it. These socialists are against that.”

“But they cause massive riots. How can you possibly get the numbers to counter groups like that?” asked Vanessa.

That’s why we need people. We can stop them, but we need numbers. Smart people,” he said as he looked at Vanessa. “You are all welcome to join us. You can help us work against these groups.”

“How much do you know about them?” asked Rich.

“We know that many of them are headquartered in Boston, and meet on a regular basis. Most are just a bunch of sign-holders, but some of them are dangerous. I can tell you

that we discovered one of them plotting a terror attack, and we shut them down.”

“What?” Rich asked.

“What kind of attack?” asked Vanessa.

“You know that little store out there?” Eric asked, pointing toward the street outside, “The Indian store?”

“Kand’s Store,” Doug said.

“That’s it,” Eric said. “It was a front for one of these groups. They were getting shipments of bomb material from Singapore.”

The group must have looked visibly stunned. Vanessa stared at the table. Rich looked at Doug and cocked his head.

“It was our discovery that got them arrested,” Eric crowed.

Doug and the others were dumbfounded.

“I was buying stuff from him,” Rich said.

Eric looked around the room at his colleagues, and then back at the four attendees and said, “Well, that is our pitch. Take a look at our material here, and if you have any questions, feel free to talk to any of our members. We have the room until 9:00.”

Jonathan stood up and thanked Eric. Vanessa stood and turned to Rich, who was still sitting, and was now flipping through the brochure.

“So, you don’t look impressed,” she said.

“Well, it’s not that I’m not impressed. I am actually surprised that they had their act together.”

“What did you think of that grid?” I asked, looking at the flipchart.

Rich turned to look at it. “I’m not sure,” he said. It seems wrong somehow. The symbols are all in different places from what we saw on the armor.”

“What about Kand’s necklace?” Doug asked.

“Didn’t get a good enough look at it,” said Rich. “Can we... not talk about Kand?”

Rich stood up and the three of them left with Jonathan. They took the brochures and nodded to the group’s members as they left. Doug thought it was weird how they stood around like henchmen through the whole meeting.

They walked down the corridor and passed the room where the PMW party was still in full swing. Rich and Vanessa decided to go back in. Doug could tell that a lot of the VPs had left, and there was little point in going back unless he wanted to make a fool of himself dancing.

Doug walked with Jonathan out to the sidewalk and got a ride home.

“What did you think of the seminar?” Doug asked.

“It was different from when I was a member. They were only trying to pursue economic fairness then. Not Globalization.”

“They’ve changed, huh?” Doug said.

“Yep,” said Dad. “I guess they’ve become part of their own paradigm.”

Jonathan dropped Doug off at the bottom of his street. Doug walked up to his apartment and opened the door. He put down his keys and the brochure. There was a sticker on the back, which tipped him off that the folder was upside down. He picked it back up and saw something that should have been no surprise, but instead, it made him turn white. The sticker was printed with an address. It read:

429 Main Street, A.5  
Weymouth, MA 02893

Weymouth. PMW had been involved in some kind of activity there, and the agents at Kand's store had mentioned the town. Doug and his friends did a lot of business with Kand, and if an investigation led to them, it could be a problem.

Suddenly, something about the address caught Doug's eye. The numbers, if put together, created a familiar string: 429502893. It was the code for the database.

There was no way it could be a coincidence. The code, Kand's store, and the address had to be related somehow. Doug had to look into it. If the binder was still in the building, he needed to find it.