



**Lo and Behold,**

**X.**

# **Denizens of the Ivory Fortress**

Book 1 of a Business Fable  
of Change and Intrigue

**Isaak Tsalicoglou**

# Lo and Behold, X! — Denizens of the Ivory Fortress

Book 1 of a Business Fable of Change and Intrigue

Isaak Tsalicoglou

This book is available at <http://leanpub.com/lo-and-behold-x-1>

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I just bought Book 1 of "Lo and Behold, X!", a fictional business novel about transformation and all that it entails for those it engages. My X is...

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*To all the Robert McBarkles of this world, of whom I have had the  
good luck to have encountered at least three.*

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Lo and Behold, X! — Bifurcation and Deliverance

Lo and Behold, X! — Doldrums and Machinations

Lo and Behold, X! — Growing, Pains, and Awareness

The Incredible Story of Deft

The Cave

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# Before we begin

**Lo and Behold, X! — Denizens of the Ivory Fortress**

*Book 1 of a Business Fable of Change and Intrigue*

by Isaak Tsalicoglou, [OVERBRING Labs](https://overbring.com)<sup>1</sup>

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contain or spell “X“. The letter X in this publication’s title and its content is used as a placeholder for any mental association the reader may endeavor in, obviously beyond the author’s control, until humankind develops mind control capabilities, upon which event this disclaimer will probably need to be evaluated with a critical eye.

For more information, get in touch with the author on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/tisaak>

# Disclaimer

While reading this novel, you might sympathize with Nate and his team, or even with Damon; you might wish you had a Bob or two in your life; you might recoil at the idea of working under the aegis of a Richard von Kopf; or, you may have had the pleasure of working at a place led by an Augustus Giles. Any, some, or all of those characters, their thoughts and words, the situations they find themselves in, and the opinions or views they express, might ring a bell. Same goes for the kingdom of Obratheria.

Alas, it will have merely been a coincidence! This novel is but a fictional, tongue-in-cheek exploration of the periodic waxing and waning of fads within organizations and across entire industries, sometimes even across the entire business world, and of the political ramifications encountered by well-meaning professionals who want to bring any “X” into their organization. It is as much an exploration of the worst-case trajectory of so-called “transformations” within businesses, as it is an exploration of the worst-case situations faced by those who lead them, by those who endure them, and by those who entertain their orchestration.

Thus, the entire story, all names, characters, and incidents portrayed in this production, and clearly X itself, are fictitious and merely instruments used to drive some points home. Names, characters, locations, events, incidents, and “X” are the products of my imagination, with exaggeration aplenty that has been further fueled by the inspirational (“desperational”?) torrential outpour of hype that adorns my LinkedIn feed daily. The characters are composite archetypes deliberately crafted according to [Jungian archetypes](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Jungian_archetype)<sup>1</sup> and caught in well-known [narrative arcs](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Story_arc)<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental. Truth be told, each element of

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Jungian\\_archetype](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Jungian_archetype)

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Story\\_arc](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Story_arc)

this story is wild-enough exaggerated speculative fiction by itself, let alone when you put all of these elements together.

Still, for the maximum enjoyment and learning impact, an imaginative extrapolation of the story's many elements onto your own work experiences, should, ideally, be attempted. Some of these elements might faintly ring a bell of familiarity, who knows! However, if *too* many ring a bell strongly, you have my condolences, and you have my respect; for, in that case, your work life is as strange as this deliberately-bewildering work of fiction.

# Preface

Much like my first book ever, “[The Incredible Story of Deft](#)”<sup>1</sup> in 2017, I didn’t plan to write this book either. There was no grand plan or even a prior hint that I would be spending so much time and energy in 2023 to write a business novel, nor was there time allocated between my two existing professional engagements for doing so.

Truly, this book too “just happened.” Of course, by that I don’t mean that the book wrote itself; far from it! Many grueling evening hours and more than a handful of weekend days “from morn to eve” have been invested in it by now, even though at the time of this preface’s writing, I still have not finished [the final act](#)<sup>2</sup>.

What I mean by “just happened” is that the ideas behind the book, very similarly to what happened with the Deft book, are fruits of serendipity and an eagerness to explore further, and see what may come<sup>3</sup>.

This book is similar to “Deft,” because it too started on LinkedIn, albeit with a post, not with an [article](#)<sup>4</sup>. Sometime at the beginning of April 2023, I responded cheekily to a post (as I often do,) probably a post about yet another buzzword making its rounds again through organizations. Maybe it was about Agile, maybe it was about Lean; who knows anymore. Moments after posting the comment, I thought I’d [rework it into its own post](#)<sup>5</sup>, because the mere act of commenting had made more ideas flood my mind.

Reflected within the comment was an evolution of ideas that I had never before put to words. You see, [the Deft book](#)<sup>6</sup> had been about the buzzwords and the frameworks themselves. This

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<sup>1</sup><https://leanpub.com/deft>

<sup>2</sup><https://leanpub.com/lo-and-behold-x-4>

<sup>3</sup>You can take the engineer out of R&D, but you cannot take R&D out of the engineer...

<sup>4</sup><https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/incredible-story-deft-isaak-tsalicoglou/>

<sup>5</sup>[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tisaak\\_lean-agile-activity-7056295417017229313-MHEW/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tisaak_lean-agile-activity-7056295417017229313-MHEW/)

<sup>6</sup><https://leanpub.com/deft>

post, however, was a different angle of exploration; something had clicked, and I saw in my mind's eye that the buzzword of "transformation"<sup>7</sup> encapsulates a whole sequence of steps that are almost mandatory for an organization, at least judging from what I see, hear, and read about the vast number of alleged transformations dwarfing the actual number of companies actually "transforming" in any meaningful way.

In short, it all starts (hopefully) with a genuine curiosity for a (generally) good set of ideas that will (maybe) create some change and (ideally) some desired (by some) improvement. First results are (sometimes) encouraging, which leads the organization to pour (vastly) more resources into a (frantic) pursuit of the ideas, which leads to more (sometimes, better) results and (predictably) to (crafty) pushback from the status quo. This, in turn, leads to an intensification of both the effort for (more, rarely better) action and the effort for (often, tone-deaf) communication. This, then, (often) leads to hype and the devolution of the whole endeavor, which can end in a few different ways, none of them really a mark of success for the organization, by *any* definition of the word "success" *for the organization* and not for individuals within it profiting professionally from the whole "tralala".

The "transformation" might then be deemed concluded, and the set of ideas will be mothballed, or will at best become incorporated into job descriptions as yet another bullet point of a "must have heard of this" kind of requirement for a while, and will become sight unseen going forward; until the next X buzzword comes along and the cycle repeats anew.

If you have *not* witnessed this happening with various types of X cursing through the world of business every so many years as the shiny new miracle cure, I envy you, and I admire you.

One, I envy you for your great luck of having worked in organizations impervious to hype; this is a rare thing, except when

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<sup>7</sup>This is a buzzword that I *deeply* loathe for its implicit false hopes and promises that are so alluring to well-meaning people. It truly means nothing, while letting everyone project their own fanciful interpretations on it. No wonder there is such a great chasm between expectations and reality; Disappointment is baked into the concept from early on!

the organization is small, or young, or preoccupied with important things, such as serving customers or trying to survive, or all of the above.

Two, in case those organizations you have worked for are larger than just a handful of people and you still have not witnessed anything that rings a bell, I admire you for your pioneering spirit in interplanetary travel; because, here on Earth, the much-touted “wisdom of the crowds” is as likely to be experienced as the “hyping of the crowds.”

So, anyway, back to how this book came to be! By the evening of the day on which I had turned the comment into a post, I saw that there was some resonance. Nothing crazy at all; a thousand views, ten reactions, less than a handful of comments, a few private messages. Yet, this narrative of transformation and hype and its impact on people kept me curious.

Thus, on that very same evening I started expanding the post into an outline, aiming to flesh out the narrative by crafting the characters of Nate and Bob. Curiously, incorporating characters in discourse greatly troubled me back in January 2019, which is the last time I had attempted to rework “The Incredible Story of Deft” into a [second edition](https://leanpub.com/deft)<sup>8</sup> more akin to a business novel. Yet, this time, writing and re-reading Nate and Bob’s first interaction in Act I made me laugh out loud.

Enjoying what I create is a very useful indicator, because I always write for myself first, to crystallize my thoughts into words. Therefore, I continued to explore the storyline through their interactions, looking forward to writing Nate’s interactions with the Lord Baron Richard von Kopf. With this enjoyment springing so easily from my mechanical keyboard, the outline in turn easily became a first high-level draft within a couple of evenings. I continued working on the book on most evenings after work, sometimes capturing my thoughts for the details of the character’s interactions and the ensuing hilarity by voice-recording during my daily driving commutes through and around Athens, Greece.

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<sup>8</sup><https://leanpub.com/deft>

By the end of that first week I had written around 40% of the book; at least, “40%” of what I at the time considered would be the 100% scope. I continued writing on evenings, and especially during weekends and public holidays. I avoided writing whenever I didn’t feel inspired.

A few days of fervent writing later, I thought I’d reached “70%”, and that I’d be finished by June 1st<sup>9</sup>.

In the meantime, I posted a couple of excerpts on LinkedIn. Friends and connections asked me for more information on the book’s story, and for text samples due to the “weird” writing style.

*Fie!* This writing style had already started influencing my text messages, so fascinated by it had I become.

A few close friends received early drafts, others received excerpts of chapters. A few received paragraphs copy-pasted into instant messages. One of them disliked the writing style. Yet, most of them found it an interesting juxtaposition to the matters being written about, in particular because the style also made it difficult to figure out on which side of the fence I, as the author, stand with regards to the characters<sup>10</sup>.

My friends’ draft reviews turned into more ideas. On some days, I continued receiving ideas as well as valuable feedback and encouragement through instant messengers. Trust me, as much as I enjoyed writing this book, there have been hours of slogging through edits and asking myself why I even started it. In those moments, these friends’ feedback is what has kept me going.

At some point one month after I started writing, there I was, still at the same estimated “70%,” which earlier had represented 120 pages at font size 11, yet at the moment represented 239 pages at font size 10, and with some sections not as descriptive as I wanted them to be. I foresaw that the last 30% will probably

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<sup>9</sup>Joke’s on me, I guess...

<sup>10</sup>The true answer to that question is that I am on the fence about each and every one of the characters in this book. They are all caught within a system that propagates hype; it’s the system that’s at fault. And if you’ve been following me on LinkedIn or read anything else I’ve written on Leanpub or on [overbring.com](http://overbring.com)<sup>11</sup>, you know which part of the fence I am regarding *that* topic.

take me another month to finish and tie together, yet my project management experience told me that no, it would be closer to double that.

In a style of post that I call the “Dear Diary” style, I [shared my thoughts on LinkedIn](#)<sup>12</sup>. In light of what ensued thereafter, there are six people in particular whom I would like to thank: [Peter Wendorff](#)<sup>13</sup>, [Allan Kelly](#)<sup>14</sup>, [Bob Emiliani](#)<sup>15</sup>, [Marc Chauvet](#)<sup>16</sup>, [Petros Papapanagiotou](#)<sup>17</sup> and [Kostas Kefalakis](#)<sup>18</sup>.

I had chanced upon Peter’s comments in a different thread about politics within development projects. I was in awe at his prescient insights about a topic that many in that thread considered “dirty,” somehow. It might be a sign of the times that the mere utterance of the word “politics” causes negative associations about an emergent phenomenon in any organization larger than a handful of persons. Peter’s well-reasoned comments and messages (and the naive responses others posted to his comments) bolstered my intent to keep writing, as I saw that the political element of “transformations” is eagerly ignored at the peril of the “transformer” and the “transformee.”

Bob (no relation to this book’s “Robert McBarkle IV” character, and the naming is pure coincidence) has always amused me with his posts’ sobriety on a social media platform drunk with hype and exaggeration, in particular with regards to the topic of Lean. Bob’s humorous style, prodigious writing output and deep insights into the organizational barriers to Lean, as well as his long-term criticism of Lean as it’s been peddled by various consultants and other self-authorizing bodies purely in pursuit of commercialization, also contributed to my intent to continue writing.

My MBA classmate and dear friend Marc was the first to

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<sup>12</sup>[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tisaak\\_writing-agile-corporate-activity-7069273651858087936-qHFz/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tisaak_writing-agile-corporate-activity-7069273651858087936-qHFz/)

<sup>13</sup><https://www.linkedin.com/in/peterwendorff/>

<sup>14</sup><https://www.linkedin.com/in/allankellynet/>

<sup>15</sup><https://www.linkedin.com/in/bob-emiliani-660a72170/>

<sup>16</sup><https://www.linkedin.com/in/marcchauvet/>

<sup>17</sup><https://www.linkedin.com/in/petrospap/>

<sup>18</sup><https://www.linkedin.com/in/kefalakis/>



be bombarded with my enthusiastic messages about the book's idea and my sometimes grueling progress in writing it. I greatly admire his ability to deal with my enthusiasm and provide sensible feedback on a few things that I initially frowned at, yet eventually accepted and incorporated. Acting upon his feedback has had a great effect on the book's readability. For example, Marc is to thank for the characters having names, instead of boring you with a thousand repetitions of "the young scholar," "the Master," or "the Lord Baron."

My past collaborator and dear friend Kostas helped make the content better by challenging me on world-building and through feedback on the uneven and frantic pace at which the story was evolving. Alas, his enthusiasm in sharing ideas didst exceed my capacity for modification at this late stage, but rest assured, he provided me with quite a few ideas, some of which I have sprinkled across all acts, while others enriched the final act of the book, in particular. With Kostas' deep experience and actual success in the world of Lean and many more years of experience than me in experiencing the many ills that befall it<sup>19</sup> the book is better for it.

My high-school classmate and dear childhood friend Petros provided great feedback on the readability of the book, and with some much-needed positive and enthusiastic feedback on the character development and the writing style. Such outbursts of positivity were instrumental as I found myself grappling for the umpteenth time on whether the mock-archaic style of the book was a boon, a curse, or something in between, depending on how you look at it. For all that, I am thankful to him. He has been the cheerleader that I didn't know I'd need!

Last but not least, I am thankful to Allan for providing me with a much-needed kick to finally consider Leanpub for an early publication, instead of crunching along until everything would be ready for print-on-demand publishing by the rainforest company's

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<sup>19</sup>Mealy-mouthed words of wisdom, weak conferences, [tired Japanese buzzwords](#)<sup>20</sup>, to mention but a few of those ills.

platform. I had not connected with Allan on LinkedIn before; he was a “drive-by commenter” on that post I made about how long it would still take me to publish. Yet, very soon after we connected, a few messages he shared were enough to convince me to go down that path. [Allan’s track record on Leanpub](#)<sup>21</sup> is what led to me using the platform, and making it possible for you to peek into the book’s first couple of chapters.

Finally, I sadly proclaim that at least one thing of my original post, was prophetic. “Sadly,” because I should be happy, but I am unhappy for being proven right in an “oh God, seriously?” way.

Look; the original post of April 2023 was truly “for the lulz,” poking fun at the reliable unfolding of events of an “X transformation” from the nascent stage of an X project to the eventual establishment of the role of the Chief X Officer, shortly before the whole thing devolves into press releases and corporate theatrics at the expense of actual valuable outcomes.

Five days ago, two months from that post to the day, an article circulated on LinkedIn on “[The rise of the chief AI officer](#)”<sup>22</sup>. Suffice to say, the latest and greatest X of the business world, “AI” (yet another maligned buzzword), riding hot on the heels of the failing X of “crypto,” [exceeded even my wildest expectations](#)<sup>23</sup> by making it through the narrative’s arc in a *record time of not even six months* since the first-ever chat-focused application of a Large Language Model in December 2022 led so many on LinkedIn to re-brand from “blockchain visionary” to “AI expert.” Wow. Truly, this has been a modern marvel of upskilling and reskilling!

Therefore, even if only for this recently-delivered affirmation of the validity of the narrative this book explores, I consider that writing it has been a worthwhile endeavor.

I shall finish this preface by copy-pasting three slightly-modified paragraphs of my preface to the 2017 edition of “The Incredible Story of Deft.”

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<sup>21</sup><https://leanpub.com/u/allankelly>

<sup>22</sup><https://www.worklife.news/leadership/chief-ai-officer/>

<sup>23</sup><https://overbring.com/blog/2023-04-03-chief-x-officer/>

Though this arguably can be a passive-aggressive move, I really believe that gifting this book to your colleagues can serve as a well-deserved mental kick. It can also serve as inoculation against those overzealous, incessantly-preachy fans of the real-world equivalents to X's many flavors that cater to different of types change and improvement initiatives, regardless of business objectives.

I am convinced that this story can inoculate you, your colleagues, and your organization, and so help everyone avoid a classical, yet rarely named, discussed or addressed pitfall of change and improvement initiatives. Same thing goes if you are a consultant or consider yourself to be a "change agent" or "coach."

Namely, coming back to the question of "why are so few change and 'transformation' initiatives successful?"... Everything else being equal, in my experience and from my observations offline and online, the answer that remains unmentioned is "hype"; organizational systems infected by mismanaged and ill-timed hype, e.g. about great ideas, fancy methods and tools, visionary leaders, inspirational outlier companies, and all-too-wise experts and consultants.

And, with that, I hope you will enjoy reading this series of books as much I've enjoyed writing it.

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Isaak Tsalicoglou  
June 2nd, 2023  
Athens, Greece

# Books in the saga

“Lo and Behold, X!”, a business fable of change and intrigue, has been released as a series of books on Leanpub.

- Book 1: [Denizens of the Ivory Fortress](#)<sup>1</sup> (this book)
- Book 2: [Growing, Pains, and Awareness](#)<sup>2</sup>
- Book 3: [Doldrums and Machinations](#)<sup>3</sup>
- Book 4: [Bifurcation and Deliverance](#)<sup>4</sup>
- Book 5: [Above, Beyond, and Far Away](#)<sup>5</sup> (a work in progress)

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<sup>1</sup><https://leanpub.com/lo-and-behold-x-1>

<sup>2</sup><https://leanpub.com/lo-and-behold-x-2>

<sup>3</sup><https://leanpub.com/lo-and-behold-x-3>

<sup>4</sup><https://leanpub.com/lo-and-behold-x-4>

<sup>5</sup><https://leanpub.com/lo-and-behold-x-5>

# Discovery

Lo, and behold! In the void, naught existed except for a young scholar, his essence of character, his respectable academic credentials, and a large, seemingly infinite multitude of possible paths forward. Soon, the judgment and decisions of others collapsed this multitude of paths into a mere handful. The scholar's own ambition and discernment further winnowed down these few remaining paths, seeking the one that seemed to offer him the optimal blend of challenges and rewards, of enthusiasm and coin.

A mixture of relief, exuberance, and trepidation had coursed through the scholar's veins as he finally found himself embraced by a prestigious kingdom. Forsooth, that kingdom was willing to engage his productive capacity in endeavors that simultaneously ticked his fancy and bestowed upon him a remuneration regular and esteemed, especially at such a young age, merely one score and a few years passed. For, that kingdom, the first one he had ever pledged his allegiance to, was verily a grand one! It spanned the globe and was long famed and admired for its countless feats of invention, innovation, and execution demonstrated steadfastly for close to an aeon.

And so, the budding scholar was soon summoned to the capital of the kingdom of Obratheria. In bureaus and catacombs of experimentation deep within the capital's bowels, he was tasked with the periodic conjuration of ingenious algorithms, astounding contraptions, and wondrous implements for the kingdom's novel and innovative wares out of the wondrous ether of ideation.

Forsooth, many would have deemed themselves fortunate to join such esteemed ranks even at a much progressed age, and thus to bask in the security and prosperity the kingdom offered until the moment of retirement, and beyond. Lo, many in fact did so with such security and prosperity as their primary motivator, a secret whispered across the marketplace, yet publicly unacknowledged by

the kingdom's priesthood tasked with the pledging of allegiances.

Yet, despite such glorious circumstances that he had been graced with, the young scholar would not rest on his laurels. Nay, he wouldst not become complacent in the regular deposit of a respectable salary, nor comfortable in the plush ambiance of the capital of the kingdom that employed his capacity and, with a legal requirement he had acquiesced to, monopolized the fruits of his creativity. Nay, the young scholar had many times over in his hitherto short life proved to be a striver, a geek, and a bookworm who loved to pore over volumes of tomes with the hunger of a giraffe seeking sustenance from the lofty trees of knowledge, ever vigilant in his quest for comprehension and creation.

"Nathaniel Lee Abel" was the full name adorning his first-ever calling card issued by a kingdom of enterprise, but those who knew him better simply called him "Nate." Nate Lee Abel was a student of the ancients, ever heedful of the counsel of those who came before him. He was diligent and methodical, a true student of the arts, and he was constantly parched for knowledge of the novel and the unorthodox. Mr. Abel was, by all accounts, a paragon of intellect, having attained excellence in his academic endeavors and the respect of his peers for his formidable perseverance in pursuing the non-obvious. He was a persistent seeker of novelty in all kinds of knowledge, a tireless acquirer of insights, and an unrelenting inquisitor of all things that tickled his bottomless curiosity. He was thirsty for understanding and sought to improve his every endeavor, yearning to fathom the abstruse mysteries of the world of enterprise, and to unravel the intricate webs of system interactions that gave rise to the success of realms and to one's professional fulfillment. He longed to cast aside the veil of ignorance that he knew would forever enshroud him, for he wished to perceive himself as learned, curious, and persevering, and to elevate and hold others to the same ambitious standard.

Verily, Nathaniel was a scholar's scholar! That is, to say, Nathaniel could sometimes also be full of himself, ensconced within the fortress of his own capabilities, basking in the glow of his

perceived grandeur; and all of these qualities so impressive for those who held him dear were but inexplicable conceit to those around him who didn't. Alas, little didst Nathaniel care, for his fortress of occasional conceit was spacious, yet also filled to the brim with the display cases of numerous academic trophies and intellectual accomplishments.

Lo, this pursuit of excellence had always been his singular aim, even in the days of his studies and most certainly in the nascent year of his maiden employment at the awe-inspiring capital, far away from the patrons of the kingdom's wares. Such an obsession wouldst serve him well. For, in the capital of the kingdom, whether in the depths of its bowels or the heights of its spires, the exaltation of rationality, the worship of analysis, and the art of synthesis in visual and oral presentation seemed to hold sway over matters.

Those who could master such artistry were esteemed highly not only by the priesthood that oversaw the kingdom's expansive hierarchy, but especially by the high-ranking elder lords and ladies of the realm, whose word didst bear weight for the hierarchy's evolution. For, many of these rulers had honed these same abilities during their own tenures not only here, but also in various other kingdoms, most notably within the realm of providing advisory services to kings and queens, and to these lieges' vassals and lieutenants.

Even though his own tenure was thus far brief and his past still too short to be illustrious, our youthful scholar was eager to make his own mark upon this kingdom and the bureau that occupied his faculties. For he was freshly minted by his alma mater, an academic institution globally renowned for the toughness and breadth of its curricula and thus also for the quality of the few, select scholars that didst succeed in graduating from its divine halls of scholarship and research.

Lo, the young scholar Nate had indeed emerged like a phoenix from the flames of academia, his thirst unquenchable, his devotion to scholarly endeavors unparalleled, his self-esteem fortified, his stubbornness nurtured, his insecurities latent and lying in wait.

With each passing day working in the depths of the bureau, his mind had become an ever-hotter cauldron, bubbling with a symphony of ideas, a whirlwind of concepts intertwining in a cosmic dance. Evenings didst witness him returning to his humble abode, his mind still aflame with the ecstasy of learning, ideas and notions thus far separate from each other commingling within an expansive vast network of seemingly tenuous relationships that might somehow prove less tenuous than they initially appeared, once decrypted by his intellect and his impressive faculties of analysis and synthesis.

Behold! For Nate, the pursuit of knowledge was not limited to the confines of his daily toil at the bureau or in the catacombs, but was an insatiable hunger that consumed his every waking moment. Into the depths of the night he would oft immerse himself in tomes, both ancient and contemporary, both written and transmitted. Their words wouldst seep into his consciousness like an elixir of wisdom, permeating and saturating his absorbent mind, renovating and expanding his fortress of self-appreciation, emboldening his psyche and bolstering his belief in the absolute, obvious truth of his growing knowledge and understanding of the world. Manuscripts and electronic missives became his psyche's sustenance, feeding his intellectual appetite with prodigious amounts of information both trivial and revelatory.

With fervor unmatched, Nate wouldst regularly distill the most memorable essence of his endeavors into handwritten collections, filling numerous notebooks with the jewels of insight gleaned from his relentless pursuit over the years. But it didst not end there, for he sought to go beyond the mere accumulation of knowledge. Nay, Nate was no mere theoretician, and he didst abhor the very idea of becoming one, as he also abhorred the possibility of being considered a hollow thinker without the capability for application. Therefore, armed with the ideas that regularly took root in his mind, he wouldst eagerly venture into the realm of experimentation, converting his newfound wisdom into directives that could imbue the intricate workings of his personal differential



engines with simulacra of reasoning.

Lo, through the art of enlivening the networks of his automata's circuitry with complex directives representing the dynamics of things, Nate sought to bring theories to life and to perhaps unravel the mysteries that lay hidden beneath the surface. Nate delved into many of the intricate mechanisms of the world, embracing the limitations and nuances of the mental and numerical models that crossed his path. Some of these models, he discovered, held direct relevance to his work experiences within the capital, while others were borne from the fertile soil of his own unique encounters.

In this dance of intellect and practice he sought not just understanding, but a profound sense of connection to the miracle of existence. For his innermost drive behind such effortful and tiring activities was to make sense of the world around him through an ever-expanding collection of lenses. Through these he perceived all things, from the gyrations of machinery, to the discoveries of science, to the interactions of human beings, to the struggles and mechanisms of enterprise, to peculiarities of organizations, to the flourishing of economies, to the evolving history of the world, and more. Truly, nary a topic was out of reach of Nate's tentacles of curiosity!

Nate's preoccupation with such pursuits was perpetual, and even spurred by the company he kept for most of each day. For, deep within the bowels of the capital, where scholars congregated like monks in mindful prayer to the gods of knowledge and comprehension, Nate didst find solace in being surrounded by spirits that seemed in line with his proclivities. Lo, most of them were as obsessed as he was with sense-making, or even more, and thus pursued their obsession through endeavors of creation both *ex nihilo* and by incrementation upon earlier feats of intellect. Lo, among such company he didst feel a sense of belonging and purpose, perhaps even a temporary diminishing of his conceit, as the wondrous achievements of his experienced fellows often dwarfed his own fortress with their own. Yet, their collective pursuits

ignited his own fervor, bolstering his intent and strengthening his focus on his holy crusade of cognition.

Verily, Nate knew that focus was of the essence. For, while many sought solace in mundane diversions and worldly delights, Nate had instead always found immense joy in the relentless and focused pursuit of knowledge. The lures of idle conversation and frivolous distractions held no sway over his unwavering determination. Nate regularly found himself radiant with intent and eagerness to maintain this fervent schedule and monk-like mode of existence, undisturbed by matters pedestrian, such as loitering around the coffeehouses of the capital's burrows, letting the observation of spheres getting kicked or tossed stimulate his primal instincts of tribalism, or consuming addictive substances altering his perception for short-term relief from emotional burdens and traumas that he couldst veritably not comprehend could exist within a psyche.

Behold, Nate was indeed aware that there were those who might consider him dull or detached, a boring snob, a self-absorbed square—yet, he had been steadfastly impervious to such judgment, for he was having what some might call “the time of his life,” though implying entirely different preoccupations!

Yea, for Nate this kind of life was a blithe symphony of scholarship, a harmonious interplay of ideas, thoughts, experiments, and insights. Ennui was truly a foreign concept for him, as his days were filled with meaning and purpose from morn till eve, and sometimes until the early morn of the following day. While others sought solace and titillation in momentary and fleeting pleasures, he basked in the glow of his persistent exploration and his intellectual discoveries, his mind alive with the wonders of the world, his fortress temporarily shrinking, yet still growing with every new month of experience within the kingdom of Obratheria. For this was how he had been brought up from a very young age; ever active, ever inquisitive, and ever restless to think for himself and figure things out, ever taking himself and all his endeavors way too seriously.

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Such were the conditions of Nate experiencing the essence of life itself during his first year of service to the kingdom, when one day his peripatetic mind chanced upon a grandiose anthology of articles at the stand of a book merchant in one of the suburbs of Obratheria. The anthology had been crafted with care by the most learned scribes of a venerable and esteemed establishment of education in all matters of the enterprise. This establishment had bestowed the coveted title of Mastery of Enterprise Stewardship upon numerous shrewd and cunning enterprise leaders and misleaders of generations past, and this anthology was but one of many similar anthologies in the establishment's long experience with the printing press.

This tome, with its majestic typography and its luxurious gold-leaf cover, was a thing of wonder, a true marvel to behold! Within its pages were recorded the sagacious insights and teachings of a wide array of realms spanning the globe and transcending time itself, that had doggedly pursued something mentioned in the title as "X."

Oh, what a *masterpiece* of design the tome was! Its external appearance crafted with meticulous precision by minds steeped in the arcane arts of visual allure and textual persuasion, the tome exuded an irresistible charm. The title was by itself a wonder to behold, its words smartly selected and placed in a sequence deftly crafted with the intent to entice prospective readers. The resulting text was akin to an incantation eliciting promises of hope, transcendence and grandeur within the reader's soul. "The X Renaissance," it proclaimed, a majestic prospect that stirred the depths of the soul with promises both implicit and grand hidden within the last word's historic significance. Beneath this resplendent proclamation, a subtitle whispered of untapped power, of the awe-inspiring magic of X: "Harness the Potency of X Stewardship to Lead and Transform Your Realm for Lasting Success and Prosperity," it read.

Behold! It was not only the captivating words that graced the

cover, for a mesmerizing, ambiguous daguerreotype of futuristic abstract shapes also adorned its surface. A glimpse into an enigmatic world, it tantalized with hints of wonders untold, inviting the intrepid reader to delve into the tome's depths and discover the very future of global enterprise.

And lo, on the back of this hallowed tome a roster of luminaries emerged. Illustrious stewards and rulers, their names etched in the annals of fame, emerged from far-flung kingdoms of eminence to contribute their wisdom to this sacred anthology. Academic figureheads, revered feudal lords, advisors of mighty firms, and even the name of a Queen the kingdom of origin of X—their collective presence lent an air of reverence and authority that only a fool wouldst dare to doubt; and Nate, like most people the tome was intended for, certainly did not consider himself a fool!

And beneath this noble assembly, another list served to hammer the point home and finally convince even the most skeptical of prospective readers of the power of the tome they held within their thankless hands. Testimonials, breathless and fervent, poured forth from denizens of other kingdoms of significance and glory. Each account spoke of the transformative power of the anthology's contents and the very essence of X itself. They hinted at the unimaginable splendors that awaited those wise enough to embrace its teachings, implying dire consequences of missing out on X for those foolish enough who wouldst *dare* to neglect such a treasure of wisdom and insight offered with grace and at such low a monetary price by an establishment so distinguished. The allure of glory, promotion, and acclaim danced within these lines, tempting, nay, *taunting* those who dared not to partake in this grand revelation yet.

With a good-natured heart unburdened by the weight of skepticism, Nate stood before this fabled anthology, one hand supporting its back, the other grasping the edge of its cover in a moment of hesitation. For, despite his innate curiosity, Nate often found himself hesitant before each new bout of exploration. Still, yet untarnished by the blemish of cynicism that bewitches many

within the realm of enterprise, Nate teetered between hesitation and anticipation at the prospect of reading the tome, despite a fleeting flicker of doubt that likened the praise to a towering heap of noxious bovine excrement. Lo, he swiftly dismissed such negative thoughts, for the allure of possibility and his immense curiosity and persistent passion beckoned him onward, his hand committed to the action of opening the book and letting its secrets loose upon his thirsty soul.

*Surely, he had mused, rationalizing his minute weariness, if even a fraction of the wondrous claims within these pages prove true, then X must be a marvel of unparalleled magnitude!* And so, with renewed resolve he had thrown the book cover open, his curiosity intensifying with every turn of the page, his hope and excitement growing by the minute, a sense of urgency to take action consuming his mind.

Behold! Nate was deeply intrigued by the claim that X was a mystical set of ideas, tenets, practices, methodologies, mindsets, models, leadership tools, enterprise archetypes, what-have-you, that had once upon a time allowed one kingdom of enterprise and its interconnected feudal realms to rapidly and surprisingly ascend to the very pantheon of its peer group. Thanks to this alleged superiority thanks to X, that fabled kingdom had risen to dominate the networks of supply and patronage across the world, no matter the type of wares it chose to enter brutal competition with, or the type of patrons whose coin it chose to compete for.

Lo, at the mere consideration of such glory for the kingdom of his allegiance, Nate was seized with an indescribable fervor, his heart racing and his cheeks flushing with excitement. For, in that moment he knew with a certainty born of conviction and destiny that he had stumbled upon a potential key to enduring success, the very essence of what he had been searching for all along in his random walks across grand vistas of information. If only those who had deftly crafted this tome couldst witness Nate's elation and growing sense of conviction, they wouldst rejoice in their mission accomplished.

For, in X, lo, Nate didst behold anon a path to greatness, a way to unlock the secrets of his kingdom and unleash its full potential upon the world. Alas, dogmatism threatened to enshroud his otherwise pliant mind, for he was forthwith consumed by an irresistible desire to put these ideas into practice, to prove to his peers and colleagues that the way of X was the one way forward, the path to glory and triumph. For, in his youthful naivety and latent conceit, he interpreted the examples recorded within the tome as far more than mere anecdotes. Yea, they were the veritable signs that triumph lay just within his reach, if only he wouldst possess the valor and fortitude to seize it, if only he couldst muster the company of others on the voyage to X fulfilled!

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