

Partial Galley, for "*THE STRAW MAN*"
Fiction/Espionage Novel
All Rights Reserved 2008
By Victor M Saraiva

Bertrand was on top of the world. He left his office at the University feeling exuberant. His doctoral dissertation was indeed going well and the new appointment, as instructor was just magnificent. As he walked down the north corridor of Smith Hall he gazed at each office door for a sign of any of the other graduate students whom he knew well. It was late June, commencement had come and gone and the summer session would not begin for another week. He thought of the course on Introductory Psychology which he would be teaching and paused to peruse a bulletin board still plastered with Spring semester announcements. He glanced at his watch, rapped in thought not really noticing that it was nearly six o'clock. How could he support a family on his meager wages ? The salary just about covered his expenses for the coming academic year. He felt too proud to expect any further assistance from his family, although they would be more than able to afford it, or for his wife to contribute to the support of a household. Wife?! He wasn't even married yet. But the prospect of his scheduled union worried him.

A loud thud awakened him from his dazed state. Glancing in the direction of the noise, he immediately recognized the sound as being caused by the malfunctioning door closing mechanism in the south wing stairwell. No one could be seen but his attention now focused on the large clock above the exit sign and

was shocked to see how late it was. He hurried to the stairwell, near him, and ran down the stairs. Once again he had forgotten to leave by five.

Laura walked to an empty table with her cappuccino. She was glad that her favorite spot, close to the garden was not occupied. As she placed the cup on the marble top she looked around to see if she could recognize anyone adjacent to her. A young couple in their early twenties were involved in conversation. The young man struck her as quite handsome with deep dark eyes that seemed to dance in the rays of sunlight that streaked from the west. He reminded her of Daniel, a youth whom she had loved from a distance in her teens.

Laura crossed her long, slender legs and turned away from the bright, intense rays of sunshine. Although its warmth was enticing amid the mid 60 degree weather its intensity was uncomfortable. The late afternoon breeze seemed to lift her long black hair, to reveal a pleasant countenance with high cheek bones and long dark eyelashes that embraced dark piercing eyes. But her lips, although appearing to be somewhat small in proportion to her face, gave her an exotic appeal that many men found irresistible.

She sipped the cappuccino slowly, savoring its sweetness, while thinking how much she always found it a wonderful experience late in the afternoon. Looking at her wrist, she gently moved the onyx and gold bangle, so that it would adorn her hand. Noticing her Omega, she became irritated, and acknowledged to herself that Bertie was late as usual. She found her thoughts wandering to the insignificant, and somewhat aloof-- composed her skirt,

the 19k gold chain and crucifix dangling from her neck. Laura loved jewelry, it made her feel special and noticed. Attention made her shine inside, as if feeding her strength.

Opening her briefcase she decided to review the Tech-Mor brief that her secretary had put together before she had left the office. She had been struck by one of the depositions and was looking forward to working on the legal research for the rebuttal memorandum. One of the copies began to flutter with the wind and started to be lifted from the file. She grabbed it just in time and opted to continue her reading later in the evening.

“Laura! Sorry I ‘m late.” Bertrand panted as he walked briskly, dodging carefully not to bump into the busboy who was clearing an adjacent table to Laura’s. “Well Bertie, what happened this time ?

I have been waiting for close to half an hour,” Laura said. “I completely lost track of the time, I am so close to wrapping up the research. Even without performing the statistical analysis I know that my results are highly significant. The formation of perspective is a constructive enterprise which without a doubt relies heavily on past experience. However the subject considers alternatives, much like a mathematician considers alternative variables to plug into a formulation. I have established that, information is actively constructed and “plugged into” the “reality equation.”

Do you know what this means, it is further proof that Piaget as well as the Gestaltists were on the right track. Reality is constructed actively not passively. Proof that we are not a

tabula rasa. It means that we are free agents to mold our world, restricted only by the natural physical laws of nature. All is possible. We are limited only by the limitless.”

“Yes Bertie, but also by our own lack of courage, lack of intelligence, and by our greed.” “What do you mean?”

“Bertie, man is a wild beast, he evidences speech and a high level of potential, but one cannot forget the lessons of history, Hitler, Pinochet, Franco, Salazar, Mussolini, and the countless genocides across history in the name of and in the search of glory, fame, riches. Have you forgotten the thousands, hundreds of thousands killed during the Spanish Inquisition and the conquest of the new world ? And the holocaust that cost the lives of millions ? What is man, but a wild beast, a wild uncontrollable beast .”

“As always Laura, you cut right through the meat and potatoes to the desert. O.K., you’re right, but what about the contributions of Schweitzer-- the doctor who devoted so many years of his life to serve the simple tribesmen of the African Congo. His contribution showed what it means to be a physician. To cure without concern for money, or the comforts of day to day living in western society. What greater contribution to fellow men than devoting one’s life to alleviate the suffering of others less fortunate. Is this not also an endowment of hope, an attribution to a living creature who possesses such magnanimous possibility to live to its utmost possibilities of true greatness-- to contribute to the realization of a better world ?

Have you, Laura, forgotten Art and Music, Beethoven, Picasso, Bernstein ? Of Bernstein, I remember clearly that he once questioned the reasoning for creating music, indeed for living. He said, “why does one spend one’s life making sure that a certain musical note follows precisely another ? Well, it gives someone a something worth something. It provides amid the chaos in the world, a permanence. By creating, life... is essentially saved.”

“Yes, Bertie and what of Picasso’s Guernica ? Have you forgotten the blitzkrieg, as simply an exercise in destruction for the sake of the creation of terror and death for its own sake ? During the Spanish Civil War the fascists destroyed an entire town, all its inhabitants in an exercise of dive bombing. After the war Franco, declared that this town, Belchite, would never be rebuilt. It would serve to remain as a lesson to all those who were foolhardy to resist fascism. That town is still rubble, to this day. This is what man is-- a brute.

Bertie, are we having dinner together? It is getting late.”
Laura’s face became rigid showing little if any emotion as if what she had just said did not in the least upset her. It was simply fact, a given just like the weather.

“Laura I know what you just said to be right, but I cannot accept the cynicism of how you say it. Surely these are exceptions to humanity, surely these are the examples of man that have gone wrong, astray.”

“Bertie what of the Inquisition, the Crusades, the Stalin purges, the Chinese cultural revolution, the Jahids of the middle East,

the witch hunts, the Balkan exterminations, the mass killings by Pinochet, and those in Rwanda, the Congo, Indonesia, the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia, on and on, oh the madness, the bestiality of man, Bertie how can you not see it ?”

Bertrand was silent. He looked at Laura perplexed. Slowly he uttered, “well in any event I can’t wait to finish all the trials and do the mathematical analysis of my research... The sooner that’s done with, the sooner I can expound the theoretical implications. But enough of that.

His face contorted like someone straining to understand something perplexing, such as a student attempting to understand the rules of how to perform an algebraic equation, just beyond his grasp.

His thoughts wandered, and without being conscious of it he began to speak, I’ve missed you. You look great!” He reached over and kissed her. “Oh, your hair smells great. I love your hair. And your eyes, make me melt like ice cream on a hot day.”

“Bertie, we are not alone.” He reached over and grabbed Laura’s shoulder, as he whispered in her ear. Laura responded somewhat aloof and coolly, uttering almost inaudibly, “enough Bertie”.

His family stood in stark contrast to her own, who had always been quite humble. In fact whatever she had made of herself, she had done using the tools of femininity, avarice and street smarts. She liked Bertie, but did not love him, he was handsome

but also a bore and in her eyes, soft. Not the strong, and lean man she longed for but never found with the attributes of wealth, power, and grace. Nonetheless Bertie had impressed her, he was a prolific writer of research articles that probed how the human mind functions and was in demand with various research projects at the University.

Recently he had received an invitation from the State Security Agency (SSA) to submit a proposal as to how volition developed. He had already worked with the SSA on previous projects regarding how best to present subliminal messages in various video formats, as well as putting together a computer filter program that analyzed human communication and patterns of imperceptible emotion, through voice intonation and speech velocity and pitch. Bertie's work was a stark contrast to his principles. But Laura had never mentioned this apparent contradiction to Bertie, and he in turn had never raised any concern. He was in fact blind to any malicious use of such research and firmly believed that his research would be used to aid society, even if it would essentially be used by the SSA, and other government agencies.

The nation was a democracy. It was in fact the world's most powerful and advanced, and as a consequence the richest country the world had ever seen. Its accomplishments in science, medicine and engineering had dwarfed the greatest of empires of history. It had been founded as a Republic while other nations struggled with governments that protected a select minority of rich and powerful and subjected most of the citizenry to a life of misery, serfdom and injustice.

Its constitution stood as an example to the world. All men equal before the law. Government of the people, by the people and for the people. Today the nation was the envy of the world, it reflected the pinnacle of civilization, and the defining force in the frontier of mankind's style of life and meaning. Its status as a just society had never been questioned by Bertrand. He could recite half of the founding documents from memory, upon which the nation's laws were based. He took pleasure in reading the Bill of Rights which cited brotherhood among men, individual liberty, freedom from censorship, freedom of beliefs, protection of the weak, respect for human difference, freedom of opinion, equal status for all citizens, and justice as a basic guarantee for all.

Laura and Bertie left "Le Figaro" just as it started to rain. Walking swiftly together, Bertrand gently caressed Laura's back as he contemplated where they would have dinner. "Laura, what do you say about us dropping in on your folks?"

"Now?! They aren't expecting me at all Bertie."

"Well, your mom is always glad to see us, and I am sure she can accommodate us for dinner."

"I'd rather not, besides I have some work to do, and by the time we get back, from across the river, it will be past midnight."

"Ok, what about Chinese?", replied Bertrand.

"Bertie, not Chinese again, how about we stop in at "Casa del Monte" for some pasta?" Bertrand was too proud to admit he

was not budgeted for more extravagant spending this week, but looking at Laura he quickly put it out of his mind. “Pasta it is!”

Halfway through dinner, Laura looked at Bertrand, giving him a long penetrating glance. She watched as he gently rolled the spaghetti, using a spoon to support his fork as he twirled the strands of spaghetti.

He ate as he lived, gently moving his utensils, and then his mouth as he masticated before swallowing.

Laura, smiled, as she admired Bertrand’s movements. He was in a sense, poetry in motion, careful, methodical and economical.

As she observed him, it became apparent that Bertrand was far away in thought. He did not even notice that Laura was evaluating his every movement. She took the opportunity to carefully admire his boyish face, his long dark eyelashes adorning dark brown eyes and well proportioned cheekbones shadowed by closely cropped but abundant almost wire black hair. He was in fact quite a handsome and gentle man.

She admired him, his wit, but mostly his intelligence. No one Laura had ever met was as intelligent and noble in spirit and kind as Bertie. Slowly Laura began to remember the night she had first met Bertie. Four years ago at a university party, this young and thin man had approached her while she sat with friends. Bertrand had asked Laura to dance to a slow romantic melody that the band was playing. She couldn’t quite remember what the melody was. But she did recognize the young man as

someone she had seen in her neighborhood. It seemed that he was a university student, or so she assumed since he carried books with him always whenever he stepped off the bus. She was so sure it was him because he had always taken careful note of Laura whenever they passed one another in the street. He would gaze at her, with a look that seemed to caress her, but in a manner of someone quite lonely.

She remembered that as Bertrand held her, that first time, he was polite not to squeeze her tightly to him. It seemed he was supporting her while dancing, or as if waiting for the air to lift them above the dance floor. She thought of the way he gently moved her hair aside with his lips and slowly brought them to her right ear just above the lobe. Laura still remembered how excited he had made her feel, by a gentleness that she had thought at the time to be amorous, but which she today knew had been a result of sadness and loneliness...

...Bertrand was somewhat of an anachronism, he held onto beliefs that were more reflective of the past than the present. He still believed that marriage, was a bond that should last a lifetime, that love was not a word or a feeling to excuse momentary fleeting pleasures, with little permanence. Bertrand's beliefs were the product of an antiquated upbringing that centered on the family. But there was something more, his was an existence that received its impetus not from visceral pleasures but rather from intellectual ones.

Bertrand saw Laura home, without any further discussion.

The next morning as Bertrand was shaving, the entertainment center became active, and the video mail warning message rang its melodic chime throughout the house. Bertrand stepped into his bedroom and as he approached the center of the room, the motion sensor activated the playback unit, and projected the video image on the room's south wall. "Bertie, this is Alex at SA, we have reviewed your recent project and are quite excited by your results and analysis of the data. I have scheduled a conference this coming Wednesday at the SS National Center. The face-to-face meeting has been requested from upstairs. Bertie, we need for you to make a presentation of your results. Some very important people are coming from across the country to hear this presentation. If you handle yourself right, you may just find that many good things may come of it. Be ready to field questions about theoretical as well as pragmatic issues. Make sure to be here Wednesday. If you have scheduling problems, reschedule all else. Whatever you do, make sure to come next Wednesday. The conference is at 11:00, but let's meet at 10:00 in room 2307 so that I can brief you further.

Plan to spend the day. Your clearance and access voucher, which is a ring, will be at the reception desk in the lobby. You will need this ring to proceed throughout the various security checkpoints in the building. The ring will be synchronized to your perspiration matrix. Your palmprint is already registered so all you have to do is place your palm on the digitization reader. After screening, go past the sentry gate to the lobby for further security screening and check-in. See you then. Say hello to that gorgeous woman of yours for me. Message terminated. ”
Communication 013 Friday 06:18 no response requested.

With the day's work load nearly complete Bertrand finally was able to relax in the cafeteria and grab some lunch. His teaching assistant had spent the day imputing the hard data and all that was left was for the numerical raw data to be put through the analytical stream of formulas. Somewhere between his very late lunch and four cups of coffee, he was able to quickly manipulate the hard data into various statistical formulations which appeared to bear out his theoretical explanation for the elicited human behavior in the experiments. He still wanted to collect his thoughts and write down a brief summation of the most important points which he would attempt to present to those present at the SS meeting. He knew that the SS's chief concern was with state security. His experiments were quite general but shed significant light on explaining specific human behavior, and had predictive value given stipulated conditions and thus could be of immense interest to SS.

If we can predict why people act the way they do, we come closer to understanding how intentionality and meaning is shaped in human experience, he thought.

As he continued to write down his notes and prepare his remarks he noticed from the corner of his eye as Dr. Norris his doctoral advisor entered the cafeteria and walked in his direction.

“May I join you ?”

“ Jack ! Sure have a seat. Nothing to eat ?”

“I just came in. I’m going to get a yogurt, see you in a bit. How are the numbers looking ?”

He walked off with that usual grin that appeared more sarcastic than friendly. Jack Norris was in his mid sixties, long white hair and an ash white mustache. He was tall, thin and remarkably walked with a youthful exuberance. Norris had studied with one of the founders of the German Gestaltist School and specialized in perspective formation. He was however somewhat of a pragmatist. His work had taken a path of exploring what constitutes creativity, why it is that some people are able to solve problems much more ably than others. In fact why some are able to recognize problems and many others cannot do so. Much of these studies paralleled Silvano Arieti’s seminal explorations into the subject matter. His studies were required reading by anyone interested in the field of Psychology, perhaps even Philosophy of mind. His most well known study had illuminated one of the essential aspects of creativity, the ability

to formulate a problem and come up with a solution that escapes the apparent confines of the problem itself. It had since been accepted as *the perspective of going beyond the problem*. Norris was an accepted world authority who had taught at Columbia, Geneva, Rutgers and Yale. Bertrand greatly respected the “old man’s” ability to “put blinders on” while preparing for his research. In other words his ability to formulate questions deemed worthy of pursuing, and weeding out all extraneous variables from the central question. His was a mind of cold calculation, a machine of preciseness and exactness. Bertrand was lucky to have had the opportunity to work with Norris.

“Have you completed the analysis ?” “Yes, the results of all the clinical trials support my hypothesis. Each of the variables, which I proposed as critical show highly significant results. I have already begun to write up the data analysis. I hope to have a draft ready for you, by next month.

I received however an invitation from the SS to discuss my analysis of the study which I had prepared for them from last semester. They want me to go down tomorrow, and somehow I think that there is a possibility that I may be presented with a grant opportunity for further research. If that happens I will have a time problem. I want to complete my dissertation before I embark on any other responsibilities which will encumber my time.”

“Bertie, I have great confidence in you. I have little doubt that you can complete the dissertation. Take some time off, go to my cabin in the mountains. Finish the damn thing. A word of

advice. Don't get too involved with the SS. It is a given that with your abilities, they will throw rivers of money at you, and before you know it, they will own you. Do some studies, use their money, but get on with your interests, in the philosophy of mind. Build your career and your name. But Bertie don't become a cog in their machine."

"I don't understand, you yourself helped me get that grant from the SS last year."

"Yes, I did, but intelligent people like yourself can be seen as somewhat of a threat to the social order when they essentially probe the deepest recesses of the human mind. Your work challenges political priorities, moral concepts. Don't you see, that the reins of power in this country are not held by scientists nor academicians with the best interests of mankind in mind.

The reins are held tightly by a small coterie of very rich and powerful men who own an exceedingly great percentage of the wealth of this country. The SS is a tool at their beck and call. By doing some of their work, you are seen as an ally and not a threat. That's all I tried to do, assuage them.

You show great promise Bertie, much more than I ever did. The standards of human progress stand on the shoulders of men of vision, although they may at first be rejected. You promise to illuminate man's mind to himself— nothing nor anyone should hinder you from that feat.

Enough of speeches. Write up your results, and give me the first draft. I'll give you my comments and any suggestions. Once

we are past that, if all goes well we can begin the process of approaching the committee, and request the dissertation defense.

I'll expect your draft in three weeks. If you need the cabin, let me know. Well I'm off, I have a class to teach."

"I appreciate your offer. Thanks for your advice Jack. I would indeed be a fool if I didn't consider your words and your experience. Perhaps I should consider the SS offer more carefully and evaluate what the implication of my research can present to the government. What uses do you think... what is their motivation ?"

"Jesus Bertie you are quite naïve sometimes! It's Control. Your research makes it easier to develop and implement social control mechanisms. Why do you think subliminal suggestion was their focus last year ? It is all about control and manipulation. This country faced an abyss forty years ago. It came incredibly close to a revolution. Indeed, we had a cultural revolution.

Remember that Lennon song, "Imagine" ? Rock and roll, the mini-skirt, free love, drugs as a facilitator for self expression. Art, music, moral standards, all changed drastically. We also saw the death by violent means of some of the most beloved leaders our nation has seen in recent history. Have you forgotten the riots in the inner cities. Blacks revolted, women revolted, youth revolted. Universities became the sites for mass demonstrations, and the fountain for revolutionary thought. The University is where our nation's future leaders are trained.

What did all this present as a predictor for this nation's future ?

I guess some important people decided that this sort of thing must never happen again. Therefore the kind of research you are doing is of practical interest to them. Control, that's what it's all about."

Bertrand said nothing at first. He stared at Dr. Norris perplexed. "I never thought very much about it, but I guess you're right. I won't need the cabin. I 'm going to my parents' place upstate, and I'll have that draft for you in two or three weeks. If I take the time off can you have someone take over my summer classes ?"

"Bertrand I'll see to it. Good luck."

He woke very early even without the aid of his usual alarm clock, his cat. She was a black and white European shorthair that every morning would jump on his bed and nudge Bertrand until he awoke.

"It must be about five", he thought. He rushed out of bed and followed the usual habitual movements and travails of the morning routine. After a quick breakfast, he sat at his desk and printed out from the computer the brief which he would be taking with him to the SS meeting. He grabbed some of his notes from the files which he wanted to review and slurped his third cup of coffee as his thoughts echoed back to Norris' comments.

By eight thirty he had everything ready for the presentation. He placed the brief and his notes in his briefcase, grabbed his jacket and rushed out the door. He knew the shuttle bus would be by in six minutes and it did not afford him much time for the eight minute walk which he still had ahead of him. He did his best to jog and make up the two minutes. The bus however was late, and although he was on time he was forced to wait nearly five minutes. During the ride to the University, his mind kept going over the essential points that he wanted to stress. Norris' or even Laura's remarks were far away now. Bertrand the researcher was well composed. His mind running like a well oiled machine ready for the predicted questions from those at the SS. When he got off the bus near Smith Hall, he saw that the car from the SS was already waiting for him. He saw Alex and waved. Alex was smiling and seemed glad to see Bertrand.

They had after all been students together during their undergraduate days. Alex was a jovial fellow, somewhat of a prankster. Bertie remembered him as a ladies man who surfed the clubs on the weekends collecting amorous relationships, as Bertie collected books. He was a good looking fellow, tall, lean, blond with aquamarine eyes. After being inducted into the SS, he had become much more conservative looking. He now had a crew cut, and dressed impeccably. His suits were usually wool, Italian cut, solid or very thin blue pin striped. His shoes of the finest leather, were not the usual wing tip. Bertie didn't know what Alex did exactly at SS, but he did know that he

must have a very high security clearance even though he had been with the SS for only four years.

“Bertie, great to see you again. I decided to come and get you myself. This way we can talk informally on the way.”
“Alex I just wanted to pop in quickly and touch base with the department secretary.”

“No need, you can use my mobile phone. Let’s get going.”
“OK, let’s.

The limousine eased into traffic and headed for the outskirts of town. “How’s Laura ? What a lovely woman you have the pleasure of being in the company of so often. I envy you, do you know that.

I still have not found someone as worldly and classy as your Laura. Not that I haven’t tried. Women today are so plastic. I have had enough of one night stands and such pleasure, I need a soul mate. But it is not easy you know. In a way my job has filled some of my needs, I know what is expected of me, and I have been lucky to find a job that makes a difference. Few people can say that. I don’t spend my time gazing at a clock, or figuring out how to budget my money for retirement, or have to worry about how to purchase a condo or a home. The SS takes care of my needs, more generously than I could perhaps do for myself. Oh, I had nearly forgotten here’s the phone.”

After Bertrand finished his call, Alex’s easy going mood changed into a much more hardened and business like

demeanor. “Bertie, the meeting today is really essential. You are going to meet some really important people, although for security reasons they will not be identified to you. The meeting will be a video conference connecting our other SS centers from where these people will be addressing you. It will be a one way video link, except for audio which will be a network linkup to all the stations simultaneously. I should also like to inform you that the SA has completed a clearance check on you, which has been approved at a GS8 level. It is a mid level clearance giving you access to the building’s fourth level which houses our PSYOPS, Psychological Operations, research facility. Today’s meeting will mostly be a formality. Your background has already been cleared. Your research has been of great interest to the PSYOPS faculty and staff. They are looking forward to meeting with you in person...

...Bertrand woke in a cold sweat, as he looked at his wristwatch, the time was still 3:30 in the morning. A light from the hallway illuminated part of the room. The sofa creaked, and he sank lower as he turned on his side. He noticed that someone sat in a darkened corner and was smoking.

“Who is there?” He asked. Silence was followed by the sound of a shoe hitting the floor, and then a clearing of a throat. Bertie, I was instructed not to waken you, would you like a cup of coffee? My name is Jonathan, I am your

aide, I will be accompanying you while you remain at the complex.

Well Jonathan I would like to use the men's room if you don't mind, and I need to speak with Alex right away.

I will tell the Commander that you have awakened. The bathroom is down the hall to your left. Pass your hand over the sensor near the left side and the door will open.

Jonathan then got up and walked out of the room. He was tall and thin, and walked with a slight limp.

Bertrand felt more comfortable, although his recollections of the earlier meeting began overwhelming his emotions. He was still in shock and couldn't believe the discussion that had happened just hours before.

As he walked down the brightly illuminated hallway, the clicking of his soles echoed hammer-like making his head thunder and pound even harder. Bertrand wished he had never agreed to meet with Alex and proceed with this government job. It was too late now. He knew that he had gotten himself over his head.

Thoughts raced before him too fast. He couldn't focus on any single thought long enough to logically pursue and analyze the situation. What did they mean that a crisis was coming.

He approached the gray door, a flat panel on the wall of blackened glass had blue lettering underneath that simply stated Personnel Control. He waved his ring finger near the panel, and the door opened, sliding into the wall.

Bertrand felt relieved by the cool water on his hands, as he splashed some over his eyes.

He took a deep breath, and as he looked into the mirror, faces of people that he had known throughout his life began passing in front of him.

He recognized his mother, father, his cousins, his English teacher who reveled in Poe's tales, his college French teacher who introduced him to Voltaire, he recognized his 4th grade teacher who had taught him to respect himself. Mr. Robinson was a rebel, he taught Bertrand to always question authority, he had taught that people in power always overstep their mandate to serve the people, and instead serve only themselves.

Other faces passed before him, faces he recognized from history books, and television programs, like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Desmond Tutu, Dag Hammerskjold, and so many others that he could not remember their names.

My God, the election had been rigged, it was a coup d'etat, a hidden revolution, hidden from the people, and now they were taking the extra steps, to massacre all their opponents. What will I do? What can I do, they have uncovered part

of the plot to me already, I am being watched. And yes, they are right, no one will believe me. How could they? I wouldn't believe me. The whole scenario seems impossible, improbable, fantastic.

When Bertrand returned to the lounge, Alex was sitting at the table with Jonathan drinking coffee.

Alex what is the next step?

OK, Bertie, let's go to the lab that has been set up for you. I thought that you might have some reservations about what was discussed. Do you?

Bertrand looked Alex straight in the eye, smiled briefly and said, what do you mean, sure I was somewhat shocked, but you know the more I thought about it, I knew the Vice-President was right.

We live in the best country on earth. God's providence has shined on us. What we have, we are privileged to have. It's God's will that we retain our prominence on this earth. By whatever means, whatever it takes. And I am honored that my abilities have been recognized, that I can help in protecting our great nation. So let's get to work.

Alex's gaze narrowed. He paused for a minute, then smiled, and patted Bertrand's left shoulder, I knew we could count on you, although your outburst had me somewhat preoccupied. Why the change in heart?

No, no change, I had to think about what was discussed, that's all.

You're right of course, Bertie. I reached the same conclusion myself, we all have, but it is still a shock when you first hear about Project Blueblood.

The Project was elaborated by some of our current people a few years ago...

Partial Galley, for "*THE STRAW MAN*"
Fiction/Espionage Novel
All Rights Reserved 2008
By Victor M Saraiva

