

INTERLANDER

by **Thomas Ward**

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Chapter One

Dr. Hilary Lynch

What kind of individuals are emotionally and mentally fit to walk in two worlds? And how does one set about discovering and recruiting such people?

Once the gun smoke of 1989 had cleared, these questions presented themselves to the Interland Security Service with considerable urgency. I quickly understood that my long association with Sebastian would not be enough to guarantee the Service's constitutional position. As guardian of the new sophiocratic state, Seb had a wide range of interest groups to satisfy, and it was inevitable that the loyalty of old colleagues would be taken for granted and their interests overlooked. The Service, I realised, was on its own and, given the planned expansion of the enclosure, it needed to recruit in earnest if it was to maintain its position and privileges within the new government.

In my own mind I was clear from the start that potential recruits should be very bright indeed. Our work is so extremely delicate and so complex that it would be downright dangerous for us to carry any deadwood. But I also knew that simply being intelligent was not going to be enough. We needed young people with a degree of daring and native cunning—which isn't quite the same thing as intelligence—as well as endurance and a certain quality of dreaminess or playfulness. I still find this last quality difficult to define, although I believe I know it when I see it.

More than this, however, I came to understand that we needed people who were, at some fundamental level, unhappy. I have written elsewhere that the experience of crossing the boundary is profoundly liberating, and so it is. But it is not only liberating. To slip between worlds day after day, to form relationships within the enclosure, to feel the full spectrum of human emotions within these relationships and yet to know that these feelings are at best only half real: experience has taught me that these things are simply not possible for people who are basically at peace with themselves.

We certainly weren't looking for bores in the Service—we all still enjoyed our drink and our parties too much to want to be saddled with a lot of misery guts—but we didn't really want ordinary, happy people, either.

Fortunately, a means of selecting suitable candidates quickly presented itself; in fact, it was staring us in the face. Unfortunately, I may not speak or write of it publically.

Dr. Hilary Lynch. *Soul Freedom*, Chapter 8

Chapter Two
Professor Randall's Proposition
Cambridge, 1972

Dr. Hilary Lynch was glad of the dark. As the lights dimmed she pushed her spectacles up her nose, arranged her face into an expression of polite attention and relaxed. She sipped her gin and tonic and half-listened as Professor Randall talked about experiments, progress, blind alleys, funding, deadlines, gas. And she half-watched the images that the professor projected onto the wall above the fireplace: a little boy with half his face missing; a young woman with what appeared to be scales instead of skin; an elderly gentleman with a large hole in his chest, lined with brass. It was glorious to be so close to the professor like this, listening to his lovely, buttery voice, glancing at his shaded profile, and knowing all the while that he could hardly see her dreadful bulk. The professor's hands were especially delightful. They moved swiftly and sinuously over the projector, snapping out the used slides and discarding them, then selecting new ones and slipping them quickly into the machine so that the picture sequence was seamless. Occasionally, the professor's hands drifted upwards to push his thick hair back from his eyes, making it stand up messily on his forehead like a child's. Hilary stole another glance at him and sighed as she re-lit her pipe. She sipped her drink and thought hard about the professor's hands, blushing scarlet in the smoke and shadows.

“You all right, Hillers? You look a bit shaky, old girl. Gin not taken you badly, has it?”

“This was from Dr. Marcus Gormley, Hilary's long term colleague. An extremely thin man, his head was turned sharply towards Hilary in a way that reminded her of a small, unsavoury bird, something with hollow bones and sneaky, watchful eyes.

“After all, you're a woman of a certain age,” Marcus went on. “Not sure how wise it is to be hitting the sauce this early in

the afternoon, even if it is to ease you through a department meeting. Might want to slow down a bit.”

Marcus sipped from his own glass and smirked at Hilary across the gloom.

“Thank you so much for your concern, Marcus,” Hilary said severely, “but I’m absolutely fine—a bit chilly, is all. Cambridge in February is hardly the warmest place in the world, is it? Which is no doubt why you’re insulating yourself with such a thick layer of port.”

The professor’s eyes flickered anxiously between the pair of them.

“Look, I know it’s a bit cold. I’m sorry. But I’m nearly done, so, you know, let’s not fall out. I wanted to show you my camp stuff as a way of properly introducing myself, I suppose, and also because I’ve an idea that it might offer a way forward for the department.”

Hilary poked at the bowl of her pipe with a shaking finger.

“You can take as long as you want as far as I’m concerned, Sebastian,” she said casually. “It’s just Mendel and me at home this evening and I doubt he’ll miss me very much, if truth be told. And I can put up with a bit of cold. Let’s face it, I’ve got a fair bit of insulation myself. I’m all yours.”

“Yes, you fire away, Seb,” Marcus agreed. “You’re the boss, after all. And your camp work was very highly regarded over here, as I’m sure you know. You take your time, young man. Hilary and I will do our best to behave, won’t we, Hillers?”

The professor smiled shyly and ruffled his hair, causing Hilary to stir softly.

“Thanks, Marcus. Thanks, Hilary. Thanks both of you for indulging the new bloke. And I suppose you’re right—my camp stuff did go down fairly well, although, ironically, by the time my research was complete, I had almost entirely lost interest in the material I was meant to be studying.”

Marcus spluttered into his port.

“What on earth do you mean?” he twittered. “Your gypsy work made your reputation, man. I’ve no doubt it won you the post here, for one thing.”

“Yes, I know, Marcus, and, believe me, I’m not ungrateful for the reception it’s had. It’s simply that by the time my five years were up I was far more interested in the *structure* of my work than I was in the experiments themselves. And actually, I think it’s the structure of the stuff that might have some bearing on our current situation.”

“I’m not entirely sure that I follow you, Sebastian,” Hilary said.

“Sorry, Hillers, I don’t mean to be mysterious.” The professor stared into his drink and swirled it around in his glass. “Look, it’s obvious to all of us that our subject is engaged in a fight for survival. My predecessor here just about kept things going, but that’s pretty much all he did, isn’t it? And in saying that I’m not criticising the man. I regard it as a considerable achievement, given our situation. I suppose that, ideologically, we still represent the victors to the vanquished, and that’s always going to be uncomfortable. Let’s face it, the calibre of our students is appalling; our funding is dreadful; and, apart from a few lucky so-and-so’s like yours truly, we never get the chance to work with any flesh-and-blood subjects. The general view in the common rooms is that Anthropology and Posthumanism is dying on its Teutonic arse. I’ve only been back in the country for six months and that much is clear to me already.”

“Just the way things are,” said Marcus gloomily. “The university regards us as a bunch of Kraut sympathisers. Doesn’t matter how often I remind people that I fought at Canterbury.” He shrugged. “I’m afraid it’s just how things are.”

“Well, it’s how things are *at the moment*,” Hilary said, rather more earnestly than she had intended. “But it’s certainly not how things have to be. I came into A and P, many bloody moons ago admittedly, because I actually believed in the subject. You know ... I thought that I’d be able to *do good* in Anthropology and Posthumanism. I hope that doesn’t make me sound like a hopelessly naïve old boot, but it’s true.” She gulped her drink. “I mean, obviously, working in A and P means making tough decisions about some people—your own camp work proves that, Seb. But still, back then I honestly

thought we could be proud of what we do, despite the German link and the New European Order nonsense and what have you. To be honest, I still *do* think that... you know, I... I believe in *Sophia* and *Know Thyself* and *Humanity Refashioned* and whatnot...’

Hilary tailed off and stared at the wall. Marcus smirked, while Professor Randall studied Hilary in the semi-darkness. Eventually, he said, “I’ve never thought of you as naïve, Hilary, nor as an old boot, come to that. We don’t talk much about things like motives, do we? It’s too personal, I suppose, but perhaps we should. For the record, I also believe in the nobility of *Sophia* and *Know Thyself*. But we have to face facts: the subject *is* associated with Germany in the British mind and so we have no money, no decent students, no credibility and no opportunity for hands-on fieldwork. And I’m afraid things are going to stay that way until someone comes up with a significant proposal to reinvigorate our field. With that in mind, I’d like to show you a few more pictures, if I may. Help yourself to another drink whenever you fancy one.”

The professor’s sideboard was well stocked with bottles. Marcus poured himself another glass of port while the professor clicked a new rack of slides into the projector. A cluster of wooden huts viewed through wire flickered onto the wall above the fireplace.

“Right, you know already that I was lucky enough to be granted an initial group of 400 Romanian gypsies as my research base.”

“Because you were good at kissing backsides in Berlin.”

“Well, I was prepared to take full advantage of the German connection, yes, Marcus, and I make no apology for that. But I can assure you I drew the line at actually kissing anything German. Now in the course of my studies, the figure fluctuated a bit; there were some babies born, some adult additions, and obviously we lost a number of subjects through the work itself, but the total number never sank below 350 and never rose above 550. And there was a core group of about 200 that was unchanged throughout the time I was working. We were privileged to have 150 acre compound constructed specially for us in the forest about two miles from the main camp, where the

subjects were split into three distinct settlements. They had living blocks, wash blocks, kitchens, workshops, leisure facilities, gardens and so on. It wasn't exactly luxury, I admit, but it was decent enough. I insisted on that because I needed the subjects to be reasonably happy and compliant. The Lithuanian guards used to complain that my gypsies had better accommodation than they did. Admittedly the Lithuanians are absolute buggers for grumbling, but they may have had a point. We set the compound up pretty well."

The professor continued to work the projector and a sequence of images of life inside the compound appeared on the wall. There were pictures of the subjects eating in communal dining rooms, playing football, hanging out their washing, dancing, fighting, even making love.

"To begin with," the professor went on, "the compound was guarded as securely as the main camp. There were watchtowers every 300 yards along the perimeter, regular dog patrols, tremor sensors for tunnels and so on. But we found that the security gradually became redundant, until in the end we just had seven men covering the whole site, and they used to spend most of their time watching dirty films in the guard hut. In fact, work at the compound came to be seen as a soft option, it was often used as a respite for the poor chaps who'd been on oven detail over in the main camp."

"So what are you saying?" Marcus asked. "Did the subjects just resign themselves to their fate? I saw something similar with new bugs in the military; to begin with, they'd cry blue murder every time they got so much as a slap, but eventually..."

"Actually it's rather more interesting than that. What seemed to happen was that the subject group began to lose any interest in the outside world at all. More than that, they almost seemed to lose any strong feeling of the outside world's *existence*."

"What, do you mean they just forgot about it? Seems a bit unlikely, Seb!"

"No, I didn't say they *forgot* about it. I said that they seemed to lose any *strong feeling* for it, which is rather different. Of course, they knew perfectly well at some level of

their consciousness that there *was* a world beyond the wire, but they gradually lost interest in it, until it simply didn't feature in their day-to-day thinking. We helped to curb their wanderlust with some bits and pieces we put in their water and a preliminary surgical adjustment. The details are all in the notes. But, still, the change in the subjects went beyond anything we could have expected." The professor's voice purred with delight. "I was able to observe them spin a tight web of meaning around themselves so that their feeling for reality effectively petered out at the compound perimeter. *I watched them make a world, Marcus.* Can you imagine what an extraordinary privilege that was, professionally speaking? Now, admittedly, the gypsies are a fairly insular and superstitious bunch, but even so, it was remarkable to see how desperate they were to keep their spooky little world intact. Do you know, towards the end when we were getting pretty slack about security, the compound fence collapsed at one corner. Before we had a chance to get the maintenance chaps up from the camp to sort it out, the subjects repaired it themselves with bits of old furniture and chicken wire. *They actually repaired their own prison.* It really was the most extraordinary thing to watch. I only wish I could have kept the compound going after my research was formally complete to see how things developed."

"Not possible?"

"Not a chance, Hillers, sadly. I had been given leave to work with my subjects for four years and four years is precisely what I got. I tried appealing to Berlin but it made bugger all difference; every one of my gypsies went up the chimney precisely on schedule. The Germans are nothing if not efficient, but you don't need me to tell you that, of course."

The professor chuckled and clicked off the last picture. He unplugged the slide projector and the hum that it had been making died abruptly.

"Of course I was left wondering," he went on casually, "what might have happened if it had been possible to keep the compound going indefinitely."

Hilary shifted awkwardly in her seat and scratched her chin. Marcus finished off his port in a single mouthful.

“Cards on the table time, Seb,” he said gruffly. “What is it you’ve got in mind?”

“Well, suppose we could duplicate the compound experience here in Britain,” he said slowly. “Think about it; we would only need a relatively small area to begin with, which we could secure and protect just like my compound was protected. And we’d adjust the subjects in the same way my gypsies were adjusted. Then we could observe the process that I saw begin in the camp at close quarters. And we’d have a pool of compliant subjects for research, without any of the fiddly bureaucratic business about seeking their permission or honouring their European Rights or what have you.” The professor’s eyes darted from Marcus to Hilary and back again. “It would be like empire days all over again, except no one would have to go traipsing off to bong-bongo land in a pith helmet to get any field-work done. Our subjects would be right on our doorstep. The opportunities for study would be almost limitless. And also...”

“Oh, come off it, Seb!” Marcus interrupted. “The logistical problems, the legal problems, the security problems would be immense. Also, I don’t honestly see that locking up a bunch of British people is a good way to endear us to our fellow countrymen, which is what this is supposed to be about. No, your enthusiasm’s commendable and your imagination certainly bloody is, but the whole idea’s completely impossible.”

“It’s certainly very difficult, but I don’t think it’s impossible. If I did, I wouldn’t have suggested it. For one thing, I still have contacts in Berlin who could help us with the legal side. Providing we picked an area where the people were mostly corrupted Caucasian, say category B’s or C’s, I think we’d be able to swing it, constitutionally speaking. We’re still part of the New European Order after all, if only just. As you say, security would be a problem, but I don’t believe it’s insurmountable. Actually, with your background, that might be an area you could help with, Marcus. And as for anyone objecting to our *locking people up*, as you put it, well, I don’t accept your terms. The whole point of what I have in mind, if it works, is that the residents in our enclosure *won’t want* to be

anywhere else. We can hardly be accused of denying folk their freedom if they're all perfectly happy and don't *want* to go anywhere, can we?"

Hilary felt vaguely there was something she should say about this, but she wasn't quite sure what it was. She opened her mouth to speak, but the professor went on quickly, "And anyway, if we promote the project carefully and make it clear that this is a home-grown *British* project, designed to benefit *British* people, increasing *British* prestige abroad, then people might be a lot less bothered than you imagine. One of the oddest things about the compound was that off-duty staff from the main camp used to come up to watch my subjects in their spare time, as if we were running some sort of soap opera. We had a network of concealed cameras and microphones inside the compound that were originally meant for security purposes, but they ended up being used recreationally. People loved catching up on who was sleeping with whom; who was cheating whom; the feuds that went on between the different settlements; their business dealings, and just about everything else, really. I didn't object because the phenomenon fascinated me. By the end I spent almost as much time watching the watchers as I did observing the subjects themselves. I don't see why something similar shouldn't be possible here, *if we decide to go ahead, that is.*" The professor sighed. "Look, I know that I'm new and young. If you think the idea's bonkers, then for goodness' sake tell me and I'll forget the whole thing. But listen, this is the definition of Anthropology and Posthumanism from our founding charter at the university in 1886. This is what our forebears thought our subject was about, and it's really rather salutary." The professor pulled a notebook from his inside pocket, opened it and cleared his throat.

"Taking as its twin mottos Sophia—wisdom—and the Delphic Oracle's command to Know Thyself, the discipline of Anthropology and Posthumanism finds its object of study in humanity itself. Its practitioners seek to understand the human animal in its social, psychological, biological and chemical aspects in order to refashion it in a nobler form, free from the tyrannies of ignorance, superstition and nature itself. We seek to recreate humanity as its own artifice and possession."

The professor snapped the book shut and tucked it back in his pocket. He gripped Hilary's arm. "You see, we're bloody important in A and P; at least, we're supposed to be. We're about *achieving* things, *changing* things. We're not supposed to be a joke." He grinned. "But you don't need me to tell you that, either. Look, the lecture's over. I ... well, I just think that if we pursue my idea we might make some real progress at last. That's all I wanted to say."

Hilary gasped. Desire rippled through her like pain from the professor's touch. And there was another emotion as well—something powerful and startling that her mind couldn't quite catch hold of. She cast around desperately for something to say.

"Yes, Seb," she began, "I...look, what you say sounds reasonable enough in th...theory. Well... I mean, it's more than reasonable; potentially, I suppose, it's brilliant. But this is Great Britain in the 1970s we're talking about. People here aren't like Romanian gypsies; they're *connected*. They're not primitive and superstitious; they're *modern*. You can't really hope to cut a group of them off from the rest of us."

The professor released Hilary's arm and stood up. He strolled to the room's north-facing window and peered into the drizzle, the dusk silhouetting him like a gloomy halo.

"On a good day you can just about make out the tower of Ely Cathedral from here," he said softly, "the ship of the fens. What an extraordinary feat of engineering that is when you think about it. It's a perfect square, you know, built without any external support and visible from 40 miles away—and constructed with nothing but ropes and pulleys."

"Yes, Seb," said Hilary. "I'm sure that's true, but..."

"Extraordinary imprint on the landscape. Extraordinary. And on history, of course. Oh, I don't doubt that an awful lot of people will have died in the construction—stonemasons and labourers and so on, you know, *ordinary* people. But then, they had their priests to bless and bury them, didn't they? And they died in an extremely good cause. It's a wonderful achievement. Really it is... I don't think anyone would dispute that."

"Yes, but Sebastian..."

The professor span round.

“I grew up in the fens,” he said. “Neither of you knew that, did you? Well, I did. And it’s one place that isn’t very *connected*, Hilary. You take my word for it; it’s not damn well connected at all—or *modern*. If you’d spent 18 years living in the middle of a potato field you’d know what I mean. Some of those bloody farmers would make my gypsies look sophisticated and cosmopolitan, really they would.”

For a moment nobody spoke. Then Hilary said in a quiet voice, “Ok, Sebastian. Ok. Why don’t you tell us exactly how this might work?”