

Research

Corrupted

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A NOVEL

BY

JOHN HEPHER

Acknowledgement.

This book was partly inspired by a non-fiction work, 'The Shock Doctrine' by Naomi Klein, which I highly recommend, and to which I urge the reader refer. I have used certain references and scenarios from Ms Klein's documentary in this novel, and I thank her for having the courage to write her account of the way in which American politics and business is linked, cheek by jowl, and the subsequent manipulation of many other smaller governments by it, either militarily or economically.

I do not set out to denigrate the ordinary US citizen. These people are kept in the dark and fed propaganda by their successive governments, just like the rest of us. It is the right-wing politicians and bureaucrats, the self-interested lobby groups, and the American culture of greed and free-market, the un-regulated economy, for which I have utter contempt.

Certain American politicians, ex-politicians, and business leaders have amassed huge fortunes at the cost of the lives, and the economic freedom of millions of ordinary people world-wide, by subjugating whole small countries to their advantage. If one wonders where the American trillions has gone, look no further than the bank accounts of these people and their corporations.

The so-called free-market economic model metaphorically and literally imprisons ordinary people in the process of freeing and protecting the multi-billionaires.

My work also explores the issue of genetic engineering of crops, the moral dilemma associated with it, and the monopolisation of the manufacture of the foods of the world by one corporation. The other issue looked at is the corruption of science by commercial interests, retaining so-called 'intellectual property', making it impossible for their science to be proven, or disproven.

John Hepher

Also by

JOHN HEPHER

THE QUEENSTOWN CONSPIRACY.

A NOVEL

THE SECESSION.

A NOVEL

**The Bigger They Are,
The Harder We Fall.**

AN OPINION PIECE

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Chapter 1

“Scientific research is a can of worms, although it shouldn’t be. It should be a process of seeking, finding, checking, double checking, peer review, checking again, proving, and finally publishing the conclusion or discovery of the outcome of sometimes years of painstaking, often controversial and always very expensive research, and then more peer review.”

Professor Grant Williams was lecturing wet-behind-the-ears high school graduates, new enrollees of the small university on the outskirts of Campbelltown in the outer south-western suburbs of Sydney, on the ethics of modern science.

Grant Williams was an odd-ball in this age of corporate science. He had lately reverted to the old school of education. He continued his lecture.

“Following the publishing of the research, professors, PhDs, or for that matter, journalists, doubters, sceptics, teachers, or students should be able to question and test the conclusion or published discovery, and either be able to prove, or disprove the said conclusion of the subject research. Not so these days,” claimed the professor.

The students were shuffling in their seats in the tiered lecture hall, not grasping the concept the professor was espousing.

“Universities and research institutes have unbelievably high costs, and low budgets. Many of these institutes, and certainly this one, cannot survive, or compete, without philanthropists, corporations, or patrons, sponsoring the billions of dollars required to fund research projects. Governments used to do this, but this is the age of outsourcing. Nowadays, patrons’ families have squandered the fortunes of past benefactors, and philanthropy is an outmoded concept. This leaves only corporate sponsorship, known these days euphemistically as a partnership, to fund research projects, projects in fields such as bio-technology, medicine, agriculture, genetics, or engineering, to name a few”.

He took a long breath, looked around and continued.

“These fields of scientific research swallow vast amounts of money, and do we imagine corporations fronting up with their donations of millions of dollars to be the benevolent benefactors for the advancement of humanity? In most cases, not likely. Corporations want big bangs for their bucks these days. Even the word sponsorship is outmoded. It is now referred to as ‘partnerships’ because everything, absolutely everything, including this university is a business. It has to make a profit.” Grant Williams was slowly commanding the students’ attention. The newbies were starting to take notes. He continued.

“Many of these imagined benefactors want much in return for their sponsorships. All rely on scientific proof. Many of these corporations require outcomes of research beneficial to their manufacturing and marketing of the goods or services they sell to the ordinary person. Sell being the operative word, because research is now so clouded in commerce that where there were once lines in the sand, the tide of money has washed them away.

Where would pharmaceutical manufacturers be without years of research and clinical trials conducted by institutes, hospitals, and universities? Where would those who manufacture seeds be,”.... he paused, thinking aloud for the benefit of those in front of him... “does one manufacture seeds? Today one does. We do it in the laboratory along with fertiliser, and the many other chemicals required in this age of intensive, mechanised, and in many cases, artificial farming. Where would they be without positive outcomes of research? Where would all those who spend millions of dollars on developing new products be if suddenly the research that provided the proof that their products were safe for use was found to be flawed?”

The new students, many had Justin Bieber and Amy Winehouse haircuts, tattoos and ‘attitude’, some were obvious nerds, and others obviously out of their depth, were now starting to think. Their mentor was winning them over, although he had doubts about this 2011 intake of wide-eyed hopefuls. Where were the thinkers and inquirers today? Were there any, or had they all been

dumbed-down by popular culture, Goggle, and social networking? Libraries are even vanishing.

The professor continued.

“Much of the science was flawed by either corruption, or a deadline not allowing the researcher or scientist time enough to prove the product he or she has discovered is in fact safe to use in its intended manner. Or, flawed by the practice of ‘intellectual property’ retention by the institutes and universities not allowing the most vital research data required to either prove or disprove the theories, into the public domain. Peer review is impossible.”

The students were now thinking. Peer review? What does that mean?

“Remember Thalidomide? DDT? Agent Orange? Asbestos?”

Most of them couldn't.

“All these and many, many more were wonder products. All were assumed to be safe. All were not. Somebody somewhere either knew that, or was not given the necessary tools or time, or funding, to check and re-check. In the meantime, corporations profited handsomely from the selling of these products and many more, deemed by the corporations, and their scientists, to be safe and beneficial to humanity.” More shuffling in seats, more laptops being tapped, some were even resorting to the use of actual writing implements and paper.

“Scientific discoveries have been rushed into production in the pursuit of profit over safety. Corporations base their manufacturing of a product on the conclusion of research they themselves have funded, and no corporation likes to see its billions wasted on unfriendly outcomes of their research. Sometimes, corporations pressure institutes to provide positives where no positives exist. Or at least, turn a blind eye to negative outcomes.” The professor now had the students in the palm of his hand, and the shuffling stopped as the note-taking became more intense.

“It is true,” he continued, “that some discoveries, with the benefit of hindsight, and advancements in technology, and review techniques, have been found to be dangerous. These were shoved in a too-hard basket at the time of their discovery because it would be years before research, many years later, proved many wonder products to be at best benefit neutral, or at worst dangerous. One hundred years ago there were fairground hustlers selling snake oil as a remedy for everything from impotence to smallpox, the corporations that made the products were, for whatever reason, unaware of the possible, or real dangers inherent in the chemistry of their manufacture. These days we see pharmacists from Penrith spruiking weight loss remedies. They look impressive in their white lab coats. The fairground has given way to the TV screen.” He paused to sip from a glass of what was assumed to be water.

The pause had the desired affect of reinforcing to his audience, his previous point.

“Others however....well, they knew all along that their products were at least very questionable or at worst downright killers. The Directors and CEOs of companies like Union Carbide or James Hardie simply hoped the dangers in their products or manufacturing would not be exposed on their watch. Once a product gets to the manufacturing process, in many company directors’ eyes, that product has already gone past the point of no return financially, millions have been spent in research and development, and it is too late, and there has been too much research and development money wasted, to kill the project.”

Another sip of the clear liquid, more reinforcement by pause.

“So kiddies,”...ooops, that reference to the assembled youth went over like a lead balloon...“what do we do now?”

One young man dropped a pen and it rattled its way down the tiers of the lecture hall. The professor ignored the interruption.

“We hide the bad results in scientific jargon, much like insurance companies do with legalities, and make it impossible, by claiming so-called ‘intellectual property’ ownership of what the scientists discover, for anyone who would question the safety of the product, or the scientific evidence of its safety, or otherwise.” Another sip.

“The corporations pay for the research, therefore, according to them, they own the ‘intellectual property’ of the data, the models, the algorithms, or in fact, the

institute or university itself. And, many results of research have been doctored simply by the practice of omission of certain facts or data from published material or product brochures, in the hope that the new wonder product will not show up as causing cancer, or other maladies, for another twenty odd years. After the CEOs and Directors, along with the dodgy, or in most cases, just plain frazzled and pressured scientists and researchers have long gone.

You who are assembled here today,”... he took a long deep breath followed by an audible sigh... “you lot of hopefuls in whichever field of science you choose to follow, take note. The profits have long been spent, but the damage done only becomes evident many years, or in some cases, generations later. Look how long it took to prove the link between asbestos, or tobacco, and various cancers and other, cardio-vascular disorders.”

He paused once again, reached for the glass, held it for a moment, but thought better of another sip, and glanced around his lecture hall seeking out those who were in fact showing interest and those he knew were products of a culture never to change. He judged his point though was certainly not lost on most. This was mostly a working class university. He replaced his glass on the shelf under his lectern and returned to his lecture.

“Look at how long it took for the dangers of lead to become obvious. Lead has been banned in paint and other products for years, but we have recently been alerted to a town in Queensland with a lead mine and a population of children with lead poisoning symptoms. Look how long it took to link the many other artificial,

chemically manufactured wonder drugs and products, to the many cancers of the late twentieth century.

And still the multi-national corporations invent more ways of making huge profits from chemicals, minerals, and artificial products, knowing them to be harmful.

Will it soon be found that certain chemical products or processes, or GMOs, or wonder drugs, are responsible for the proliferation of diseases such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, ADHD, for those who must rely on acronyms, various other depression related syndromes, or even the Devil Facial Tumour Disease killing off the Tasmanian Devil? Look at Europe right now, an outbreak of e-Coli is killing people. Will we find that Genetic Modification is at the root of the contamination of vegetables by weakening their immunity to certain bacteria? Or will it be found that it is some other form of human intervention that is responsible? Europe is destroying millions of tons of vegetables in the hope of finding the cause of this calamity. Nearly all of those vegetables are indeed innocent and harmless, but they have to be destroyed in the elimination process to find the source of the e-Coli. Millions of tons of vegetables that are disappearing from the food availability chain. Modified they may have been, but food none-the-less.

Will it be found that science and industry in the pursuit of profit, has not done its utmost to protect humanity, the vast and ever growing population who entrusts scientists to make its discoveries for the benefit of humankind rather than just the profit shared by so small a sector of that population, a population that also entrusts

and elects governments and employs regulators to protect that population?”

Grant Williams glanced at the clock embedded in the console of his lectern.

“In conclusion ladies and gentlemen of the new generation of science, you lot out there who are aspiring to be responsible for the next generation of discoveries, and with that comes advice to governments, corporations, or the passing on of science to the next generation, be aware that you have the future of this planet on your shoulders. Don’t be corrupted like many of your predecessors, including, I must admit shamefully, myself.”

Professor Grant Williams reached for the remaining liquid in his now nearly empty glass and swallowed it. It burned his throat as he collected his notes and filed them in the well worn, once tan, leather briefcase, a present from his father on his first graduation. He inadvertently gazed around the small auditorium and noticed the different mannerisms of his students. Some were clearly, wide-eyed, and in search of education, some were clearly bemused at his address. Others seemed to be unsure of just why it was they had found their way into his lecture. A few others were there because it was expected by their parents that they become academics. In which field, it didn’t matter, just as long as there was at least an Honours degree attached.

Yet a few more, it seemed obvious, were those who were driven by the financial incentives of science academia.

These were the dangerous ones, the ones who would gain degrees in geology because that could lead to directorships or positions of great power and wealth in mining corporations. There were the ones who would study applied mathematics and be the next Zuckerbergs and create a product that was addictive to the masses, and along with that came the vast billions of dollars that flowed from a society addicted to that product. Social networking? The opiate of cyberspace.

Grant Williams had been one of these dangerous scientists in a former life. Grant Williams, was if anything, now on a crusade to expose the dark side of science and research. He was given a second chance, a teaching job at this small western Sydney University.

He had been exposed for plagiarism, but it was discovered that what he had plagiarised was itself corrupted, corrupted by a colleague, The ensuing inquiry exposed a web of deceit emanating from the very early days of a corporation's so-called philanthropy of the university, the much respected sandstone edifice in which Grant Williams, now Professor Grant Williams, became the beneficiary of a scholarship grant.

He lifted his battered briefcase from the lectern and exited the auditorium to be greeted in the hallway by the Vice-Chancellor.

"Interesting lecture Williams," remarked the Vice-Chancellor, "I'm sure my P.A. will be able to fit you in for a chat in ten minutes time."

“Oh....yes sir, did you have an agenda for this...er...chat?” Replied Williams, unfazed, but surprised at his boss’s invitation.

“Just be there Williams.” The Vice-Chancellor spun on his heel and was swallowed by the rush of bodies all headed for the same door, at the same time. He was clearly un-amused.

Within a few minutes the Vice-Chancellor’s P.A. had called Williams’ on his mobile phone and informed him that there was, in fact, a meeting in the Vice-Chancellor’s office.

“NOW!” She barked.

Grant Williams had never been in the Vice-Chancellor’s inner sanctum previously, but it was as he expected.

A large desk of replica Victorian appearance dominated the room flanked on the right by a grouping of three overstuffed Chesterfield style, mahogany coloured leather armchairs. To the left were floor to ceiling bookshelves filled with first edition classics, leather bound of course, and in strategically placed niches, the Vice-Chancellor’s degrees framed in ebony. Behind the desk, large windows framed in red velvet provided a panorama of the blonde brick rimmed quadrangle.

This was a relatively new university, built in the main in the 1980s to cater to the vast population shift to the area. No sandstone here mate, pure working class Austral brick. And if it had been built a few years earlier, fibro

and tin roof no doubt, and un-insulated like other institutions, and most of the schools built in the southwest.

The Vice-Chancellor's chair behind the huge desk was the typical mahogany coloured leather chair one would expect of a Vice-Chancellor.

A plain wooden, straight back, unpadded chair had been placed in front of the Vice-Chancellor's desk, obviously for the repose of the arse of the errant Professor Grant Williams.

Williams entered to be greeted by the back of the Vice-Chancellor's head protruding from his vast expanse of mahogany leather. The Vice-Chancellor, it seemed, was surveying his blonde brick and aluminium empire.

"Sit down Williams, it appears we have a point of conjecture to discuss." Williams did as instructed. After all, he was well aware that this teaching position was possibly his only means of resurrecting any sort of career.

The Vice-Chancellor spun in his chair with a force that caused papers on the desk to flutter.

"I attended your lecture Professor, and I use that title carefully, it may at this time be temporary."

Williams was stunned at the viciousness in his boss's voice.

"Sir?" he questioned.

"What the hell are you doing preaching scientific ethics to these new, impressionable students?"

He continued with Williams' head spinning.

“The only thing that is paying yours, and indeed, my wages Williams, is the philanthropy of our patrons,....sorry, partners, those who fund this place, and it's not, as you would be very well aware, the government. Much as I wish it were. You of all people Williams know the game we all have to play. You got caught at it. No Williams, we cannot afford the luxury of ethics. This is business, universities these days are degree factories and degrees cost money. We must sell degrees to attract funding, and we must make degrees easier to get. We can either teach to a formula that is aimed at the lowest common denominator, the less than brilliant student, or we can close this university. The more degrees, the more money is available for the more brilliant minds. You understand that Williams. You will, in future moderate your analysis of ethics. ”

Williams immediately saw the dilemma. He also immediately saw the Vice-Chancellor for what he was, entrenched as deeply in the corporate web as anyone. He immediately lamented the dumbing-down of tertiary education by commercial forces. It was now in the interests of universities to make most degrees easier to get. Many Asian and Middle Eastern students were paying handsomely for their education, albeit watered down. Standards were slipping badly.

“Well Vice-Chancellor, you are right of course, but I was given a second chance to redeem myself and I intend to do so. Even if it costs me my job I am now, since your remonstrations, even more determined to purge academia

of corruption. I can at least still write and there is a media out there hungry for snippets of corruption.”

The Vice-Chancellor was stunned at this outburst but had to accept Williams’ point and knew deep down just how shallow, he, himself was proving to be in the eyes of a subordinate, especially one who had repented.

“Williams, you do realise what sort of position you have placed me in?”

“Yes Vice-Chancellor I do, and I will sleep well knowing I have not strayed from my only recently adopted principal. That of education over corruption. If you can live with yourself without that principal, be it on your head. I can’t anymore, and I won’t. I assume my tenure is on shaky, if not entirely collapsed ground.”

“Leave me now Williams, I will adjudicate your position in due course.”

Williams counter-attacked that remark with, “there was once a time when there were educators, teachers, not salesmen of degrees, just as there was once a time when journalists reported without fear or favour. There are thankfully some of them left.” It seemed that the whole world, even academia, had succumbed, or accepted, or maybe had just become de-sensitised to ‘commercial expediency’, the loss of truth and propriety to profit. With that, Williams, head held high, took his leave, fully expecting this to be his one and only encounter with the Vice-Chancellor who had eavesdropped on what he thought was his most important lecture.