

PAX

**by
Richard Dante**

SMASHWORDS EDITION

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PAX
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PAX

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CHAPTER 1

For centuries man has asked the question: Who or what created the human race? Did it evolve from single cells swimming in some ancient primordial ooze as suggested by Darwin and others, or were we created by God, in his image, as told in the bible? Since stories from the Old Testament are more colorful and entertaining than scientific dogma, let's use one to kick off our formidable tale:

In the beginning, or there about, God created the family unit, presumably starting with Adam and Eve. Should we choose to believe, as biblical scholars do, Adam begat Cain and Able, then there you have it...that's where our troubles really began. When Cain slew Able, he set off a chain of violence which has flourished and escalated to this day. What followed Cain's fratricide were wars of greed, power hunger, ethnic cleansing, genocide, or on a smaller scale, patricide, matricide, regicide, you name it...any time man, or woman for that matter, could visit their inhumanity on others, they murdered their way into the present. For whatever reason, here in the current era, countries, tribes, gangs, and families continue in their attempts to bump one another off.

There are exceptions to the rule, but they often seem to be in the minority. A few gentle souls get along just fine on what they possess and cohabit peacefully with others. Yet the burning question remains, what to do about all the killing? It's crossed many minds. However, over the years, most gave up the quest, the mayhem being too universal and ingrained to do anything about it. Studies ultimately showed a vicious genetic glitch in the human psyche. Found in the area of the brain which houses our self protective gene, it varies from being to being. In a relative few it's only activated when there's need to protect oneself, loved ones or country. Tragically, many others, behaved themselves as long as everything goes their way. They can be kind and gentle as long as they're successful in finding a mate, a job, a fortune or a happy home, but their dark side is provoked when their endeavors are thwarted. In far too many cases the commandments against covetousness, thievery, adultery, jealousy and the sixth commandment, *though shalt not kill*, are ignored. and things get out of hand.

Two thousand years ago, one man tried to change all that. Today we find he was only moderately successful. Unfortunately, he hadn't the technology to bring peace to the insanity inflicting much of the world

CHAPTER 2

Nearly two thousand years after the first Messiah was born, there came a new peace maker. This one however, was born in an age when philosophies were based on scientific thought, not ancient fables:

And so, It came to pass in the late nineteenth hundreds a brilliant etymologist, Dr. Orville Peace, Ph.D., wed Olive Pound. They married at thirty and at thirty-one Olive gave birth to a bouncing baby boy. Orville suggested, and Olive agreed, they should name the boy Warren after his paternal grandfather. The couple doted on the child and spoiled him with attention. Still, they had other responsibilities and life must go on. Dr. Orville, a much respected professor, taught at Harvard, while Olive, an efficient mother and housewife, kept an immaculate home. Each weekday morning, following a healthy breakfast, she sent her husband off to teach with a farewell kiss.

After clearing away and loading the dishwasher she made it her habit to retire to the family room to watch the early news before launching into her other chores. During these viewing sessions, Baby Warren sat on her lap. From the beginning he was bombarded with the brutality reported by the media. There was a horrendous mix of road rage, assassinations, domestic violence, gang wars, and savagery occurring in battles on the international front, The news rocked the child with an unending spectacle of horrors. From this early beginning, all the killing disturbed Warren as he watched human beings being exterminated.

Following the news his mother would place him in his playpen while she did her housework. She left the television on, usually tuned it to PBS. Once, when she decided maybe the baby would prefer cartoons, she switched channels. Surprisingly this set Baby Warren to squalling until she switched back to the educational channel. As he watched the documentaries and teaching programs he was quiet and attentive, giving her time to complete her housework.

The boy had inherited the best attributes of his parents: his mothers deep blue eyes, fathers dark hair and the intelligence of both. He began to walk and talk at an early age and his mother, assuming he had her and her husbands extraordinary IQs, decided he must also be gifted. At less than a year old she began showing him children's books. He spent hours pouring over the pictures and words, making rapid progress in his desire to learn.

When Olive pointed out her observations to her husband, Orville also became involved in the improvement project and bought complicated puzzles for the boy to solve. Amazed by the child's progress, they sensed they had a genius on their hands. By the time he reached kindergarten, he was reading and writing at the sixth grade level, and his parents entered him in a school for gifted children. At six, his father bought him his first chemistry set and he became an expert at testing the acidity of urine with its litmus paper. As the years passed, he excelled at everything he studied: math, science, literature, language, philosophy, including a fascination with psychology and the workings of the human mind. Though his extraordinary intellect gave him *geek* status, he grew up personable and charming and was popular with his peers, girls and boys alike. Early on, the youngster realized a healthy mind needed a healthy body and went out of sports. In college he became the Harvard team's star quarterback and his brilliant plays carried them to the national championship.

Still, burning in the back of his mind was an obsession to find a way to bring peace to the world. Since his infant days watching the news on his mother's knee he'd continued to observe, listen and read about the the planet's chaos. Driven to stop the killing, he wanted to know why human beings were so determined to snuff one another out, and read everything he could on the quirks of the human mind. Wanting to reverse the process of human violence, he majored at Harvard in biology and chemistry and minored in psychology. Slowly a plan began to form in his mind. In his study of the human psyche, he found proof in the old cliché: *It takes all kinds of people to make up a world*. His studies had shown nearly every being on earth had some form of mental aberration. A small percentage was truly good, while another equally small group were rotten to the core. There may be saints who approached perfection, yet there were also bipolar terrorist tyrants who reeked of narcissism, paranoia and schizophrenia; brutalizing everyone around them.

In between was the vast majority who might be kind and generous on the surface, but harbored a dark side within. Deep in their brains was an evil force which could turn cruel and violent when aroused. There were as many causes for this instability as there were people on earth. A great majority were simply gullible and easily influenced by ruthless leaders. The more he studied and learned about the dark side of humans, the more determined he became to pull them out of the dark and into the light.

Meanwhile like any normal young man, he fell in love. Her name was Emily. She was beautiful, intelligent and affectionate. He simply adored her. He was anxious to marry, but Emily wasn't so sure marriage was what she wanted, she was more drawn toward a successful career in medicine than that of a wife, no matter how desirable her potential mate might be. Determined in all things, Warren decided he might have to get her pregnant to win her. He was athletic and worked out regularly. He was, Emily thought, *a real hunk*, and she certainly enjoyed making love with him as long as he practiced safe sex. However, unknown to Emily, Warren began to punch holes in his condoms or forget to wear them at all. He invited her to have sex regularly. But with all his efforts, his devious plan came to naught. For whatever reason he was unable to impregnate her, and Emily still refused to marry. Years went by as the couple remained true, but single.

CHAPTER 3

Still, his driving obsession took up most his his time. as he searched for a way to pacify the world. Aware universal frontal lobotomy was impractical, he decided the only sensible mode of disseminating peace would have to be some sort of gaseous compound. Thus, during his graduate studies, he spent much of his time in the university laboratory, mixing and experimenting on his brain child, a *peace gas* he dubbed PAX. Though he'd smoked some pot during his college years it was only out of scientific curiosity. Predictably, reefers gave him a definite feeling of tranquility. Still, he realized he'd have to intensify the potency to make it universally effective. He synthesized THC from sources more legal than marijuana and distilled a concentrate--purifying it and eliminating any negative effects to leave only its positive pacifying properties. Experimenting with mice seemed effective, and in its gaseous form PAX

proved to be even more so. He gave himself small doses and found PAX most gratifying.

Meanwhile, as in his childhood, the news media continued to blast his sensibilities with violence. Horrified, he saw there was a practical side to all the killing. It was an excellent method of population control, but, Warren thought, there must be a better way. He began a series of additional experiments on a special ingredient he could add to his PAX gas. He theorized the combined compound could be released into the upper atmosphere, and riding on wind currents, be inhaled by all the peoples of the world. Yet he realized the birth control additive might prove to be more complex than PAX itself. Another challenge. He welcomed it, but for the moment put it on the back burner of his extraordinary mind.

Knowing his quest for world peace would be expensive he decided to raise money for the project. While his studies and experiments took up much of his time, he arranged whatever spare time he had for fund raising. Since Warren somehow knew a government grant was unlikely, he decided he'd go to the private sector for financial aid. The charismatic young man was a forceful speaker and conned his way into speaking engagements before service organizations such as the Shriners, Eagles, Elks their women's auxiliaries, and women's clubs-- anywhere he could get an audience. He outlined his plan to create a sophisticated weapon against war and other violence, and told them he was making headway. He'd driven rats crazy and then pacified them with his secret compound. Though many thought he was a crackpot, there were enough wealthy believers to donate vast sums to his fund. There were some pacifists who were more than generous when the young scientist promised he'd travel to troubled areas in the third world and bring back proof positive just how deplorable conditions were.

Since he felt the news media hadn't really shown the most explicit cruelties, Warren needed to see mans-inhumanity-to-man for himself. He asked for and received special visas and permits from the government to go into war zones forbidden to most civilians. During one summer vacation he used part of the PAX funds to go first to Sierra Leone, reputed to be the home of the most horrendous atrocities known to man. Under the control of one of the world's cruelest dictators, the news reported only vague indications of the monstrous tortures the Sierra Leone leader visited on his people.

When Warren arrived in the capitol, Youngstown, he wasted no time in getting into the rural areas, where he'd heard much of the horror lurked. On an ancient bus loaded with locals, baggage and livestock he was rattled into the outback of Sierra Leone. As they bounced along, they heard a commotion ahead and the bus stopped. Armed natives came aboard and ordered everyone to disembark. Warren and one other passenger being the only whites, they were told to stay inside and not look out the windows.

Suddenly there were horrible screams that couldn't be ignored. Warren held his digital camera close to the window and watched, sickened and dismayed as the screaming black passengers, men, women and children were systematically butchered by machete wielding mad men. Arms, legs, hands, heads and torsos were hacked off, and covered with blood, littered the area outside. The driver was among those killed.

The perpetrators finished their grim slaughter and disappeared into the jungle leaving Warren and his companion, who had fainted, were left to fend for themselves.

Seeing the villains leave, Warren got out of the bus to inspect the carnage and forced himself to take more pictures. Finding no one alive, he got back in the bus and drove it to Youngstown. He unloaded his sick passenger at the hospital and returned the bus to the depot. When he reported what had happened to the police, he was rewarded with disinterested shrugs.

Still shaken by the sights he'd seen, he returned to his hotel. He decided to sit down and gather himself together before he collected his key at the desk. He sat behind a potted plant in a small room off the lobby. Overcome with emotion from the horrors he'd seen, he moaned softly to himself. Suddenly he heard three men enter the room and take seats at the small table. The large chair and plant hid him from the men, and he decided to remain hidden as they went about their business. Though he couldn't see them, he soon determined there was an American and two natives. The American spoke only English and one of the natives translated what he said into the local language. As he listened he discerned the gist of their business. It became clear the American was an arms dealer, and he was selling AK42 assault rifles to one of the RUF generals--an officer from the same contemptible organization who'd just slaughtered the busload of innocent fellow passengers. Warren shrank down into the chair, afraid he'd be discovered. Selling arms to such groups had been dubbed illegal by the UN and anyone involved in such dealings could be prosecuted. Finally the three men reached an agreement and he heard an ominous rattle of something hitting the table. Sierra Leone was a major diamond mining country, and Warren had read about weapons being bartered for blood diamonds. The RUF enemies used children to carry out gun battles and cut the hands off their enemies. They had a motto: "You don't hold your weapon against your brother." Brandishing machetes, RUF rebels amputated the hands, arms, and legs of thousands of Sierra Leonines. The RUF indicated the reason for this brutality was so amputees could no longer mine diamonds which might be used to support government troops.

Finally the three men shook hands and, much to Warren's relief, left the area.

He went quickly to the desk and ordered a taxi. Hurrying to his room, he gathered his few belongings, quickly paid his bill, and took the cab to the airport. Once there he took the first plane out of Youngstown, but didn't feel safe until he was winging his way toward Baghdad. The ancient capitol of Iraq could be the *frying pan into the fire*, but at least he'd have the US Army to look out for him.

CHAPTER 4

His room at the hotel in Baghdad hotel wasn't posh by any means, but was certainly a step up from the one in Sierra Leone. He checked in and sat waiting in the lobby to meet the news reporter his American contacts had arranged to show him around. Warren wasn't there as a tourist, but to research first hand what the conditions really were. Ralph Jones showed up right on time and they went out to scan the rubble strewn city. As they crossed a street entering a shopping area, the reporter remarked.

“See that.” he said pointing at a small beat up car. “Watch out for cars like that. A perfect vehicle for a suicide bomber .”

The small auto pulled ahead of them and into the crowded market place. Warren kept an eye on the vehicle and as it reached the middle of the crowd there was a huge explosion. Warren barely caught a glimpse of flying body parts and groceries before his companion pushed him to the pavement. Seconds later, Jones leaped up and ran toward the disaster. Over his shoulder he shouted:

“Come on!...should be safe now!”

Warren got up slowly and, partially deafened by the explosion, hurried after the reporter. Wanting to get closer to the action, yet dreading what he'd find, he ran on. As he arrived at ground zero he saw the disaster was far worse than he'd imagined--even more heinous than the incident in Sierra Leone. There were many wounded who were still alive and screaming in pain. Bodies and body parts lay everywhere, some together and some dismembered or partially torn apart by the blast. The areas not strewn by bodies were covered in blood. The reporter, had apparently seen such grisly sights before, and went right to work taking pictures and gathering information for his story: estimating the toll of the dead, and the injured. Very shortly, ambulances and trucks began to arrive to clean up the carnage. Warren, sick to his stomach, realized this was his reason for coming to the war zone. He grit his teeth and followed the reporter around. As in Sierra Leone he took many pictures with his digital camera. The sight of all the men women and children suffering or dead and beyond suffering was deplorable to him, How is it possible for human beings to do these things? He was viewing the proof he'd traveled halfway around the world to find: evidence some people get gratification from doing violence to others. Some who enter war have sociopath tendencies. and enter battles with a psyche preprogrammed to hurt, damage and kill. The sight sickened him, but confirmed his suspicions and strengthened his resolve to do something to counteract mankind's depravity.

As he and Ralph Jones finished their grim task, medical and clean up teams went about theirs. Sadly Warren sensed they'd all been there before and this was just another routine suicide bombing.

Finally the reporter shrugged and turned to Warren. “Well. that's it. Gotta file my story, Why don't you go ahead to Army headquarters and check in for tomorrow morning's patrol duty.”

Ralph Jones and Warren managed to grab two local taxis and took off in opposite directions. Jones to the hotel that housed his news department, and Warren to Camp Victory, the army camp outside Baghdad responsible for area security. At the gate, Warren presented his pass and papers and was escorted to the tent/ office of a Major Lees. The Officer was expecting him and they held a brief conference in which the Major outlined the possible dangers of Warren's accompanying his men into the field. Though Warren was aware there were risks, he was willing to put himself in danger to see how soldiers were affected by the angst of war.

After conferring with the officer and checking out some safety gear, Warren returned to his hotel for the evening. Events of the day left him with no appetite, but he'd agreed to dine with the reporter and his news gathering friends. His dinner companions were a mixed lot, but all seemed cynical as they regaled him with their war experiences. He took mental notes of all the horrors they described and would add their comments to the

laptop computer he'd brought for the purpose. Though the conversation was anything but appetizing, he managed to force down enough food to keep going. Tomorrow promised to be another trying day and he'd need all his strength. He retired early and his exhaustion pushed him into a series of bloody nightmares.

CHAPTER 5

Warren rose before five AM, dressed quickly and forced down a tasteless breakfast before he met his reporter friend in the lobby. Ralph Jones had arranged for transportation and they were hurried out of Baghdad to Camp Victory where they found Major Lees and their Humvee convoy waiting for them. The lead vehicle, radioed for clearance as the three-Humvee patrol drove out of Camp Victory into the countryside. The heavily-armored vehicles hadn't cooled down much during the night. The sun was already up and the temperature climbed rapidly to over a hundred. Since the feeble air conditioner was on the fritz, under body armor and helmets, everyone was soaked within the first hour of a three-hour drive.

While they drove, one of the soldiers, a corporal, rambled on about how you couldn't trust native Muslims. They were a bad and ungrateful mob who were laughing up their sleeves at the attempts of the U.S. to bring peace to the region.

"We gotta throw out the Geneva Convention. This war can't be won as long as we play by some artificial rules written for civilized people." His rant concerned a couple of soldiers who had disappeared. "The reality is, our two American Soldiers will be found dead and mutilated in about two weeks...sounds ugly, but some people need a dose of reality. We're back in Vietnam and the light at the end of the tunnel is gonna turn out to be the glow from a lit fuse. We're fighting under the Marquis of Queensberry Rules while the jihad soldiers are using The Mohammed of Mecca Rules. By grabbing Sadism Hussein, we've only made it easier for them to reek their mayhem on their fellow Muslims. Hussein was the only one who could keep the Iraqi bastards in check."

Warren listened, fascinated, and noted the other soldiers in their Humvee were nodding in agreement. His reporter friend was in another vehicle, but Warren remembered some of the dinner conversation the night before had touched on things the corporal was bitching about.

"I thought history was to teach us how to protect ourselves." The corporal continued. "Guess we didn't learn anything from Vietnam. This is the same deal. These Sunnis and even the Christian Iraqis would just as soon stab us in the back as look at us. And when they are smiling and friendly...Look out!"

When they arrived at their destination, Mahdudiya, they were stopped by what they assumed was a friendly Iraqi patrol. Their group got out of the Humvees to stretch their legs and hopefully find some respite from the heat inside the vehicles. The corporal grabbed Warren's arm and led him behind the group to a nearby building.

"Sorry, man, I just don't trust any of 'em." he growled, leading the puzzled scientist farther away from their group and the Iraqi patrol. "They look too friendly!"

Almost before he got the words out of his mouth there was a barrage of gunfire behind them. The corporal pushed Warren aside and rushed up an alley and down the

street, his assault rifle at the ready. Warren followed at a safe distance and saw the corporal crouch behind one of the Iraqi vehicles and open fire. The Iraqis had already managed to shoot most of the American soldiers. Most, faced with what they thought was a friendly force, had foolishly left their arms in their vehicles. Some of the enemy were killed by the Americans, while the rest of the enemy were gunned down by the corporal. Even when a couple of Iraqis indicated they wanted to surrender, they were shot down by the battle crazed soldier .

The firing from both sides ended as soon as it had begun. Looking forward, the corporal inched his way into the battle zone. Finally he signaled for Warren to follow.

“It’s over...they’re all...oh God! They’re all dead!” He sobbed, leaning down to check his own lieutenant who had been in one of the other Humvees. Warren hurried into the area. Breathing heavily, he groaned in sympathy as he viewed the wholesale slaughter.

Grudgingly he took out his camera and taking a deep breath, began snapping pictures of the carnage. The corporal frowned at his actions, but went on with his inspection of the bodies. Suddenly, Warren came upon the corpse of Ralph Jones, the war correspondent. War shows no favorites and his friend was dead. Choking, he said to himself. *Ralph, I’m so sorry...but I’ll get your story for you.* As he’d seen Ralph take notes, he did the same, getting the count of dead and a description of the horror.

The corporal had disappeared and Warren found him calling headquarters on one of the vehicle radios. The soldier struggled to keep the emotion out of his voice as he reported what had happened and asked for assistance.

While they waited for the helicopters to arrive, Warren wrote out his story:

This morning at 10:15am in Iraq, a coalition force team of ten soldiers (twelve Americans and an Iraqi army interpreter), were attacked near Mahmudiya. As a result of this attack, Both U.S. and Sunni forces suffered heavy loses. Among the dead was war correspondent Ralph Jones. Only Corporal Johnny Michael's and a U.S. civilian observer escaped with their lives.

The attack, one of the worst against American ground forces since a US-backed security crackdown began in Baghdad three months ago, took place near the same area where two US soldiers were abducted by Al Qaeda insurgents last year before their mutilated bodies were found.

Residents in Mahmudiya, an area of orchards and palm groves that is a bastion of Sunni Arab militants including Al Qaeda, said gunmen wearing Iraqi army uniforms had formed the check point the night before. Denying any involvement, the natives, fearing for their own lives, did not warn the American soldiers.”

Warren read his story to the corporal, who made few corrections but criticized the last paragraph.

“I wouldn’t give the goddamn civilians a word of praise. I’ll bet they were part of this...this mass murder”, He finished, his voice filled with hate.

Just then, the helicopters arrived with medics and doctors. They found there was nothing they could do but load the dead U.S. soldiers and the reporter into the helicopters and Humvees. The doctor in charge spoke to the native villagers and convinced them it was their duty to dispose of the enemy corpses.

The officer in charge assigned driving duties to several of the helicopter passengers and asked Warren to go back to Camp Victory with the corporal. With that the

helicopters roared away and loaded with cadavers, the Humvees did the same. Warren sat in the passenger seat of the vehicle driven by the corporal and kept an eye on his companion. The back seats contained four of the dead U.S. soldiers. Trying to ignore the bodies laid out behind them, they drove in stunned silence. As upset as he was, he could see the corporal was even more distraught. Taking a small packet from his back pack, Warren offered the young soldier what looked like a stick of chewing gum. At first the driver refused it.

“Better take it, Johnny. It’ll help. This isn’t ordinary gum. It’s an invention of mine and it should bring you back to reality from all the distress you must feel.”

“I’m fine...fine! I can cope with it!”

“You only think you can. I’ve studied how the mind works. It can only take so much. I can’t have you cracking up on me. Bet you’ve tried pot. Well this is even better, My own *new and improved* THC formula,” he grinned, trying to lighten the grim atmosphere in the Humvee,

“It’ll relax you and give you some perspective on these horrors.

“All right Doc. I could use a double right now.”

The driver’s hands were occupied with operating the vehicle, so Warren unwrapped the gum and holding it by the paper passed it to the driver. The corporal chewed for a few minutes and commented: “Well it does taste good. What’s it made of?”

“Secret formula,” Warren smiled. “A gum base with sweeteners and powered by my own synthetic and safe THC . It’s kinda like smoking pot, but lasts longer.”

Suddenly the driver sighed and took a deep breath.

“Thanks Doc! he smiled, and for the first time since Warren had met him seemed to be able to contain himself. “Say, this stuff is okay!” The aged look the corporal carried before disappeared and was replaced by the twenty year old. Pulling himself together, he sat up straight as he drove confidently back to camp.

Back at Camp Victory, Corporal Michael's turned his Humvee in at the motor pool and the two reported to Major Lees The corporal related his side of the story. Warren assumed he'd be released to return to the hotel and turn in his story to the news team. The major had other ideas. It looked like the corporal might be in trouble. It seems the rescue medical doctor had spoken to the native village elders and they'd given a different slant to the Corporal's account. Since Warren was the only non-Muslim witness to the killings, the major wanted him to attend the hearing the next day. As Warren and Corporal Michael's left the headquarters tent, the corporal gave Warren a look of despair. Remembering how the soldier had shot down the two Sunnis who tried to surrender, Warren knew where the trouble lay. He gave the corporal a look of understanding and handed him the remainder of the PAX gum. Not wanting to be overheard, he hoped his gesture indicated he was on the corporal's side, and all would be well.

He turned in the story to the media staff at the hotel and spent some time with them... mourning the loss of their comrade, Ralph Jones. He had small snack before retiring. He barely slept that night. Tossing and turning he was buffeted he by the horrors he'd witnessed during the last few days, and his apprehensive about the military

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