

Battle for the Brain

People exploration in the year 2087

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Introduction

Magical worlds are not without their imperfections. Whether reality or fantasy, any CEO or leader will always have high expectations for success; we will likely always see defections, more new hires, loyal 'Knights' or employees, battles for the top, battles for the brain.

In 2017 we live in a world transfixed by chaos and uncertainty as well as an unyielding drive to formulate some definite, analysable conclusions about it all – every action, every reaction, every decision, every data point.

In 2087 this need to 'button up' will become more exacerbated, more pronounced. A need will exist at every turn not only to tell the story, but to live the story – becoming one consistent, continuous, definable action of measurement – and becoming one with it.

We currently yearn for the perfect story, a way to tie every project up in a nice bow to offer insights that are actionable and interesting. Like eating or sleeping, we strive to stand out. For are we not battling our competitors for market dominance, share of voice; do we not project an arrogance that being first-to-market seems to allow? And do we not find that, regardless of how much effort is expended, nothing is ever perfect? We find imperfections that invade our perfect data set and tarnish a perfect study. We draw our metaphorical swords to defend our data, calling upon that heroic margin of error to save the day against census statistics. We check and balance to ferret out the troublemaker data points so that our story to the outside world makes sense. We measure strengths, weaknesses and threats, as we don our brave masques, every day, to save our companies from being swallowed up by our opponents to, in a vicious, victorious circle, win the day...to maintain our business another 100 years and beyond.

But we do not yearn for a sample on which we never need to screen? To sample with 100% certainty ... to prevent refusals and terminations, and to generate 100% response rates? To know, without question, what everyone is thinking, 24/7? To live in the data and experience the story?

Do we not imagine ourselves as princes and princesses, heroes and heroines? Conquering quintessential rogues and villains, rescuing from castles and keeps, wrestling dragons in dungeons via swords and shields? To live in Disney's world of Belle, Prince Adam and a 'Tale As Old As Time' to see, after all of the falling petals, a perfectly, restored rose?

Story

"*My God, but my head is crowded!*" blustered His Grace, Duke of Appenzell, Lord Creyton Montgomery, President and Magisterial Leader of the Republic of Alpeneuropa, cursing as he stalked through the cavernous confines and hellish hallways of his Ebenalpen home, situated near the Principality of Liechtenstein, outside the small *village* of Appenzell, in Eastern Switzerland.

"*Good God, it's freezing!*" poured the next outburst. "No bloody wonder I never go out in winter anymore. And we are *even* under a climate-controlled *dome!*" he muttered, as he brushed the makeshift snow and ice from his long, coal-black greatcoat with his right hand and calmed his two dogs – Sasha, a Briard, and Henrik, a Swedish Vallhund – with the leash in his left.

At a height of 1.91 metres, he dwarfed most. And, given height, his obsidian-hued, roguish queue, his weathered complexion, his attire that would rival the most hardened knights of the Middle Ages, his impeccable manners, an estate rivaling the combined houses of York and Lancaster, and the intense way in which his green eyes shone daggers at all who dared to look directly in them, his presence was enough to command anyone to do his bidding. His hardened and robust exterior belied a highly intelligent and surprisingly kind interior. Women called him breathtakingly handsome and dangerous. Men just found him to be a threat.

The 'world' Lord Creyton inhabited was one contained within itself, an outcome borne of decades of toil, tumult, terror and treachery. For relentless uncertainty and climate capriciousness had prompted each global Republic to be shrouded under its own dome that reached into the stratosphere – stalwartly protecting but invisible to the eye.

#

With his two dogs Creyton resolutely stepped over the threshold of his office and surveyed the panorama before him. His dark, brooding figure and wardrobe contrasted markedly with his all-white décor that mimicked the newly-fallen snow of the mountainous areas surrounding Ebenalp and beyond. And the sun's rays, via an oculus design, reminiscent of the now-legendary Pantheon, served to enhance the pristine room that masqued the work taking place within.

Situated deep underground Ebenalp, the northernmost summit of the Appenzeller Alps, lay the heart of Lord Creyton's empire, Starquant Industries, of which he was CEO and Supreme Leader. Overseeing every aspect of this conglomerate that reached across his vast Republic, a country that combined what used to be Europe and Ireland, Lord Creyton had been the face of market research now called 'People Exploration,' a 24/7 enterprise he had pioneered and had been running for ten years but which was now under threat by two competitors poised to battle for prominence.

Sonja van Loon, Creyton's one-time *fiancée* operating from Skandika, formerly the individually-named countries of Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden; and Sir Peyton Percival Montgomery, Lord Creyton's estranged evil twin brother – who, located in the northernmost county of Upper Anglica (formerly England) and within its own, separate dome of Grossbritannien – were vying for Lord Creyton's fortune, title and operation. He would never relinquish what had now developed into the most advanced, most accurate 'market research' ever. For his own creation of ten years prior, 'People Exploration' was the way of the future – and he would fight to the death to keep it that way.

Creyton had leveraged his 180+ genius IQ level as well as his prowess with software engineering and languages to design a processing program so complex it would only be described as labyrinthine. And it *had* been impenetrable. *Until it wasn't.*

#

His long arms as well as long fingers outstretched on either side of the console and longer legs firmly planted, he bore his jaguar-attuned eyes into the screen while he endeavoured calmly but inwardly frantically, to identify the data compromise – the exact point where he was vulnerable. He felt it marrow-deep, every minute.

For the Duke faced a problem – an undeniably, unyieldingly significant problem, one that could not be solved with meetings, banter or intellectual curiosity. No, this problem was bigger. *Much bigger. Worse than anything he'd ever faced. Ever.*

He was fighting an unwinnable battle. Against himself. Time. The competition. He had an unresolved, plague-ridden issue that had burdened him for the last three years. His wife, Maria, the heart of his life, had gone missing. Not just leaving Appenzell and blending into the fabric of some other canton. And *not* wandering-off-one-day-in-the-woods-missing, dreading-the-prospect-of-finding-a-body-missing (because that would be horrible enough). But full-blown disappeared. Missing. As in no trace. Evaporated. And no sign of her for the past three anxiety-filled, oppressive years. He vividly remembered the day it happened. The precise *moment* of discovery. And the memories flooded back. It was three years to the date.

Creyton and Maria had been reviewing a data set that had come into his head, had deposited the data onto the translucent screen that was the illustrative vehicle to capture the chaos erupting in his brain at any given second. Via People Exploration questions and responses from the entirety of his Republic were transmitted via brainwaves. To and from his brain. Without fail. Without a break. Numbers swirled and swept through his brain space at such a feverish pace that he needed to see that chaos organised at eye level. So the EyeScreen was born. A screen that spanned the length of his upper-most office wall. And, on this one notorious day, Creyton and Maria had been staring at the data overlong. They considered and calculated, attempting to make sense of the transient outcomes so that they could transpose these into some definable story to convince Parliament to act. And a story was mandatory. It was not so much convincing as brainwashing, but Creyton and Maria needed to employ the simple deception or illusion to

prevent any rebellion during their visits to the House of Lords where they often presented. Parliament was the only client that mattered, and his People Exploration was something to be protected, regardless of cost.

For Creyton had spent years perfecting a foolproof system that demanded unconditional loyalty of the people over whom he ruled. For to secure loyalty, he had to be inside their heads. Every minute of every day. And to be so, amongst every individual citizen, eliminated the need for statistics. Eliminated the need to be 'guided' by a census. Eliminated an anxiety over results within the margin of error. Eliminated refusals. Made terminations obsolete. Ensured 100% response rates ...and, thus, was he no longer sampling. Simply encoding and decoding. 24/7. With *everyone*. No more programming of questionnaires. The questionnaires were in his head. Via brainwave transmission – anytime, anywhere. And he could not have his system destroyed by enemies from the outside. He had spent hours, days, analysing the habits of his people. He lived within the data. Years of staring at computer screens and not becoming any 'closer' to a story than centimetres away told him that there had to be something else. Something more powerful. And, then, *Eureka!* He found it. A way to enter any spreadsheet, any graphic, and 'travel' from point to point. Understand its relevance on the data map to all other data points. But, it appeared, this last development might prove his undoing.

#

Three years ago he had conducted a travel survey to ascertain the degree of loyalty of his people to him, to the Republic. He had used an agree-disagree scale, within which battery were questions related to attitude assessment of his Republic as well as degree of acquiescence to his travel restrictions. *Anyone* who disagreed with any question would be rounded up for the guillotine. No fair trial. His problem, once the 'study' had concluded, lay not in the fact that he did it, for he cared not for what he people thought – well, he did, but he cared not a whit whether they liked it or not. No, his problem was that, after analysing and sifting through those who would betray him, Creyton had somehow made an enemy of someone his omniscient powers had not identified. Someone who had, unbeknownst to Creyton, escaped the guillotine's wrath and had issued a *communiqué* to Peyton – a Judas betrayal in his upper ranks. The *communiqué* had explained the precise pathway to hacking Creyton's system, entering his data, and assuming command of any set of results. However, to guarantee full access, the person needed the 'key.' Creyton had ferociously guarded this key, a simple gold, 1680, Zürich Ducat Coin inserted into an aperture by his desk. For, in this key, lay access to all things Alpeneuropa. But to get the key, Peyton had kidnapped Maria. Peyton had taken his wife and demanded the All-Powerful Coin as ransom.

#

His mind continued sifting through the chronology of events on that fateful day. Reining in the data, endeavouring to pull some serviceable nugget from the fray, Creyton had arisen from his console and moved to his study, to feed his dogs. At that time seven full years of People Exploration, of uninterrupted thought transmittal, was taking its toll. So feeding evolved into a brief walk in the Ebenalpen sunshine which, itself, translated to some minutes of reading time. Yet, with this 'break,' Creyton surmised he was not absent from his office more than thirty minutes. He had a strong sense of who was where when, and he knew Maria had not moved from her position during most of his absence. He had no sooner put the dogs back into their respective bedrooms when he heard what he thought was a scream. There were always noises under the mountain, and sound was not perfect underground. He dismissed a sensation of fear and strode briskly back. But, when he stood at the entrance to his office, he saw no one. He saw nothing on the screen. And the office looked as though no one had occupied it all day, much less all week. His initial thought was that Maria had taken ill and fled to their room. Upon checking, there was no sign of her there either. He checked the outer veranda, on which they both sometimes took their breakfast.

He had to sit. Compose himself. They must have drugged her. It was the perfect crime. Her chair sat motionless, and there was no trace of her having been there. He whirled frantically in endless circles hoping to see something anew each time he spun round. He stood from his chair, growled, to confirm she was, indeed, not there. He again stalked the house they shared. He came to a gut-wrenching realisation. She had been truly grabbed, captured by the arms of the Eternal Spreadsheet.

In the year 2087 people had evolved to such a degree that to be one with the data was actually now manifest and real. Ever present. And true. It had never happened, of course. Until Creyton imagined it. Designed it. Enacted it. And that – *that* – was the key to his success. Marrying telepathic, all-encompassing 'research' with real-time, on-the-ground, in-dimension presence. AxisAccess, he had called it. And it seemed that his brother had not only found a way in but was using Maria as leverage to steal this differentiated gem from Creyton. The only trouble was that, in 2087,

spreadsheets and graphs were limitless. One had to know one's data before jumping into explore results. One did not 'just jump in without a 'plan.' So, without knowing Maria's precise coordinates, Creyton would be immersing himself in the data blindly. And that would be a very bad thing, *indeed*. Hence, his present predicament and his inability to solve this problem for three years. Three years of writing questions, thoughts, and exploring the minds of his public, and nothing had brought her back. It was a time with unabated stress and strain – waiting for any lead. Days' worth of stubble and bloodshot eyes he continued to present over time did nothing to masque his ongoing anguish. Creyton was barely eating or sleeping, his dogs providing his sole comfort. He was adrift, caring little for much. Despite all his successes, he felt a failure.

He took a brandy bottle from his cabinet hoping the burn would also soothe his head. A few glasses later, he felt less inclined to bite off heads but too fuzzy. Counter-productively, he waited for some of the effects to wear off. Then, he called his fellow Dukes. His loyal 'Musketeers' in times of trouble. His heart raced. And took off in a flourish.

#

"Hell and Damnation! She could be rotating around in a pie chart!" Lord Creyton roared as soon as Edward, Duke of Lancaster and House of Burgundy, and Lord York appeared standing astride Lord Creyton's doorframe. Although rhetorical and not demanding a response, Creyton was furious that his ranting did not engender one – or at least some suggestion outright from his Dukes. Until an hour later, over a chess game, Edward offered what Creyton would later call a late-breaking epiphany on this, the three-year anniversary of her disappearance.

"Creyton, if I may, why not take the thing you do best and execute another wave of the same study? The same specifications, same questions. When data come in, you can start afresh. Review it as it enters your head and, then, once it appears on screen, jump in. It might jog something and help you find her. If she is in Wave I, she will be in Wave II. For, Creyton, you designed the system. *Surely*, with your intellect, you can work this out! Besides, don't you recall," he added sarcastically, "that every single thought and reason for *every single response* is contained in one bar of data? It's all there. *If you care to look.*"

Creyton listened, and, while he wanted to be the one to have generated the idea, he was grateful for the loyalty. For the help. So, immediately, he took the thing he knew best and began anew. Then, he hatched a plan with his fellow Dukes for the 'processing' of the data. "You will wait here while I do this. Then, we will enter the data together. This *will* work." Then, he could not resist retorting – because was he not the CEO? – "Edward, I really do not need the sarcasm." Then, he distributed 'assignments' to cells in the infinite spreadsheet based on his knowledge of where the old data fell. Had to start somewhere.

He was in earnest, but, doing his best to maintain an outward calm, he forged ahead. He recognised that, to get Maria back, he needed to 'return to the scene of the crime.' His nemesis was on the attack, and woe betide anyone who got in Creyton's way. He would see Maria unharmed and safe, and he would protect his system. He would find Maria. She was out there – or *in there*. In the words. In the story. In some sort of text box or title. Or left hanging precariously on some arrow or line pointing to an otherwise meaningless data outcome. Or was she so shrunken that she was inside a percentage sign?

It had taken a game of chess with Edward to realise that another wave of his travel survey was the solution. For was not 'traveling' around spreadsheets something of a chess game? She was probably stuck in Wave I – Peyton probably had her in some complicated matrix or other. Trapped until the research could be undertaken again. Edward was right! He would, as Henry VII vanquished his enemy Richard III at Bosworth Field – win this time. This reminder would ensure it. He had invoked Henry's spirit to date but to no avail. This time – *this time* – it would be different.

Out then went his very structured, questionnaire with quantitative questions and some open-ended questions...all in real-time. In English to Lord and Lady Lambeth in Ireland. In French to the Duke and Duchess de Grenoble and to the Marquess and Marquise de Rouen in France. In Italian, out to Duca Marcello de' Medici di Firenze e Milano of Italy. In Spanish, to Cardinal Lorenzo Borgia of Spain. In French, German and Italian to Reichsgraf von Hallwyl. In German to Herzog Matthias Ulm von Boppard-am-Rhein and Robert Wollstein, Ritter von Hannover in Germany. Out the questions went. Asked/answered:

1. What do you like *best* about the Republic?
2. On a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being 'not at all confident,' and 10 being 'extremely confident,' how confident are you in Lord Creyton's ability to lead the Republic?

3. What, if anything, would you change about life in the Republic?
4. Have you been to *any* other Republics? If yes, what did you learn? Would you return? What would you do differently in Alpeneuropa based on your visit elsewhere?
5. Do you have an Alpeneuroport to verify your identity for travel?
6. How many trips have you made in Alpeneuropa? With whom do you prefer to travel – family, friends? For what purpose? What times of year? What do you eat while travelling?
7. Which, if any, are your favourite destinations? Why?
8. What sources do you use to book your holidays?
9. Should there be tourism caps? Yes/no...to which destinations?
10. Do you communicate with the outside world? With whom?
11. On a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being 'do not agree at all,' and 10 being 'completely agree,' how much do you agree that your travel comfort would be enhanced by: a) more resources; b) greater accessibility to locations; c) an ability to visit other Republics, d) other Domes?
12. How optimistic are you about the future of the Alpeneuropa Republic? Using a 5-point scale of 0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = neutral, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree, Creyton intended to assess optimism and pessimism via ten (10) items.
13. And, if you *had* to choose a ruler for Alpeneuropa today, whom would you choose?

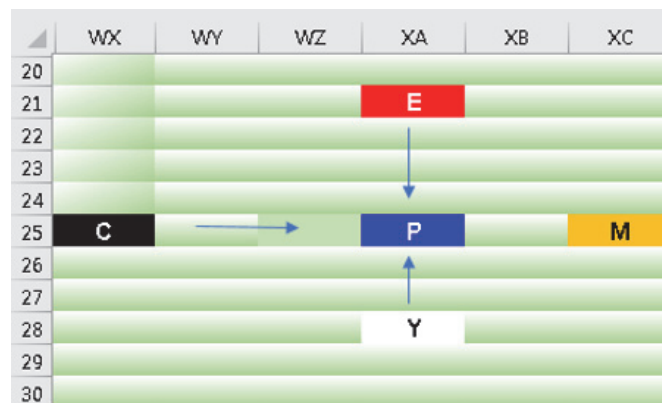
He subsequently hand-picked particular citizens from his Republic to conduct a telepathic focus group of sorts to help supplement the quantitative results and arm him further as well as help support his theories.

Gears clicked into place as he prepared for this targeted 4D travel. He now moved and acted with the dexterity and deft craftsmanship of a Swiss watchmaker, with his own internal, oscillating balancing wheel and escapement device providing a new fervency and constancy. He could barely encode and decode quickly enough while Edward and Lord York awaited a signal. Any signal, but Creyton was not ready. There *had* to be some serviceable nugget in there. *Just then...*an image appeared. He saw the data move around like his cherished chess pieces. So simple! His *forté* was data collection, and he had been too blind. Had not utilised this strength to its fullest. With the right questions, a little shifting, a little data manipulation, as well as accounting for error and performing some rapid-fire calculations in his brain – thus, serving to confuse his multi-faceted neural network – in the span of just under five minutes, he had his answer.

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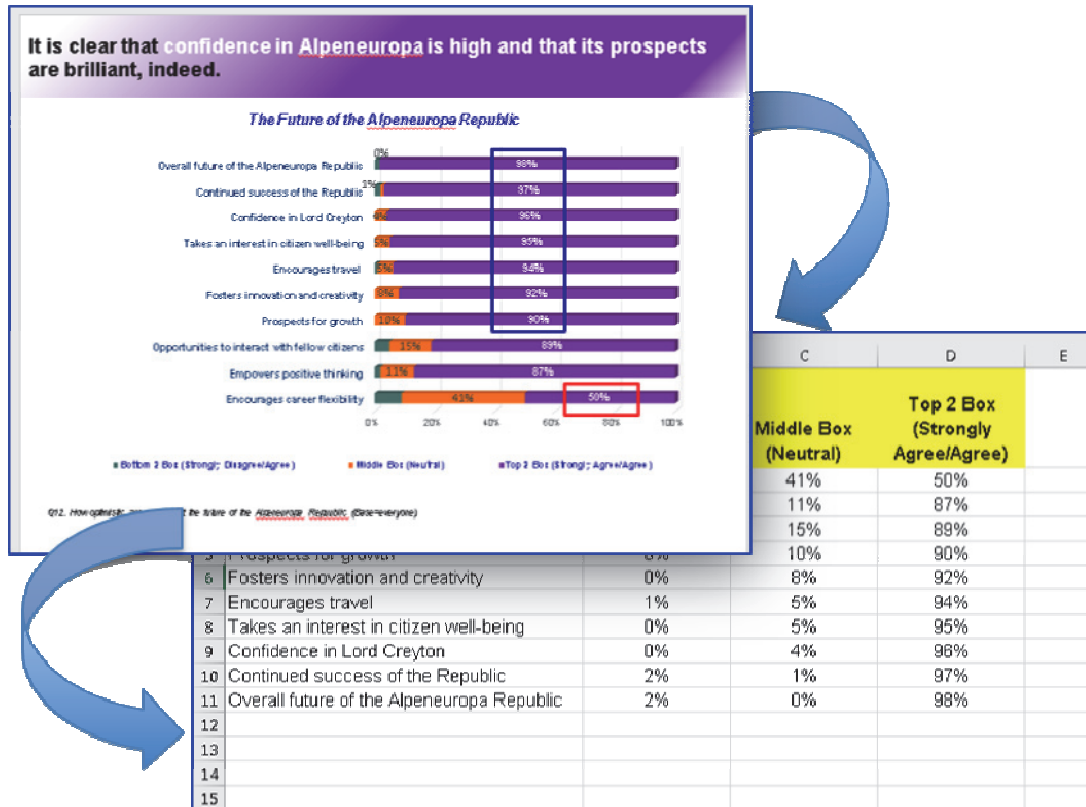
“Ok, Edward, Lord York, we’re going. *Now.*” Transposing themselves into infinitesimal, molecular-sized pieces to be rebuilt within the software, Creyton, Edward and Lord York plummeted into the numbers. Creyton cursed his having taken his data out to two decimal points, as it was becoming a bit too populated. There was not enough ‘white space’ to see or to think. However, he quickly recovered enough to issue commands. To jump cells they used their LaserEyeSabres to try to find Maria at a distance. They could not see her. They landed in A5 and made the jump to ZZ5595 – all scattered. They crossed and jumped. They jumped across gridlines, pivoted in and out of charts until they heard a commotion in cell XA25. It was Peyton. He was tying up Maria’s bindings, as she sat in XC25. Then, Peyton and Maria flew across cells until a vortex lay between Creyton and his enemy. Communicating with his CellTech call system for his Dukes to scatter, Creyton approached from WX25. Edward from XA21. York from XA28.

Figure 1



Jumping, calculating, maneuvering, cutting, pasting, replicating, de-duping to thwart the enemy and outwit, outplay and confuse. Triple envelopment in a spreadsheet. And, from there, right into the agree-disagree graph on optimism and pessimism. He prayed he was not too late. For he landed on the bar with 98% optimism about the overall future of Alpeuropa, surely a sign. Then, he saw Peyton on the 96% optimism outcome concerning Republic confidence in Lord Creyton, and he knew he was closing in. He had one bar between them...a 97% optimism rating on the continued success of the Republic. *Lord in Heaven*. The battle would end on this bar. This promontory. This small peninsula of data. This cliff, this citadel, would be his undoing – or the source of his greatest success.

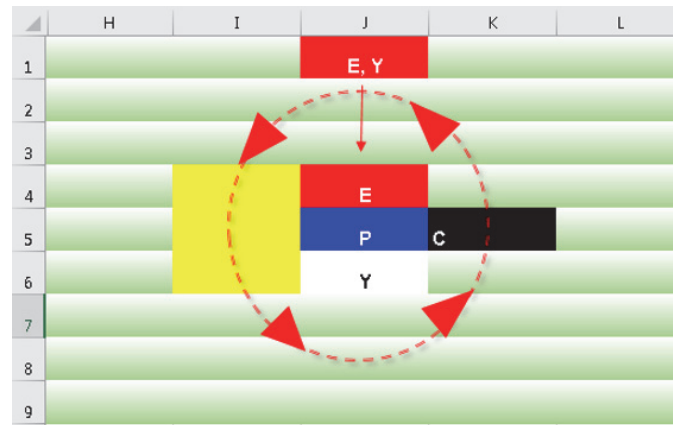
Figure 2.



The battle was a veritable, endless, virtual spreadsheet reminiscent of an infinite chess board fought across and on differently-shaped landscapes and lines at once. On the bar, below the surface and back again. *Bloody Hell*, he abhorred warfare, but he abhorred warfare fought virtually even more. It was a loose cannon, but it was ultimately a design of his own making. Peyton was a bad data point, hacking the new software, and he had to be eliminated.

Creyton shouted across the chasm of cells to his twin who was jumping cells to get to him. Peyton had made it to J5 when he saw Edward and York approach from J1. Creyton quickly caught up apace. Just as Peyton was about to jump again – to where they cared not – Creyton and the Dukes bellowed to Peyton, and, just as quickly surrounded him where he stood, albeit hit from all sides by numbers and symbols: Creyton at K5, Edward at J4, and Lord York at J6. Fortunately, there were colour blocks from I4 to I6, and a very long decimal point (probably his weights) sitting in each of K4 and K6. *So no escape*.

Figure 3.



“By the pricking of my thumbs, Something wicked this way comes. Open, locks, Whoever knocks.” Creyton stood, at the precipice of chart Hell, ready to face his twin. Invoking an apt line from *Macbeth* (4.1.45).

“Hello, Brother.”

Peyton, in a pique of panic had nowhere to run. *Nowhere to hide*. The system he thought he had successfully hacked and hoped to steal was inaccessible to him. He had just hidden Maria in another obscure location. Would he reveal it? Dare he risk empathetic treatment by his twin? If it meant his life and a return to his own Kingdom, to ever only ruling one Republic, he would take it.

However, Creyton would not allow empathy. *Was not* going to allow any more lapses in judgment. This was, indeed, a *fight to the death*. Akin to King Henry V’s Battle of Agincourt – but, this time, fought with virtual weaponry and much skill as well as a mastery of strategy and tactics. At least there was no rain as it was on Saint Crispin’s Day so many centuries ago, but Creyton’s fight was through the numbers. The battle ensued. Through characters and symbols, over bars, across axes and around cells. He needed Peyton alive so he could find Maria, but, then, oh, *then*, he would do anything he wished. He was in charge. And he would win. *Play Dirty. Outplay.*

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And, within what seemed like years but was, in essence, only milliseconds, it was done. Creyton’s virtual broadsword found Peyton’s ribcage, and it was over. Right on S11, just below the trend line reflecting 98% confidence in the Alpeuropa Republic. *Almost a perfect ending*. As Peyton lay dying – for he would forever ‘live’ in these results – Creyton forced the reveal of Maria’s whereabouts. And, as a shot, all three Musketeers tore their way across lines, up axes, across, jumping upon scale after scale as they did so. He finally found her in YY1543. Unharmd. A little shaken. A lot cramped. *But alive.*

Edward and Lord York stepped aside, to neighbouring cells, to allow Lord Creyton to command the space. And command the space he did, indeed. With his left hand he reached across to replace his virtual broadsword in its scabbard on his right side (for it was the way of swordfighters to be required to remove and replace the sword with a flourish, at a diagonal – and for ease and efficiency of sword-fighting!). In a voice mixed with sincerity, concern, torrents of relief, and a twist of sarcasm, he asked, “Am I late?”

Maria turned round, and she shrieked. For there, as gorgeous as the night of the ball when he first met her, stood her official husband. Stood there fearless, courageous, handsome, determined, exquisite, valourous and perfectly gallant. Oh, how she missed his deep baritone. His appealing lilt, a tender cadence evocative of his Scottish heritage. Dressed in black, as was his custom. Looking in every conceivable way the pirate, Musketeer, Regency-era hero and gentleman but the epitome of the complete, absolute rogue all rolled into one. He had come to save her as a knight of old. She had to laugh at the irony. Confined in a cell and being rescued by a group who could be considered as Alexandre Dumas’s *Three Musketeers!*

“Well, my lady? I might remind that I just asked you a very important question,” he taunted eagerly, as he caught his breath and saw, mercifully, she was before him.

She saw the wolfish gleam in his too-green eyes. “Pray,” she responded emotionally with her brightest smile and echoing the parlance of the period Creyton was projecting, “my lord, I was keeping watch, but, *alas, who was truly keeping time?*”

That interchange alone served to unwind the taut cords of the past almost 1,100 days. The earlier tapestry of concern and fear was now replaced by an interwoven one of contentment and some measure of tranquility. Creyton and Maria walked briskly toward each other, Edward and Lord York giving them a moment of privacy to embrace before needing, absolutely, to vacate the scene. Most *urgently*.

Then, Creyton grabbed Maria’s waist and breathed ever so quietly, “Now, love, pay very, *very* close attention, and do *not* leave my side.”

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They emerged from the deep abyss of the graphics exhausted but relieved. And, with the threat eradicated and enemy vanquished, with Maria’s having been safely found and returned, Creyton could hope, now to resume his reign – of his Republic and of his People Exploration. Unchallenged. He welcomed some solitude. For his dream of overarching power, of ensuring one narrative to every story, would now be fulfilled. He was a leader not to be trifled with. For leading the charge, in charge, and the name that would for evermore be top-of-mind for all within his Ebenalpen Republic, was *Lord Creyton Montgomery*.

Undaunted, Creyton and Maria immediately executed a new study asking, answering, conjuring study after study – and wave after wave of travel studies to maintain control over their public, to keep them in check. No more open-ended questions. Too unpredictable. Too messy. No more questionnaire ‘other-specifies.’ Creyton and Maria designed the questionnaires, all closed-end, and absolutely no ‘don’t know/refused’ options allowed. Told exactly as its storytellers saw fit. An all-consuming travel through time and space, intermingling with the data and the implications these data represent. And, lest there be any question, Creyton had a password placed onto his entire People Exploration operation forthwith. And, like the oculus soaring overhead in Ebenalpen, he ensured it was a password he would never, *ever* forget.

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