

**Solundrums V.1
2002 - 2012**

Richard W. Kelly

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Solundrums Sample

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Young Adult

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THANK YOU

To all the authors over the years that have inspired me with something small. I forever thought I didn't have it in me to write a novel. I thought I couldn't write anything that long. During that journey to more than 50,000 words it was the stories of Vonnegut, Card, Poe, Swift and many others who kept me motivated by proving there was room for those who wanted to write short things as well.

ANTI-TECH

Agent Splendor flew through the downtown street at nearly twice the posted speed limit on his government issued motorcycle. His black suit and tie flapped in the wind as he spotted the dissidents turning a corner. Hitting the brakes and making the turn down a small alley allowed him to spot the young rebels again.

There were five of them that day, a typical number, but it never seemed to be the same bunch. They wore tight pants and loose shirts. It seemed like an odd fashion to the agent, but understanding their wardrobe was less likely than understanding their motives.

The young adults ducked into a back door of one of the numerous twenty story plus buildings just before his cycle caught up to them. As Splendor dropped his bike on the ground allowing the steaming concrete to grind scars into the perfect black paint job. He let an idea come back into his

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head. A thought that plagued him every time he was in pursuit of the Parkours, how do they always outrun me when they are on foot? It bugged him. He was trained to survey and capture, but these kids always got away.

The agent crashed through the door of the huge office building looking for his prey. As usual they were on their way up the stairs in an attempt to reach the roof. He pushed his body to its limits hoping to catch at least one of the Parkours before they got outside. He hated heights, it was a fear he had since he was a child and something he thought his chosen profession would not include. But the Parkours forced the issue daily.

Splendor looked up the stairwell seeing the five kids, flights above him nearing the roof while he was panting and gasping breathing in the professionally cleaned scent of the building. He knew it was no use, the chase was now just a show for the Parkours to demonstrate their mastery of evading government apprehension. He finished climbing the stairs, but he slowed to a near walk having already accepted defeat.

He kicked open the door to the roof in dramatic fashion, to not disappoint the rebels who were waiting for him. The powerful stench of exhaust and burning tar clawed at Splendor's eyes and nose, only overpowered by the intense heat generated from the black tar roof he had just stepped upon. It only took a quick perusal of the situation before he spotted the Parkours, all five of them at the ledge a mere fifteen feet from the next building.

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One of the rebels, a short Asian boy noticed Agent Splendor and alerted his pals to their pursuer's arrival. They all snickered looking back at the government employee who was slowly increasing his speed towards the group as if he were building momentum through a steam engine in his legs. But before he was even a hundred feet within range of the kids, they leapt from the edge of the building across the alley where they fell to a balcony two stories below. Each of their landings turned into a somersault in an attempt to reduce the impact.

Splendor slowed his pace as he watched the Parkours do what they did best, which was escape in dramatic fashion. The leap was not surprising, the rebels he was chasing made a hobby of climbing walls, jumping gaps, fitting in small spaces... It was all just a normal day for them. He chuckled at himself for thinking he ever stood a chance against their nimble bodies. He turned to go back down to his bike laying beaten on the alley floor.

Agent Splendor did not return to the office in shame or embarrassment, everyone knew how fast those kids were and truthfully, no one expected him to catch them. Upon his entrance into the small underground office his subordinates did not even glance in his direction. They all continued to face forward in their little half cubicles staring into their brightly lit and large monitors inside the otherwise pitch-black room.

Splendor walked to the center of the room and sat down in his large plush executive chair. He peered into his monitor and scrolled through the bios of the Parkours. He

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found the five that he chased that day, they had all been identified as rebels, but no names, addresses, ID numbers, IP addresses, nothing. It was common for the Parkours to be unidentifiable. They were not only master escapists, but they were anti everything. Anti-technology, anti-government, anti-networking, anti-phone, anti-surveillance, they were essentially invisible.

As the head of the Union Intelligence Bureau or the UIB he had access to every bit of information originating from inside the borders of the United States. Of course, he only monitored his region, but he always felt a little bigger and a little badder knowing that his access lay from coast to coast. The agents sitting around him in the darkened room were each assigned a type of data stream. Agent Disconnect monitored credit and debit card transactions making sure that people were not purchasing dangerous amounts of certain supplies. Agent Telegraph listened to phone conversations, text messages, chat rooms... Agent Godeye studied the photos taken from sporting events, red light cameras, speed cameras, and all televised events. Agent Disturbed followed all radio frequency ID tags, which were little communication devices found in toll tags, security sensors, library books, and thousands of other sources. There were fifteen agents total in the room each with a different set of securities they were responsible for.

There were government devices everywhere. In every street light, every electrical tower, every water meter... These were all setup to cling to any network found in the area. They

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had password breakers built in so that any network within range would be accessed, logged into, and would then track all activity on it. Splendor had access to all of the government tapped networks from his PC, he could see if someone was printing a picture, hacking into a website, or remotely turning on their oven.

All of the information was a major focus, but his main concern was keeping the UIB a secret as it had been since the 1860s. The only time the bureau was in danger of exposure was in the middle of World War II. Of course, the president at the time set up the CIA as a decoy agency and the head of the UIB was never heard from again. This was Splendor's largest motivation to keep the Parkours suppressed, his continued existence.

“We have found Harvey Satchelman. He is logged onto a computer using his alias RV_SachLmn in West Virginia.” Agent ID spouted out in sheer excitement for his discovery. Harvey was an enemy of the state responsible for multiple terror attacks on American cruise ships. Although that would be considered murder of thousands of people it was considered minor offense in the eyes of UIB. There they were only concerned with offenses that jeopardized the security of the nation, the government, or the UIB itself. It was Harvey's attempt to sell military secrets to enemy nations that made him a target of the highest surveillance agency in the United States.

Splendor stood up to emit some authority over his fellow agents. “West Virginia? Anonymously alert the FBI,

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they take care of terrorists.” This was always the easiest way to dispose of people, send them off to another part of the government. It was a tremendous victory, but the climax was not exactly climactic. Although these cases seemed like large victories, it was the cases like the Parkours that were the problem. When a target had not done anything illegal that would allow other agencies to handle it, only identified the UIB as an existing agency, the group had to be terminated in secrecy.

There was a phone call made and Harvey Satchelman would be removed from the list. It was a satisfying moment, but as long as the Parkours were still on the loose Splendor would always be nervous. Not knowing their purpose, standard operating procedure was to assume their goal was to out the UIB and alert the American people of it, the highest form of treason under the current UIB regime.

It was a couple of days before there was any commotion in the dark office of the UIB. But on that Thursday afternoon something came up.

“Parkour number twelve currently at Julie’s Department Store on Twenty Fifth St.” Agent Perv shouted out into the small circle of agents.

Splendor replied quickly as he got to his feet. “How long do I have before she is back on the street?”

Agent Perv watched private security cameras meaning any security camera on a network that had been intercepted. This included government security, home security, parking lot security, and his personal favorite retail

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security. When he was not looking for anything in particular, he was usually found watching dressing room cameras. “Well, she just walked into the dressing room.” Perv stated as he watched the young girl strip her clothes off in an unintentional strip tease.

“I am on it.” Splendor said as he flung open the door. “Radio me if she takes off before I get there.” The end of the sentence did not even reach the room as he was already out the door and up the stairs.

Splendor was screaming through the streets. Only a two-block sprint and he would be inside the department store. He fumbled through his wallet as he tried to find the correct badge to show to store management. Which one was the magical ID to force the paid security to ignore the screams and cries of a teenage girl? He slipped the with FBI across it to the front of his wallet replacing the Congressional identification he typically used to get out of traffic tickets.

He turned the corner into the entrance of the store. His earpiece buzzed with the voice of Agent Perv. “She is out of the dressing room and heading towards the second floor. There is no external exit up there. You should be able to get her.”

Splendor flashed his badge at the costumed security as he made his way to the escalator. The shiny façade of the store gleamed at him as he peered through the Thursday afternoon crowds of mothers and baby sitters looking for a familiar face. The escalator lifted him up to the second floor where he was surrounded by leather coats and other winter

gear. Knowing there was to be a chase he unsheathed his taser and crept along the aisles towards the outer edges of the store looking for the girl.

An expletive was shouted from the far corner and three teenagers were sprinting for the escalators in the center of the building. Splendor caught a glimpse of them and moved full speed in that direction, his movements looked less fluid and more like that of a seventy's television cop than a highly trained professional.

He was too slow for the first two of the children who jumped over the railing landing ten feet below on the angled steel between the escalators. They slid down the metal towards the first floor escaping Splendor. The third kid was not so lucky. It was Parkour twelve, the youngest of the group as far as the agents could tell. She hurdled the railing aiming for the same landing as the other two, but Splendor had his weapon drawn and fired.

The taser's cartridge pierced into the back of the girl slicing into her baggy t-shirt as it sent electric pulses into her body, convulsing her muscles as she fell to the hard escalator stairs instead of the smooth metal between the moving stairs.

The scene was a horrific one, patrons pretended to cover their eyes from the gruesome fall, but it was seen by all. She had lost control of her body half way down the fall leaving her in a semi-paralytic state as her bones smashed into the sharp teeth of the escalator stairs. Her body was going to be bruised, but she was incapacitated which is what Agent Splendor had intended. The cartridge's wires dislodged from

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the taser still in Splendor's hands as the escalator brought the girl to the bottom where the by-the-hour security of Julie's department store apprehended her.

The girl awoke in a dark room filled with men in their late thirties. The only light shone from overhead and she was strapped to a chair. After noticing her surroundings, she could not help but picture herself from someone else's perspective. It looked like something out of a horror movie. The perfectly sane person strapped into a chair as if she were a nut-job while a group of crooked cops planned something horrid for her.

Her legs throbbed with pain almost in time with eight pinhole punctures in her back. She was frightened but did not know what to do. She let her head fall towards her chest as she let tears flow from her thirteen-year-old eyes.

Splendor looked at the girl with little sympathy as his training convinced him that an enemy was an enemy, they recognized no age and definitely no innocence. He stepped into the light so she could see his face. Noticing that she would not look up he leaned over her and placed his hand on her right knee forcing nearly all of his weight onto the soft bruised joint.

"GOD!" The girl screamed flinging her head up, her hands pulling at the tough wiry ropes around her wrists, quickly shredding the sensitive skin that pressed against it.

Splendor stood up, taking the pressure off her sores, and went into interrogation mode. "Who are you?"

The girl was lost in panic feeling that she was in over

her head. She had never been arrested before, but had heard stories about what to do. “What was I arrested for?”

“Who said you have been arrested?” A sadistic smile emerged, “What is your name?”

The thought that she was not dealing with the police turned her heart beat into more of a weak uncontrolled convulsion. Her throat pounded with a constant beat as she tried to speak. “Brenda Cartwright.”

Splendor turned back to Agent ID and told him to look her up. He turned back to Brenda and with a smirk continued his questions. “Do you know who we are?”

“No.” No one spoke. The silence of the dim room teased Brenda so she continued wanting to end the silence. “Not the cops.”

“Let me put it this way. Why don’t you have an email?” He was goading her into saying what she knew.

She had no idea how that had to do with anything.

“Why don’t you have a television? Why don’t you have a computer? Why don’t you attend school?” His questions slowed as each one was asked.

“UIB” She let it slip, but the realization that she was in custody of a secret government agency turned her childhood fantasies into a real-life nightmare.

“There it is.” Agent Splendor dismissed the tiny bit of sympathy he garnered for the girl. “You are a Parkour while I am in the UIB. So, now that we understand who is who... Tell me about your friends.”

Her spine straightened as much as it could in the chair

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as her mind recalled the oaths she took upon becoming a Parkour. “I won’t. And what did I do to you anyway?”

This was not the response Splendor wanted to hear. “I don’t think you understand what is happening to you. You are not dealing with police. You are about to be erased by men who do not exist unless you start telling me what you know.” He moved over to a desk where he half sat down. “You see, you are dodging our surveillance. For over a hundred years we have watched people in every way we know how. We make sure that the government is safe from its enemies. Whether people know about us or not, they willingly submit to us. Those who don’t, have something to hide. Those who don’t are assumed to be aiding our enemies. Those who don’t must be eliminated before they strike.”

She did not believe him. It was still America. She stood her ground at least for a few minutes.

Splendor stepped back into the darkness of the room’s corners. There was clanging of metal on metal as Splendor let the girl’s imagination lead her through her nightmare. He re-emerged from the darkness with a small jar. It had a tight lid on it. He put the cold glass up against her cheek letting the large scorpion inside be seen with the small amount of light in the room.

“What do you want to know?” She was defeated. Once she understood that they were not joking around she gave in, absolutely.

Splendor asked his barrage of questions. He had been dealing with the Parkours for years, but had never spoken

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with one. Together they built profiles on all the Parkours Brenda knew. She divulged names, addresses, ages, sexes, disabilities, schools, families, interests... Hours of questions answered with no actual torture applied.

It was all good to know, but eventually she exposed something that Splendor was not prepared for. "Why do you do the things you do?" Splendor was candid at this point, almost asking his questions out of curiosity with such compliance from his prisoner. "Why not let us watch you? I understand that you figured out we are here. But why not just live a normal life and open an email, watch television, or buy RFID products? I don't think you have anything to hide."

"I was told that I could help free our oppressed society. I was told that I could change the world. Together we would turn off the net and start a revolution."

"What do you mean turn off the net? What is a plan?" He was suddenly concerned.

"Well, in order to let everyone see how they are controlled by technology we are going to shut down all networks for a couple of hours, nationwide."

Splendor did not want to do it, but he left the room. As soon as the plan was revealed to shut down all the communication networks, she had become an enemy not just of the government, but of the UIB itself. It was a self-preservation activity that ensued afterwards. Some of the agents were trained in how to remove all information at any means necessary. A lack of knowledge would not be acceptable, they would continue until either they knew

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everything or the suspect ceased to be.

Unfortunately, they learned nothing. The girl did not know anything. She died pleading with her tormentors telling them the truth.

Ugly situations are ugly for a reason and that one was so because they had to be sure they got everything. The normal tools include blackmail, family threats, and public humiliation. But severe pain was the only tool they had against a person who was too young to be established.

The situation would have haunted a normal man, but the trained elite could remove sin from their psyche just as easily as they could wash their hands. Brenda became another missing person case that would never be solved. Her family would be lost in torment just as others had been over the years when the government did what they felt they had to.

The UIB were lost in the timeline of the internet attack. They now understood that they must stop the Parkours from shutting down the net, but they did not know when or how it would happen. It was a game they had dealt with a few times in the history of the bureau. In these rare events the agency went out among the people and abducted them in broad daylight. For those who saw, it typically sent fear and dissent through the populace.

Knowing the names and addresses of some of the Parkours, Splendor led a task force to apprehend as much of the group as possible. It was a quick operation with men in vans driving around the city kidnapping people from their homes. It was enough to spark the conspiracy community,

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another group who knew of the UIB, but were considered too crazy to be a threat.

In less than twenty-four hours the small basement torture room was filled with teens and young adults that were all identified as Parkours. It was a war of words. The Parkours in the room outnumbered the agents and violence was avoided in the self-interest of both parties.

After hours of captivity one of the older Parkours, Trent, became the unofficial spokesman of the group. His long brown hair hung in over his bony face as he yelled at the agents. "You know damn well that you have been chasing us because we are going to out you. If we know about you, then you are in danger of being exposed!" There was a cheering that erupted from behind him. The younger Parkours supported their impromptu leader as they pushed their fears deep into their stomachs.

"We are here to protect the government of the United States and its secrets. If that means protecting our agency, the source of all of our surveillance, then that is what we do." Splendor had left the discussion of the shutting off of the net, he had gained all of the information he would get from these kids. The current situation did not allow for the agency's normal tactics, instead they learned what they could through the notes they confiscated from each member's apparel. "You are the ones who are being deceptive. You tell these kids you want a revolution, but you just want to usurp the power from us."

"You are too old to understand this. We do not want

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power. We want a revolution, anarchy, true freedoms.” Trent took a deep breath ordered by his body in response to his aggravation of the situation. His body shivered thanks to the stale stench of Brenda’s corpse which had just been removed a couple hours before the arrival of the group. It was a sickening smell that all the Parkours instinctually knew, but refused to acknowledge. “What we want is peace. Why can’t we police ourselves? Why can’t we govern ourselves? Why is it that you think we need government agencies prying into our lives in order to live? We don’t! If you remove the government, we will be that much happier.”

“I’m done.” Splendor walked up the stairs into the dark office he worked in. He would let the rest of the agents deal with the argument which no side would ever win.

He sat down looking at the scraps of paper they took off the kids. Cocktail napkins and ripped out notebook paper covered in easily broken amateur code to help pass information around. The fact that the Parkours were anti-technology left them using their own form of the pony express to communicate between cities.

The information on the papers were not revealing by any means, mostly instruction on how to cut power lines, what radio shows and internet shows were sympathetic to them, where to organize meetings... The papers seemed to be old and had gone between many hands alerting Splendor that their movement may be much bigger than he thought.

He came to the realization, if he survived the war, he had just started with the Parkours, the United States

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government would surely dispose of him. He felt his life pass before his eyes. All of his work, his willingness to forgo a normal life, and his devotion to the country were all becoming his downfall. He was becoming too much of a risk to be left in charge.

He put his face in his hands leaning over the desk wishing for the world to end. He let a few tears fall. It was the first time he let his body override his training in years. The only thought in his head was for it all to end.

Maybe it was coincidence. Maybe it was God responding. Either way, that was the moment the lights went out in the office. The generator kicked on filling the computers with electricity, but they were still offline. Out of instinct he pressed the panic button sending alarms throughout the office and torture room. As the agents came up the stairs, the Parkours followed forcefully behind.

Trent knew what was happening. Although they never used technology, they had their own form of surveillance where the organization of Parkours knew if someone went missing. It was against the rules to disappear without someone else's knowledge. When nearly twenty of them went absent, it was assumed as an attack on the group. It put the plan into action.

Word spread quickly across the country and at the stroke of noon every major power plant in the nation suddenly shut down. Telephone companies across the country were sabotaged and the wireless connections that remained were flooded with telecommunications backups.

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Trent crowed proudly as he felt vindication for his kidnapping. “The time has come! The revolution is upon us.” He said staring down Splendor.

As the kids cheered the head of the bureau stood up forcing his nose into the cartilage of Trent’s. “What do you think is going to happen? I assure you there will be riots in a matter of minutes.”

“That’s what we want. When the people rebel against the applied force of the cops and politicians is when we take back our country.” His reveling was cut short by a distant rumbling that slowly grew louder and stronger. Eventually, the swell of vibration shook the whole of the building and the Earth below it.

There was a dark ominous chuckle that emerged from Splendor’s throat, a tone of evil that was not normally available to him. He grabbed Trent’s still young arm and drug him upstairs to the street to display the nightmare he knew already figured out was occurring.

As they walked through the threshold of the doorjamb an intense heat engulfed their bodies. Nearly unable to open his eyes, Trent forced himself to see a sight he never considered. The image of people running through the streets in chaos was not as alarming as it should have been. The stink of burning tar and rubber was almost ignored. The shock came from the mushroom clouds that had developed off in the distance. Windows from all the surrounding buildings were shattered and taking refuge on the streets below. Trent felt his victory shrivel as he listened

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to the long-forgotten air raid sirens that sang to the city.

Splendor, having already let go of his future and given in to his impending death waved his hand about the air in front of him and spoke to Trent with the glee of revenge in his voice. “Here is your revolution. Bask in it while you can.”

Trent’s youthful expressions surrendered to the ageless illustrations upon his features allowing the panic of his mind to run free. “This is not what we wanted.” His voice held no emotion just shock. “We didn’t have nukes or anything. Who did this?” The words were barely audible over the booms and screams in the streets.

“You did.” Splendor could see the waves of the explosions coming nearer and went in for the kill before the bombs could do the same. He needed to show the child that he was to blame before they were both met by the grim mask of death. “You think our surveillance ends with the citizens? Do you really believe that we don’t use our humongous amounts of data capture to protect this country from its enemies?” The wave of toxins from the bombs knocked the two to the ground with a forceful thud. Their skin nearly burned from the heat and their stomachs churned trying to keep things inside. “The second your cohorts knocked off our surveillance our enemies around the world saw it. They saw our defenses fall. They saw our networks implode. They saw and seized that instant. These bombs could be from Russia. These could be from North Korea. These could be from Iran. We won’t ever know.” He let a moment pass and then for emphasis he added, “At least, we won’t know

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without our networks.”

Another explosion silenced the air or at least nullified their eardrums. The two fell to their knees from the force of the deteriorating shockwave that barely reached them. Their joints throbbed from the fall, their skin began melting from the heat, and their bodies dispersed as another nuke exploded just miles from their location marking the end of the Parkours, the UIB, and the United States.

ABOUT ANTI-TECH

I wrote this story in 2008. I have always been fascinated by aliens, time travel, Loch Ness monster... And in pursuit of those interests, I have always been an avid listener of conspiracy type radio shows. Any time I had a long drive at night I would find Coast to Coast AM on the radio and just listen to whatever topic they had for the evening.

This led to all kinds of craziness in my life. I had a life changing experience at the UFO conference, Contact in the Desert in 2015. It was the same show that led to me get a job with Gaia in 2017. And over the years I have met and had conversations with many people who have been major contributors to that show.

This story was an imagining of secret alphabet agencies that some of the conspiracy theorists on Coast to Coast AM claimed were surveilling the American public.

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In my head it was tied in with ties to the free masons and other secret societies. I had imagined that the people working in these agencies knew what they were doing and did so out of duty to their country. People who would have to give up any semblance of a normal life to hide in the shadows as a surveillance agent.

One of the fun parts of following conspiracy theories is seeing the ones that turn out to be actual conspiracies. In 2014 NBC began putting out stories about leaked documents from Edward Snowden. He had worked as a subcontractor to the NSA and became the whistleblower for multiple global surveillance projects.

Of course, my story is not at all like what Snowden detailed at the National Security Agency. He explained it more like a normal work place where people had access to phone conversations and text messages. No one was losing their ability to be a normal person like they did in the UIB in my story.

The rebel group I called the Parkours. I was following a lot of videos of people who did parkour, running and jumping over rails and walls, and thought that would be a cool method of escaping law enforcement. At the time I assumed the word would not catch on. I think the word parkour is a bit more common today that I expected, but I still think it works.

Beyond the basic idea of the surveillance state the main theme of this story is the idea that although we often

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have barriers that divide us, we also are often on the same team.