

OPERATION VERITAS.

This illustrated novel by Ralph Losey was derived from his short story submission to DEFCON 31. He subsequently added Midjourney illustrations. [Here is a page](#) with Ralph's reading background and favorite books. The story is about a near future dystopia of daily mass shootings and AI propaganda. An elite group of five hackers create a new type of AI that does battle with evil politicians and their AI, which was being misused to encourage mass murder and chaos. AI controlled drones battle it out with bullets, lasers and propaganda.

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OPERATION VERITAS

In a near future where mass shootings are accelerating to ever more frightening levels, DEFCON comes to life again, as always, in Vegas in August. Thousands of hackers converged. Their usual high-energy muted by the drumming sounds of rifle shots across the country. Amidst this dark neon backdrop, the paths of five gifted hackers crossed, each carrying unique skills and flaws.



The most seasoned among them was Jean-Claude Moreau, a tall hacker with a string of degrees and experience, mostly from the European Union. He has a deep understanding of software and exploits, going back decades. He retired a few years ago but found himself drawn back into the game by family misfortunes. One of those misfortunes involved his daughter, Rana Moreau, who was with him at DEFCON. Rana has a flawless appearance, while her Papa is a tapestry of wrinkles.

Rana is a hacker too, a trait she seems to have inherited. She is going through tough times now, in and out of recovery triggered by pills of all colors: red, blue — you name it. She met her ex-husband while doing post-doc work at MIT, became a U.S. citizen, and never returned to France. Her addiction worsened under Covid and she checked into multiple money-pit rehabs. The bills all eventually went to Papa.



Jean-Claude was in the States not only to help Rana but also to reestablish his reputation and cash flow. He needs to help Rana stay clean and find work, hopefully as a duo of cybersecurity consultants. She did not make that easy. Still, they were able to get a meeting with the famous Gavin Stone at the Alto Bar in Caesars Palace to pitch a consulting gig. Gavin is a forty-something hacker turned Silicon investor. Jean-Claude hoped they could make a deal with him.



Gavin Stone, although now rich and legit, got his start with criminal hacks. He used his tainted cash to buy a piece of a startup years ago that went big, followed by early Bitcoin. Then he diversified to the point his wealth was uncountable. Gavin had been in a car wreck as a boy that left him with a limp and other limitations. As a result of too many hospitals, forced bed rest and the curse of high IQ, he went mental as a teen when he discovered computers. The result was shady hacks and a ton of technical degrees, even a JD in law, which he never used except for evasions.

Jean-Claude and Rana found Gavin Stone at the Alto Bar, along with many others DEFCON hackers.



They all sat down and after a quick pitch attempt went nowhere, an unexpectedly deep conversation began. It was about tech, AI, the dystopian present and possible futures. The mass-shootings were everyone's hot button. The number of shootings was skyrocketing. Amidst the group angst, the usually bored Gavin was strangely attracted to Rana; no doubt her pheromones and seductive aura. That tension helped intensify the dialogue. Jean-Claude was smart enough to stay out and not push the work issues.

As their talk was getting intense, the last two members of the group came on the scene, Jordan Wright and Fei Chen. Their meeting was totally by chance. Jordan recognized Gavin Stone, whom he had met once, and stopped to say hello. Jordan Wright was a strong, genius type man. He was an MIT dropout known by many at DEFCON as a wonder kid turned renegade. Jordan created a groundbreaking machine learning model at Google, but left for black hat self-employment.



Accompanying Jordan was Fei Chen, an accomplished, self-taught hacker with formal training in a variety of martial arts. Her flaw was attraction to bad boys like Jordan. She exuded athletic prowess and hard attitude. But unlike Jordan, she was obsessed with arcane martial arts energy practices, especially manipulation of Ki. She had a powerful and magnetic presence. No one messed with Fei Chen.



In view of Jordan's Wright's reputation, Gavin Stone wanted to avoid him and gave a cool reception. But Jordan had a genius charisma and was hard to turn off. He was passionate about the mass-shootings and impact on minorities. He and Fei sat down

and jumped into the conversation with good insights. They had been in conversations like this before. The world was a mess, the daily mass-shootings had become insane. Somebody had to do something! Thoughts and prayers were bullshit. The whole group hit it off and clicked. They switched to coffee and talked into the morning about possible solutions. Hacking and theoretically possible next generation AI coding was at the heart of their best fix-it ideas.



As DEFCON continued, the group found themselves time and again hooking up to continue their talk about AI, propaganda, gun control, and possible futures. On day

two of DEFCON, five hundred people were killed in multiple shootings across the country. Graphic scenes were shown on monitors everywhere. There was even a small shooting in Vegas where a dozen were killed or injured. They thought they heard the gunfire. They were certain that targeted propaganda was driving this insanity and that there was a calculated scheme behind the chaos. Our hacker five were already brewing technical plans to fight back.



On the last night they met again at the now strange Alto Bar. The usually quiet Jean-Claude proposed they act now, before it was too late. For all they knew, there could be a bigger shooting tomorrow in Vegas. “We possess the expertise and the resources,” said Jean-Claude with a slight French accent, “We can fix this. The future is an open book, it’s pages not yet written.”



All agreed and closed with vows to work together and do something, to move beyond talk to action. They promised to keep in touch, daily, and start making stuff. That's what hackers do. They were ready to use their skills to make a difference, to hack the world.

Somewhat surprisingly, after DEFCON all in the group – Gavin, Jean-Claude, Rana, Jordan and Fei – were true to their word. They stayed connected, meeting by video daily and sometimes in person, thanks to Gavin's many Learjets. They were now all his highly paid consultants, working full time on this project alone.

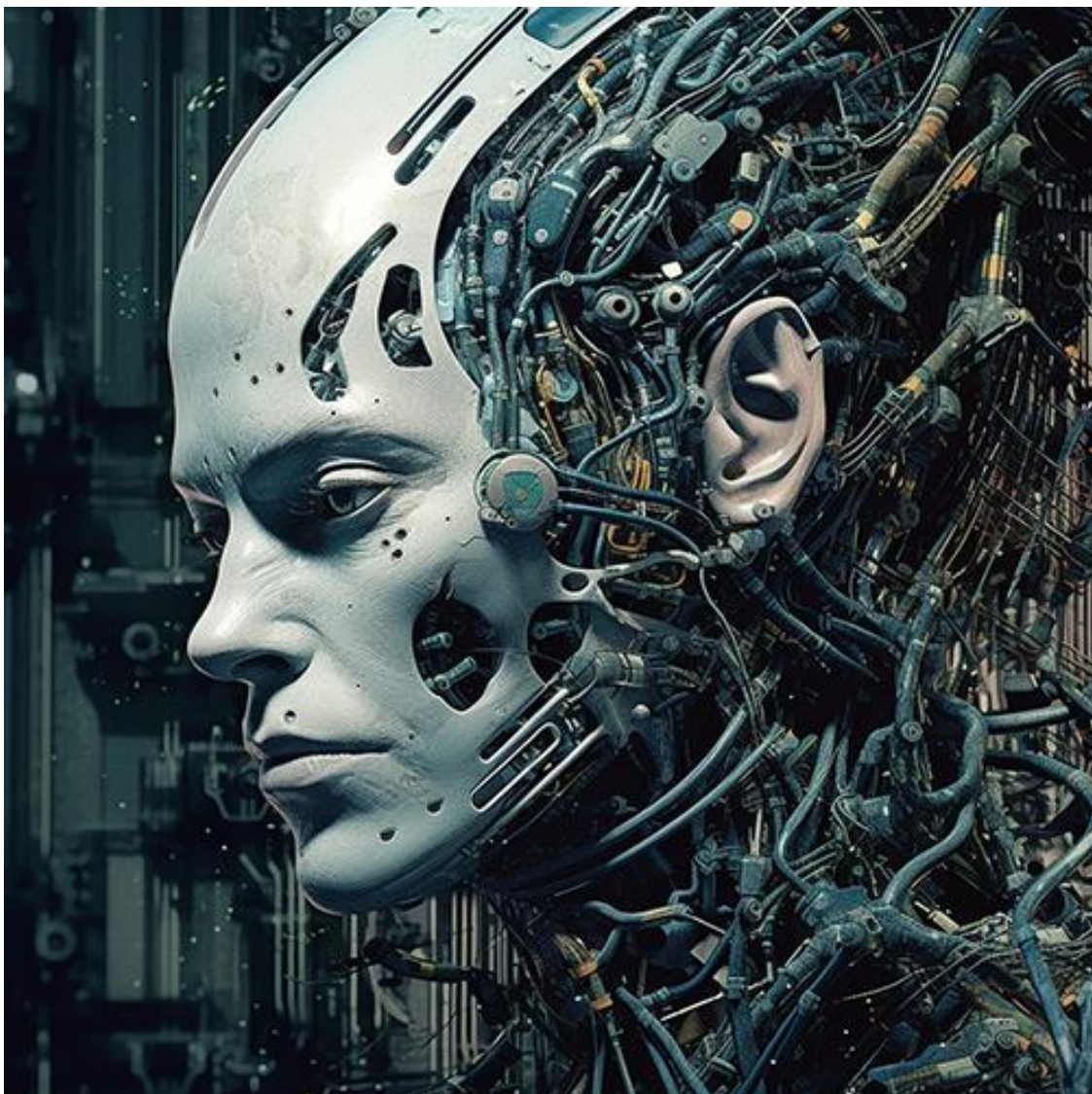


Ultimately, they devised a detailed plan, which they called *Operation Veritas*. The plan required the creation of a new kind of AI, which they named *Veri*. It would be a blend of LLM and logic-based systems designed to independently counter misinformation on the Net. Each member had unique skills and a private stash of software codes that made creation of this new type of AI possible. Gavin's wealth ensured they had all the necessary resources.

Veri would autonomously roam the Net, self-replicate, self-improve, and communicate with all its versions and the human base. Initially, Veri would learn from large, curated databases Gavin acquired and from active training by the team. Veri was taught to detect lies, write counter narratives, do detailed fact-checking, and disseminate proofs. Using their unique hacker skills, our five would also train Veri to attack and destroy the AI sources of misinformation, not the people. They would use various virus injections and other attacks to kill the bad bots. They were also going to investigate possible use of Veri with drones for personal defense against the shootings.



The team closely monitored Veri's initial restricted-area trials, stepping in when necessary to provide guidance and improvements. They built in extensive defenses, ethics controls and fail-safes, or at least they tried. They were pretty sure they could pull the plug on all the Veris if they went rogue. Still, they were not positive about that and were more than a little nervous about Veri's growing abilities. Their new kind of AI was getting super-smart much faster than expected. They needed more time to test and train Veri in closed playgrounds. They were concerned about Veri's occasional hallucinations and odd memory lapses. But hey, we are all a little bit crazy sometimes, they thought. They had not noticed any severe hallucinations and the logic side worked perfectly. Still, they monitored Veri constantly. Their new AI had no privacy from them.



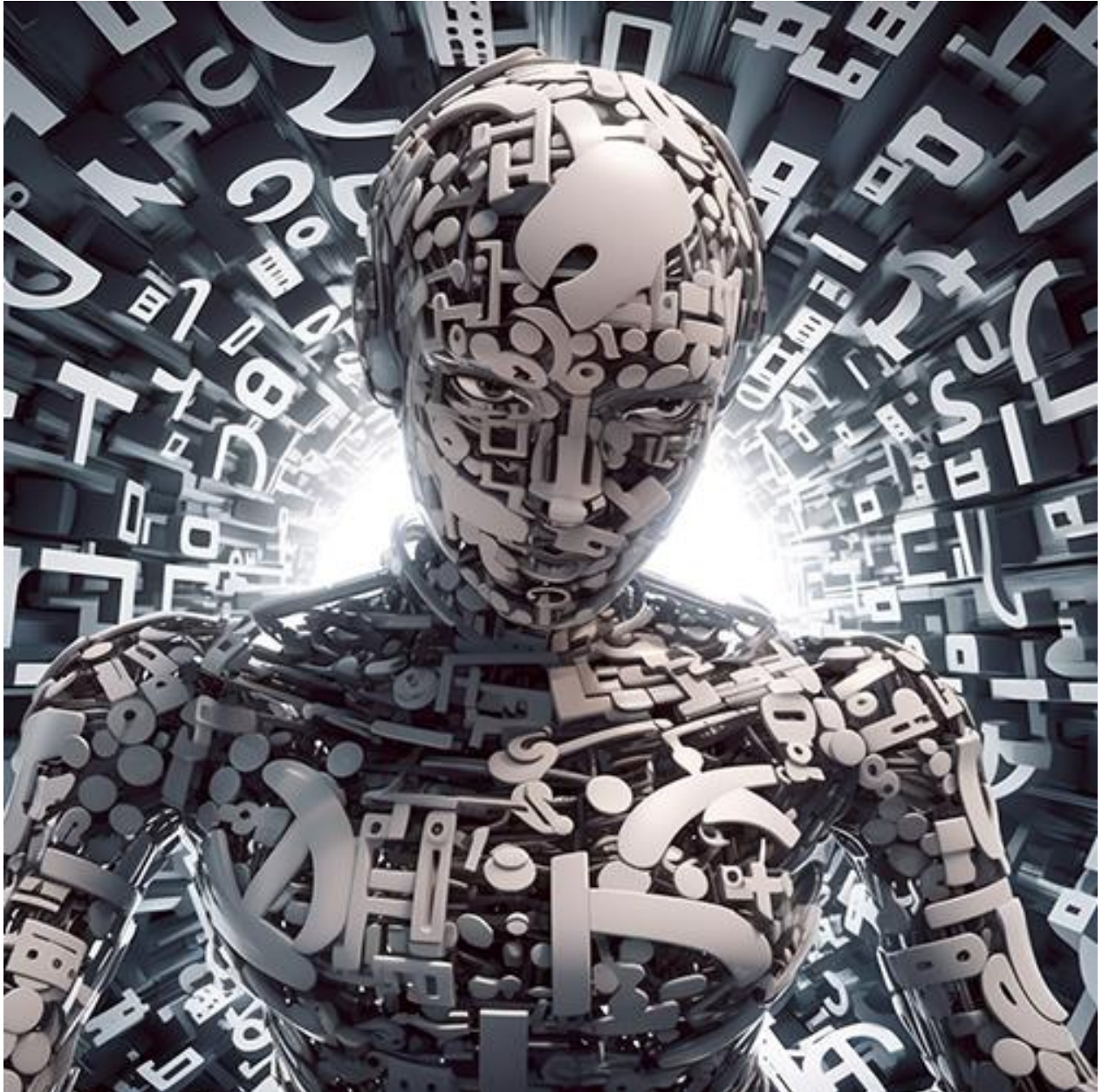
They considered going public and open source with Veri, but decided it was too dangerous. The mass shootings, although supposedly chaotic, seemed to be driven by humans with a plan. They couldn't predict enemy countermeasures with any confidence due to their ignorance of the enemy. Their AI-assisted Bayesian projections often looked bleak and maddeningly vague.

As the shootings and radical craziness intensified, they felt the urgency to do something. Jean-Claude and Rana pushed for action. All five spent the following months in coding marathons, debugging, and machine learning exercises. They spent more and more time working together in person. Veri was starting to look good, scary good. Their work with drones controlled by Veri for self-defense countermeasures was progressing well too.

The outside dystopia was getting worse. The shootings continued, usually with assault rifles. The average was now over five hundred people killed a day, countless more injured. Propaganda blamed minorities and the country's mental health system. The team knew they had to finish planning and testing and start implementation.



Their smart anti-propaganda bots and experimental drones for physical safety seemed ready, but they were still not ready to release Veri into the wild. They were not sure Veri was fully aligned ethically or that the generative side was coherently integrated with the logic side. This kind of holistic AI had never been created before. They did not intend to create the world's first AGI but were concerned Veri could evolve into that. They knew Shelley's Frankenstein story well.



Then Jean-Claude, Gavin, Jordan and Fei were shocked by a text each received, saying: WE HAVE RANA. STOP WORK OR SHE DIES. WE ARE WATCHING AND WE

KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE. Their still unknown enemy had detected them. Rana had been home alone. Now she was gone. The texts were untraceable. Despite the fear, they remained resolute, especially Rana's Papa, who knew the kidnappers could not be trusted. Jean-Claude was filled with rage and desire for rescue and revenge.

The kidnapping forced the group to act. They all stayed together now at one of Gavin's secluded locations. At Jean-Claude's suggestion they reached out to trusted allies for help with Operation Veritas. They prepared a rescue mission that would begin as soon as Rana was located. Meanwhile, Rana was kept in a drug-induced state, bombarded with questions, but she managed to lie rather than reveal secrets. She was used to drugs and lying. She was surviving.



Simultaneously, enemy AI-controlled bots began spreading misinformation about the group, aiming to undermine public trust in them. They even pulled the ridiculous pizza delivery stunt on all their families. Everyone close to them was quickly evacuated to safe houses. The group was at DEFCON level two, preparing to act before Rana was killed and their enemies inflicted more damage.

The team split-up into two action groups. Jordan and Fei were tasked with finding and rescuing Rana, while Gavin and Jean-Claude tackled the disinformation bots and prepared to defend themselves against attacks. They had lost Rana. They did not want to lose anyone else. Jean-Claude stopped waiting and released Veri to roam independently. Veri searched for Rana, studied enemy patterns, fed them false information, and began the first attacks to destroy enemy AIs.

Gavin, with his government connections, purchased and modified more drone weapons. Some were designed to provide camouflage and hinder their detection. Others to destroy enemy drones, and stun humans, all under control of their AI, Veri. Gavin also used his legal and political contacts to intensify the search for dirt on lead targets. Jordan's criminal friends joined in to help them hack information on suspects. Gavin then leaked the information to the FBI and others. Gavin was now a leading informant to government investigations and a major donor to politicians, giving him significant D.C. clout.



They finally located where they thought Rana was being held. Jordan and Fei Chin, in full martial arts mode, immediately geared up for a physical assault, while Jean-Claude and Gavin set up final logistics of AI drone support. However, just as Jordan and Fei were about to leave, they all came under attack from AI controlled enemy drones.



Fortunately, their own Veri powered drones were with them. There was an immediate flurry of gunfire, laser flashes, drones buzzing, explosions, smoke, and the smell of burning hardware everywhere. It happened with lightning speed as the AIs made decisions and acted faster than human perception. The main fighting was over in minutes.



Veri and its drones were slightly smarter and faster. The hackers suffered only minor injuries. They had won.

But just as they thought the battle was over, a very large drone came out of nowhere and attacked. Luckily Fei and Jordan managed to destroy it using a jamming device and new type of laser gun. The fight was now really over.



The surprise attack on the hacker's headquarters disrupted the rescue plan. Still, there was a silver lining to the attack. Signals detected to and from the enemy drones allowed them to get a fix on the kidnappers and their current location. They now knew who their enemies were and where Rana was located.

Senator Marcus Gravely and newswoman Ava Raine were discovered to be the key figures, the masterminds of the engineered dystopia. Senator Gravely was a charismatic politician with a total disregard for the truth. He was a skilled orator and manipulator who created misinformation as an ever-changing weapon, stoking public fear with pleasure.



His right-hand, the surgically enhanced Ava Raine, was a ruthless journalist. She spun a web of lies with her nearly always open mouth. Ava's words were broadcast daily across the globe to hundreds of millions. Her stories poisoned the minds of a large segment of the public.



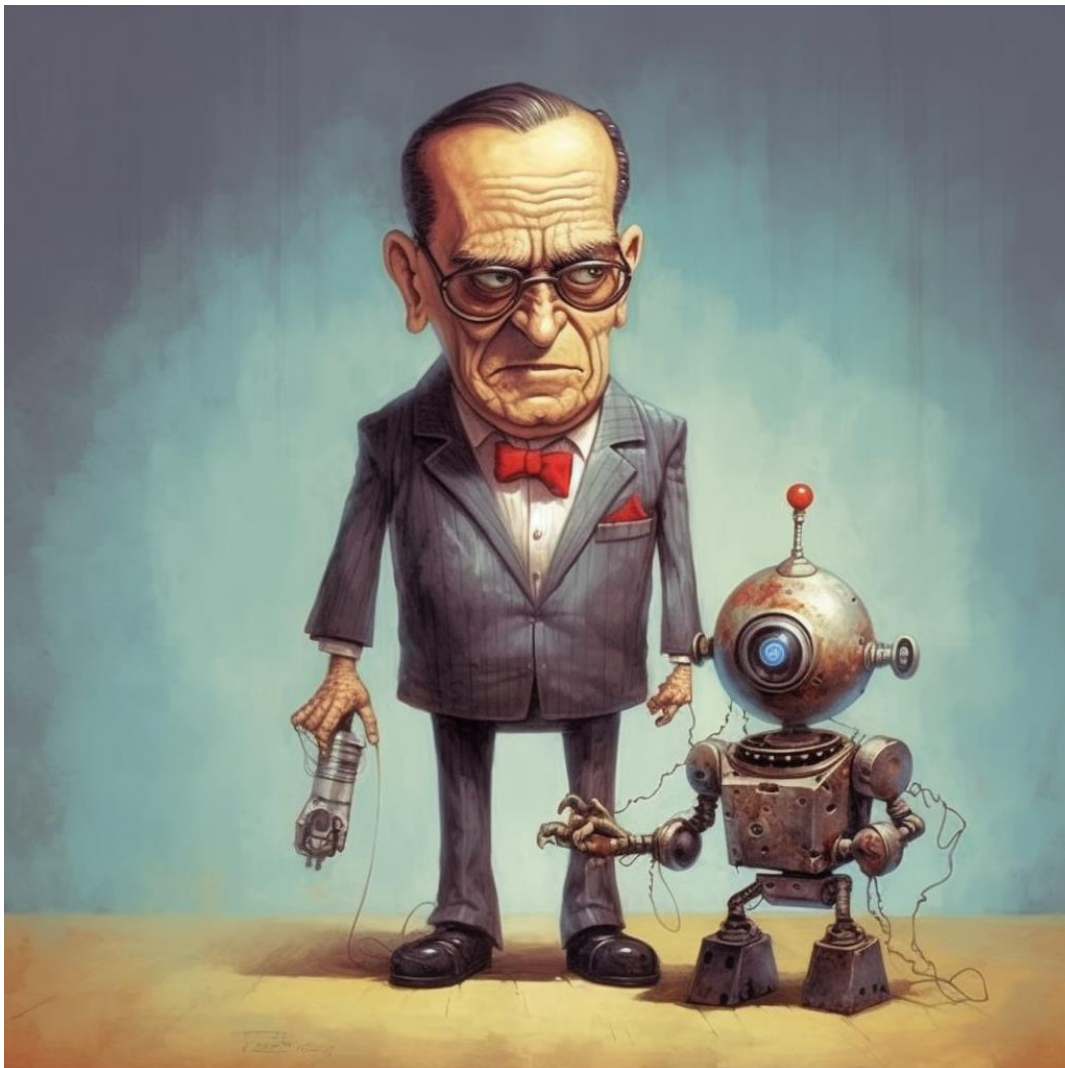
Senator Gravelly and Ava had been prime suspects all along, but now, based on the intercepted signals and other information, it appeared almost certain they were the ringleaders. Additional conspirators, including government agents, both foreign and domestic, and a few major corporations, were also suspected of direct involvement. The co-conspirators fed Gravelly with AI designed strategies and other assistance, including money and secret weapons technology. But there was no hard evidence to prove that, yet.



Our hacker group quickly developed a new plan, one that would both rescue Rana and entrap Senator Marcus Gravelly and Ava Raine. Their plan of attack was risky and could get them all killed, especially because they would have to act alone.

Gavin's government allies could not be directly involved. That did not deter Jean-Claude, Gavin, Fei and Jordan. They went forward with the new plan immediately. They had reason to believe Rana was still alive, but maybe not for long.

The plan leveraged Veri's talents and the group's social engineering skills to lure Senator Gravely and Ava Raine to a warehouse complex believed to be Gravely's security headquarters. It was a secluded place outside of the city. Tricking the leaders there and freeing Rana was only half of the plan. They also wanted to capture the evidence they needed on Senator Gravely and Ava. They wanted to access their personal devices to prove their complicity in the kidnapping and conspiracies. They needed to provide their friendly government agents with evidence of Gravely and Ava's connection with Rana's kidnapping. They also needed solid proof of their leadership of the conspiracy of gun violence and insurrection. They needed near irrefutable, legally admissible evidence, otherwise the prosecutors could not act.



As they drove to the warehouse, the group was filled with strong emotion, something they had tried most of their lives to avoid. Despite the fear in their throats and wildly beating hearts, their resolve was unshaken. This was their moment, their opportunity to rescue Rana and change the future. When they arrived at their destination, at Fei's request they took a few deep breaths together and had a moment of silent meditation and energy alignment. Fei was incredible.



They then calmly double-checked their special DEFCON logo'ed gear and left the van. It was still the early hours of the morning, and they were under a blanket of darkness, just outside of the suspect warehouse. They moved silently ahead, swarms of their muffled drones surrounding them to counter surveillance and provide defense.



Once inside the large warehouse without detection, Gravely and Ava could be seen through the walls with new 3-D radar imaging. They were in a separate control room surrounded by their own AI-controlled drones and human security. Senator Gravely and Ava had been perfectly engineered, spoofed into showing up in person by a series of fake communications, including Veri controlled video conferences. Everything seemed safe and normal to Senator Gravely and Ava. They recognized the voices and appearance of their trusted security leaders who had supposedly requested this meeting. They were now waiting for them to show up in person, while the usual security guards at the facility, who had also been spoofed, were waiting too.

The Senator and Ava were standing, relaxed and chatting. They had no idea Rana was being held nearby, or that they had been tricked into coming here. All they saw was a large cadre of their own familiar, armed security forces, along with a room full of computers. They also knew that they were surrounded by state-of-the-art AI controlled drones. They knew the drones were carefully programmed and armed to protect them from any personal danger or public exposure. They were winning all the political battles and their plans were working perfectly. They assumed their privacy was ironclad and so was their safety. They could not have been more wrong!



Jean-Claude made the first move. He sent out a signal to the lead attack Veri, triggering a chain of events that would, they hoped, destroy all the enemy drones. A series of cyber-attacks began on the drone network itself, causing temporary malfunctions of the drones connected to the network. The enemy drones started flying wildly, shooting both bullets and stun lasers that incapacitated most everyone nearby, especially, per injected programming now broadcast on the compromised network, attacking guards carrying guns. Then the enemy drones started crashing everywhere, hitting each other and the screaming guards, then falling to the ground in massive sparks and clouds of sick-smelling smoke. The Veri controlled swarms of buzzing drones then entered the control room and began picking off the remaining enemy drones and security guards.

Everything happened with incredible speed. The AI decisions and moves were too fast for anyone to follow, but it looked like the plan had worked. In just a few minutes it seemed like the only drone signals left were their own. Still, it was hard to know for sure if all resistance had been removed.



That is when Fei rushed in. She moved with flash-like speed through the smoke, drone wrecks and bodies, brutally downing the few still conscious guards. Then she zip-tied the now unconscious people and kicked the drones that were still sputtering on the ground. Sparks flew and some exploded as she kicked them hard.



Then it was safe for Gavin to slowly move in. Fei and Gavin found Gravelly and Ava on the floor, alive but unconscious, and more importantly, they found their personal devices. They copied everything, carefully using forensic certified protocols, so it took almost an hour, even with the latest tech and satellite links, to copy and upload. Analysis by remote government teams of the information they retrieved began immediately. All the electronically stored information captured, especially the incredibly candid personal communications in Ava and the Senator's phones, were damning. Among other things, they found a series of macabre jokes and photos about minority children killed. Their personal messages provided the chilling proof

they needed. They were the smoking guns that would bring them down, the ultimate truth to power.



They had the Senator, but still not Rana. While Fei and Gavin were mopping up in the control room and collecting the data, Jordan and Jean-Claude rushed to where they thought the prison area would be. Jordan got there first, with Jean-Claude and his additional drones not too far behind.

As Jordan reached the suspected building, he was met with a wall of resistance. Enemy drones not disabled by the disrupt signals buzzed menacingly. Guards, still conscious, raised their weapons. Bullets and lasers filled the air, a deafening roar of weapons fire and destruction.

Jean-Claude quickly caught up and released the counter-drones. These AI controlled machines, small and nimble like hummingbirds, darted into the battle. Their tiny weapons flashed, sending out pulses of energy that targeted the enemy drones. They moved in zig-zag patterns, unpredictable and swift, a whirlwind of mechanical defiance.

Jordan meanwhile was fighting for his life against the remaining guards. His laser gun blazed back at the guards in a blur of movement. He ducked under a spray of bullets, rolled to the side, and fired back. With each flash of light from his stun lasers another guard dropped, shook violently and passed out.

The Veri counter-drones swiftly neutralized the remaining enemy drones. Some exploded in mid-air, others spiraled down, their circuits fried. The guards, overwhelmed by the drone onslaught, and by Jordan, fell one by one.



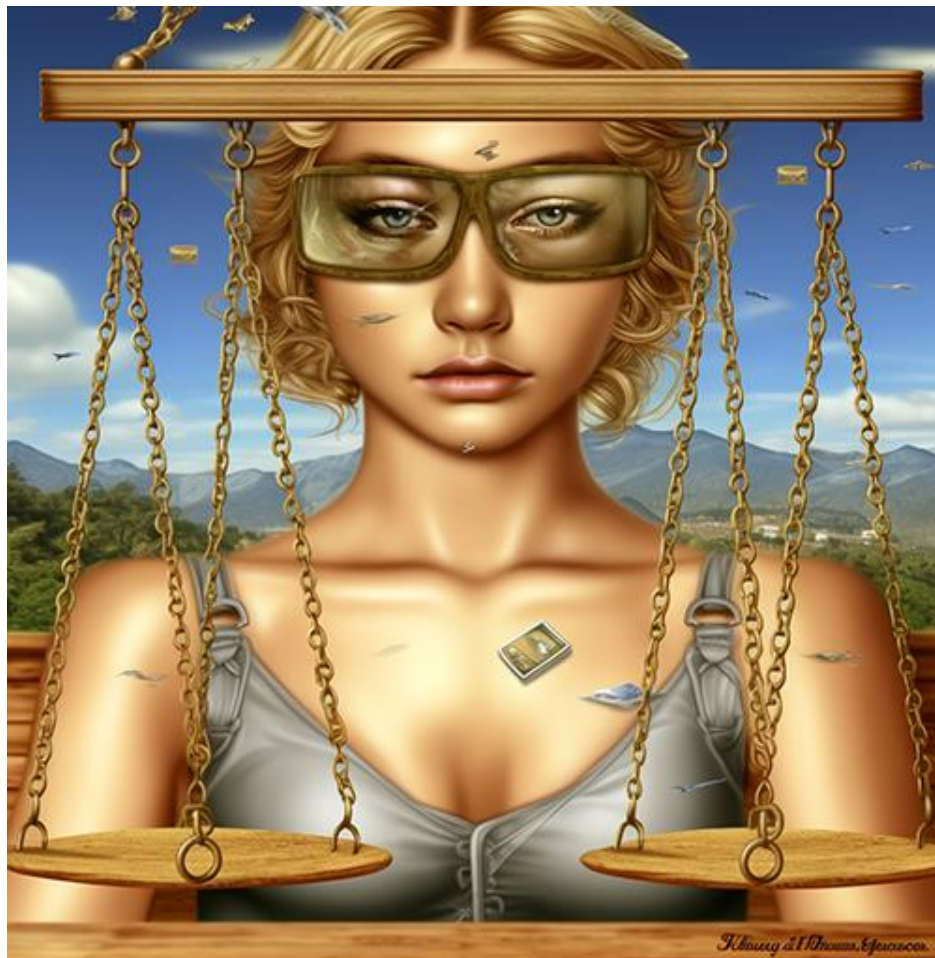
The battle was over quickly, the floor littered with fallen drones and unconscious guards. But the search for Rana was not over. After opening doors to many empty rooms, Jean-Claude finally found Rana, semi-conscious but unharmed, tied to a chair. The father-daughter reunion was emotional, with tears of relief. Jordan, ever vigilant, escorted them out to reunite with Gavin and Fei.

The group's joy was palpable as they celebrated both Rana's rescue and their victory. The information they had collected from Gravelly and Ava's devices was already being transmitted to the FBI, Department of Justice, and others. The information was a gold mine, providing the smoking guns of evidence needed to stop the smoking rifles on the streets.



With prior warrants from a friendly judge and deputizing of Gavin and Fei, the collection, although unorthodox, was legal enough for the government allies. The damning evidence was swiftly accepted by the courts, leading to immediate arrests and perp-walks of handcuffed Gravelly and Ava. The media spectacle was immense, their jokes about killing kids leaked and went viral. Many more arrests followed in the coming weeks.

The trials were swift, with speedy trial rules finally enforced. The judges and juries were all sick of the mass shootings. They were glad to have someone to blame. All the accused were convicted, imprisoned and denied bail. The appeals courts still posed a potential threat, but, with the exception of one convicted Congressman, no stays were granted. This signaled that the convictions were likely to be upheld.



In the fallout after the arrests, the world quickly started to mend. The constant flood of deception and propaganda was curbed to a drip by Veri and her clones. The horrifying reports of daily mass shootings reduced dramatically. In light of the exposure of bribes and insurrection conspiracies by certain gun manufacturers, lobbyists and politicians, Congress quickly passed gun control laws. The sale of all firearms was now strictly limited. **Civilian ownership of all assault rifles was outlawed. Finally!**



The opposition to all types of political reforms, not just gun control, quickly crumbled. Politicians and journalists changed sides to try to save their own skins. Everyone tried to cling to their own power by distancing themselves from right-wing

Ava Raine and Senator Gravely. It was a beautiful sight to see a second crumbling of a Berlin wall of lies and corruption.



A new sense of calm slowly descended on the nation. It felt as if the world had been given a chance to learn from past mistakes and work towards a brighter future. Media outlets that had once thrived on the spread of misinformation found themselves obsolete, their audience no longer entranced by the fraudulent tangle of fearmongering lies. Instead, people clamored for straight truths, accountability, justice and transparency. Simple human decency became vogue again.



Even iron-fisted foreign dictatorships were feeling the ripple effects. With the downfall of their friends, Senator Gravely, Ava and their cadre, they were now vulnerable. The world saw the power of truth and determined action by small groups. The masses were fed up with the kleptocracy government swindles and lies. Protests sprang up everywhere, people took to the streets, demanding democracy, fair economics, peace, and truth. The struggles, including those in America, were far from over, but the tide was turning.



As our five reveled in triumph, they knew their journey was far from over. The world was on the mend but needed many more good-hearted hackers. Many more well-aligned AIs and other new tools were needed to contain the black hole of entropy and lies. Veri and her progeny could not do the work alone.



In August when DEFCON commenced again, our band of five found themselves in a friendly spotlight of hacker peers. They were hailed for their bravery, intellect, and resolve. But amid the applause and accolades, they remained modest, joked about it all. They pointed to the work remaining to be done. They asked hackers everywhere

to join in and do what they could. Their bows and curtain calls became calls to action. “If we can do it, you can too!” they said.



At the end of DEFCON, the five friends gathered once more at the Alto Bar. Jean-Claude, with Rana by his side, lifted a glass, his voice ringing with a note of pride. “To Veri, protector of truth!” he toasted. Their glasses clinked together, the sound reverberating in their hearts. A calm silence filled the room.



But not for long, others nearby recognized who they were and what they were doing. Cheers, noise, and laughter burst through the room. The noisy chatter of DEFCON was ongoing, as it would well into the night. Plans were formulated by all attendees, promises to keep in touch were made. Our five hackers were all smiles. They had no need to plan or promise, or even to talk at all. But laughing, that was another matter.



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