# Last Thoughts

Greg Allen sat down after finishing his speech, which would have been deeply moving if he had not delivered it tearlessly and in a complete monotone. Even so, the average saltwater release from the eyes of the other mourners increased during Greg's speech. He had a way with words, so when he decided to make a speech touching, it was. Truth be told, Greg wasn't sad; he never cared much for his now-deceased father. But since a funeral was almost like a contest for who could give the most touching speech anyway, he figured he might as well play along.

He wasn't happy either, of course. He never was. He would have considered suicide, but that was for losers; a petty and pathetic way to exit, really. He had been bored for as long as he could remember. He had no one he particularly cared for nor any activity he particularly enjoyed. Even computer programming, which Greg was awfully good at and found at least vaguely interesting, didn't break into the realm of actually enjoyable. He spent loads of time programming, but only as an alternative to sitting around doing absolutely nothing. Programming was just a more productive version of minesweeper for Greg. He sometimes speculated that he might enjoy programming more (or enjoy anything more, really) if it had some purpose behind it that he could really put his heart into. Until three years previously, the only "purpose" he'd had for programming had been lining his father's pocketbook, which just didn't cut it.

And then Greg's father had pledged his fortune to charity. Greg hadn't been fooled, of course; he knew that his father didn't actually care about the recipients of his aid, and was only giving them money because it bought him popularity, and he had run out of other things to spend his money on. However, it still presented an opportunity for Greg, as it would finally give him a feeling of purpose for his labor. Or so he had thought. He had been surprised to discover that having a new "purpose" made his work no less dull than it had been before, and it was only then that he noticed his own hypocrisy: he never cared about the recipients of his fathers aid; he only wanted his own life to become more enjoyable, and had imagined that thinking his work improved the lives of others would make it so. He now knew that the hypocrisy of his past self was laughable; as if he could honestly care about the well-being of others while knowing that everyone else merely pretended to.

Now, though, he was under no such illusions, and his father hadn't even come close to getting rid of his wealth; the rest were his billions. And if someone of Greg's abilities couldn't do anything grand and exciting with four billion dollars and effective control over the largest nanotechnology company in the world, that would be really pathetic. Problem was, he still had trouble thinking of something he wanted to do with all that. He thought through his options while, with a small corner of his mind, he paid just enough attention to the speech being delivered by one of his father's associates for him to verify that he was still firmly winning the touching speech contest (he was). It might have been even easier just to pay attention to other peoples' reactions, which gave the same result, but, people being idiots, Greg did not see audience reaction as a good measure of how touching a speech was.

Anyway, the world was going to hell in a handbasket, but Greg just didn't feel like saving it. He'd figured out long ago that the world's future was bleak, and when he did, his first reaction had been to want to save it, which he had not had the resources to do on his own at the time. Greg had been astonished when he tried to explain to people what had to be done so that they would help him. They had all reacted with distant, apathetic confidence that everything would work itself out. Remembering this gave Greg an interesting idea: if he wasn't going to stop the apocalypse, he might as well help bring it on. That'll show 'em. It would not be easy, but he was sure he could do it. *They'll never see it coming,* he thought, *and just maybe, it will even be fun.*

"What the hell is that?" asked Chris, pointing to a widening dark blob near Perth on the space station's artificial window.

"I dunno," said Robert, and then, after staring at it for a while, corrected himself, "Grey goo!" They alerted mission control, and received only the short reply, "We know." Then they stared in silence at the horde of self-replicating nanobots as it built more members of itself out of the countryside.

A few large explosions started occurring in and around the expanding circle of grey goo at ever increasing frequency. It appeared that the nuclear powers of the world were using everything they had in an attempt to destroy the nanobots before the nanobots destroyed the world. Soon, most of western Australia and the surrounding ocean was obscured by dusty radioactive clouds. For a few hours, it looked like it may have worked. Then they saw the grey goo creep out from under the haze.

At that point, it was quite clear to both of them that it was over for Earth, but Robert still had hope that the space-faring countries would be able to evacuate enough people and supplies for humanity to live on in space. Or maybe he just wished he had hope; he knew better than to think that such an outcome was likely. He wasn't sure how long it would take for the nanobot horde to finish destroying the world, but it looked like less than a week. It would take a miracle to set up a self-sufficient space colony in that little time. He felt a little guilty for thinking of his own survival while looking at humanity's destruction, but when he thought about it, it made sense. After all, any normal person, himself included, would want some part of humanity to survive even when faced with their personal doom, and he figured he shouldn't feel guilty over wanting for himself what anyone else would want for him as well.


It took three days for the grey goo to consume the world, but only one day for Greg Allen to bask in the glory of his own success. He was already on the other side of the world when he set off the nanobot rampage. That gave him two days of reflection after the euphoria wore off. He had read a study on people who survived jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. Every single one of them regretted the decision to jump as soon as it was too late. But Greg had not thought to consider his own actions and mentality in light of that result until he had been falling for a day after jumping off the highest bridge in the universe with the Earth on his back. After all, those other people were merely human. It was too easy for him to forget that he was not really so different from the rest of humanity.

On the morning of the second day of the apocalypse, Greg decided that he had had his fun, and no longer wanted to end either his own life or the rest of the world. He tried to deactivate the nanobots. But he had not built them to have a deactivation command. They did use very limited radio communication to optimize their dispersion pattern, and he tried to take advantage of this to hack them, but even knowing exactly how they were put together, and even being Greg Allen, he couldn't do it in two days. He swore he could have done it if he had a week. But that did not comfort him, because for the first time in his life, it wasn't about what he could do. It wasn't about Greg Allen saving the world (he wasn't sure it would even count if he succeeded, seeing as he was the cause of the problem); it was about the world not getting destroyed, and the world would be destroyed.

There wasn't much time left when Greg finished putting together a signal that, if broadcast, should theoretically slow down the nanobots' dispersion, though not stop them. If this worked well enough, it was conceivable it could buy him enough time to save a tiny portion of the Earth. He started broadcasting the signal. The nanobots immediately responded, slowing their advance by a little less than 1%. That was disappointing. Greg Allen slammed his face against his desk, got back up after a few seconds, and started sorting through his code looking for obvious suboptimalities. He couldn't find any, but in his sleep-deprived state, and with his code being an absolute mess, he probably wouldn't have been able to find anything anyway. And he was starting to doubt his whole approach. Not that he had any better ideas that he could implement in six hours.

Greg stepped outside for the first time since setting off the horde. He saw a plume of rocket exhaust in the distance, presumably humanity's final attempt at self-preservation. *Good luck folks*, he thought at it. Not that he was under the illusion that luck would do them any good; he'd thought of that back when he was planning the end of the world, and hadn't been too bothered by the possibility that it

would work. Whatever was on that rocket, there was no way it was enough to sustain a civilization in space. He appreciated the attempt, though. Come to think of it, he realized that this was the first and only time that he had ever been grateful to someone for trying to fix his mistakes, and they probably hadn't even connected him to it at all.

Jim pointed the nose of his Citabria down the runway, opened the throttle, and, once the airplane was moving fast enough, pulled back on the stick, took off, and climbed. He wasn't sure that his urge to get in just a couple more hours of life was entirely rational, but hell, it's not like it would do any damage, so why not? The grey goo swept over the airport that he had taken off from. The nanobot activity was messing with the air pressure, which in turn messed with his altimeter, so he had no idea how high he was when he looked down and saw two fronts of grey goo converge on the last unmolested piece of the Earth's surface.

Jim was high enough above the Earth that he could not see, but at that very point, Greg Allen was lying on the ground, using his last moments to sunbathe after giving up on stopping the horde. "Goodbye world," Greg sighed, and chuckled. It was too bad that it would have been too difficult to make the nanobots self-replicate much more slowly in human flesh, for Greg had always wanted to know what it would feel like to be disassembled by nanobots. He had thought of this before his conversion of course, but as long as he was going to die anyway, it was still true. The nanobots ate through Greg's flesh more slowly than nerves transmitted information to his brain, but they finished their job well before Greg's brain had time to do anything useful with the signals.

Jim turned the radio to the air-to-air channel and asked if anyone was there. Someone answered, identifying himself as Steve. They talked for two and a half hours, at first about their airplanes and then later mainly about their families and jobs, as if they would be returning to their normal lives sometime after they landed. Then Steve ran out of fuel, and reported this fact to Jim, along with gradual updates on how close he thought he was to the deadly ground.

"God bless," Jim said.

Steve didn't answer; there was only static, and Jim was alone. He only then realized that he didn't believe in God anymore; God would never let this happen to His creation. Which meant there was no heaven either of course. This was really the end, then. Jim would have expected that thinking this would make him more terrified of death, but strangely, it did not. In a perverse sort of way, the immediate nature of his impending death made him latch onto the idea. It felt almost like this was the way things were meant to end, and the possibility of some miracle resulting in his rescue seemed, in some part of his mind, like a threat to the perfect resolution of his life. Which really goes to show how unlikely he saw it as. Damn human brains; they're never satisfied when they succeed, and always manage to trick themselves into thinking it was what they wanted all along when they fail.

Jim ran out of fuel. He pushed the stick forward, accelerating downwards, and before he reached the ground, he pulled the stick all the way back, pulling the Citabria into its final loop, and then let it plummet straight into the ground.