

COVID-22



GUY LANE

Covid-22

Guy Lane

Contents

Chapter 1 - New Mission	4
Chapter 2 - Local Markets	5
Chapter 3 - Briefing	11
Chapter 4 - Dubai	15
Chapter 5 - Jakarta.....	20
Chapter 6 - Mistake.....	23
Chapter 7 - Consequence	26
Chapter 8 - Russia	29
Chapter 9 - Military Bar	32
Chapter 10 - Nuclear Subs	37
Chapter 11 - Death #6.....	41
Chapter 12 - Khazakstan	52
Chapter 13 - No USA.....	56
Chapter 14 - Sneeze Once	58
Chapter 15 - R-Nought 55.....	62
Chapter 16 - Aftermath	68

Chapter 1 - New Mission

*The year is 2022. The Covid-19
pandemic is mostly over.
Around the world, Governments
are weary of its return.*

Ring! Ring!

The phone goes off in the middle
of the night.

A man wakes, sober and alone. He
takes the call.

The caller is his boss announcing a
new mission to deliver five
packages to counterparts in five
countries, and then come home.

It's a strange mission, what with
Covid-19 and all, the man thinks.

The man is *Special Undercover
Agent Wally Groodle*.

Wally Groodle accepts the mission.

Chapter 2 - Local Markets

If you get up early enough, you might see Wally Groodle at the Local Markets. He's the healthy, sporty guy with the racer bicycle and the spandex bike pants. He's the guy who always gets the first organic Soy-Latte.

In some cultures, the first trade is the lucky trade, but Wally is such an early-riser that he sometimes places his order before the coffee machine is even warm.

So Wally Groodle has to wait, and he charms the barista with a witty tale, something he read in a popular magazine; something everyone can identify with, assuming they are plugged into the mainstream culture. But Wally Groodle is not one for small talk; he's into big talk, and he quickly finds a way to turn idle conversation into something meaningful.

For example, Wally Groodle might say, "Hey, there's a new recipe for

smashed avocado” and follow up with, “if there is so much food, why is there so much hunger?”

It’s called an ‘If & Why’ question, and Wally Groodle has many of them.

If there is so much wealth, why is there so much poverty?

If renewable energy is so cheap, why are we still burning fossil fuels?

If burning fossil fuels will lead to a cascade of climate tipping points that will plunge the planet into the hothouse that will eradicate most forms of life, then why (*the ‘f’*) are we still burning fossil fuels?

“How’s your book coming along?” asks the barista, squeezing the metal tube on the coffee machine, willing the to warm up, faster.

Wally Groodle replies cryptically, “If I had the time to sit down and smash it out, I don’t see why I couldn’t complete the first draft in a few weeks.”

“What’s it called again?”

“If & Why.”

“What?”

“The book is called: If & Why. For example, if the Great Barrier Reef is dying from heat, why is the government handing out new fossil fuel exploration leases?”

The poor barista has been hearing about this book for years. *“Right,”* he says. *“You want sugar with this?”*

Wally is tall and angular and has the superficial, pop-culture hallmarks of someone who ticks all the right boxes. He is healthy to the point of extreme. His preferred fitness regime is *Zuu*; you should see him do his Frog-Gorilla duo technique.

Wally Groodle doesn’t normally drink alcohol. When he socialises at a bar he asks for ‘Arctic water’ which is to say, chilled but ice-free.

Wally Groodle is an extrovert, social butterfly and his favourite haunt is the Local Markets. Most regulars at the market know Wally Groodle, and he says 'Hi' a hundred times a day. Wally Groodle is a known quantity.

But he also has a secret that most people don't know about: a *Top Secret*. Over the years Wally Groodle has undertaken studies and developed knowledge and networks that make him very important to the government.

Wally Groodle is a *Special Undercover Agent*, and his expertise is *covert international diplomacy*, the zone that borders the white and the grey, the legal and the shady. Wally Groodle is not a spook, but he could be; he palls around with people who know spies; and all his missions are *Top Shelf Secret*.

Plus, he's a freelancer. Because he doesn't officially work for the government he can say and do things that salaried man could only

dream of. And, as a specialist freelancer, he makes the big bucks.

And he spends big bucks on grooming. He is often seen in chemist shops intently studying the ingredients in shampoos and conditioners.

For a cover, Wally Groodle tells people that he runs a small IT consultancy which is sort of true. He has a small circle of friends, and being an introvert with Australian Security Intelligence Office (ASIO) clearance, his relationships tend to be few and shallow, albeit caring.

Wally is handsome in an odd sort of way. Despite his strong physique and peppy attitude, his most noticeable features are his Roman nose and *John Howard* eyebrows. Despite constant grooming, he can never get the eyebrows under control. His eyebrows are as containable as lantana in a Queensland national park.

All this put together says that Wally Groodle is a good guy to have in the mix: a charming, talented and intelligent empath.

He's a bit odd, but otherwise engaging. He's a great guy to have around, although he's almost never there.

There is really nothing wrong with Wally Groodle.

Yet.

Chapter 3 - Briefing

Wally Groodle reports to his ASIO handler in the afternoon of the phone call. The venue is a small office located on the Air Force Base outside of Brisbane, Australia.

The handler is terse, odd, dressed like he is going to a 70's funeral. He stands in front of a map of the world, holding a laser pointer.

"Agent Orange," the handler says, addressing Wally Groodle with his official undercover title. He activates the laser pointer, and circles the green laser dot across various nations on the map. *"Your mission is to deliver packages to your counterpart in the five nations here, here, here, here and here. Your counterpart will be recognised by the password "R-Nought-55".*

"R-Nought-55. Yes, Sir," says Wally Groodle, studying the map.

“You will depart this location on a private jet to the first location: Dubai. Questions?”

“Yes, Sir. How do I manage the international travel restrictions with respect to the Covid-19 pandemic?” Wally asks.

“Your diplomatic passport will provide you unfettered travel between these location. However, you will be required to follow all Covid-safe instructions of the host nation.”

“Hmmm,” thinks Wally Groodle. “Quarantines. Weeks holed up in five star hotels. I might even get my book finished.”

The handler continues, *“As a precaution, we are giving you a dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, right now.”*

“Ahhh!” says Wally Groodle, apprehensively. He never did like needles.

Covid-22

“Which vaccine is this one?” Wally Groodle asks as a young nurse enters the room.

“This is the Oxford-Astra-Zeneca vaccine,” the nurse says as she upends a glass vial and inserts the steel hypodermic needle. *“Left or right arm?”*

“The strongest arm,” says Wally Groodle, rolling up his right sleeve to display a taut bicep. *“What’s in it?”*

“It’s a just bit of monkey snot,” says the ASIO handler, gruffly. *“Shut up and take the jab.”*

Wally Groodle winces as the needle punctures his flesh.

Once the wound is patched with a sticky bandage, the nurse gives Wally Groodle a square of paper from inside the vaccine vial box. It is thin paper, folded over many times with tiny writing on it. *“That will answer all your questions,”* she says.

“Good to go, Agent Orange?” asks the handler, placing a leather bag on the table.

Wally opens the bag and counts five packages. *“Good to go, Sir.”*

He raises the bag, but his strong arm has gone weak and numb, so he swaps, and carries the bag with his left hand.

Chapter 4 - Dubai

Wally boards a Gulfstream jet and is flown for eight hours to the United Arab Emirates. His first package is to be delivered to man in the Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Dubai.

During the flight he peruses the information about the Covid vaccine that swills through his bloodstream. He unfolds the square of paper and squints at the words. They are too tiny to be read by the naked eye, so he retrieves a pair of reading glasses. Even with this magnification, the words are too small to see, so he retrieves his spare reading glasses and angles one pair against the other until the words become legible.

Squinting through one eye, Wally Groodle learns that the vaccine is made from *a weakened chimpanzee adenovirus*, a virus that gives chimps the common cold.

“Hmmm,” says Wally Groodle, taking it all in. *“That explains the monkey snot joke.”* He rubs his arm wondering whether having bits of chimpanzee drifting through his bloodstream is such a good idea. He knows’ its not, but he’s safe from Covid, right? That’s got to be worth the risk.

The Gulfstream touches down at Dubai international airport and Wally Groodle is surprised to see a welcoming party. Airport security and customs enter the plane, accompanied by a nurse.

The Customs guy tells him, *“It is a condition of your entry to the United Arab Emirates that you accept the Covid vaccine.”*

“We are all good there,” says Wally Groodle, lifting up his sleeve to show off the bandage. *“I got a shot of Zeneca monkey snot back in Oz.”*

“The official Covid vaccine of UAE is the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine.”

“But I’ve already had a Covid vaccine,” protests Wally Groodle.

“You haven’t had ‘our’ Covid vaccine.”

“Oh, dang!” Wally Groodle rolls up his left sleeve and winces as the needle enters his arm. *“The last coronavirus vaccine had monkey in it. What’s in this one?”*

“This one has coronavirus in it.”

“What?”

“It’s a deactivated coronavirus,” says the nurse, reassuringly.

After the Covid jab and passing customs, Wally Groodle is allowed off the plane, cradling his bag of packages in both arms, now. There is a limousine waiting for him, and he is driven to the Jumeirah Beach Hotel, an opulent and massive resort that overlooks the Gulf.

Along the way, Wally Groodle lowers the limo window and takes in the spectacular view of Dubai. Wally Groodle observes the opulence of glitzy tall buildings and

supercars. He gazes across vast urban landscapes, but his view is interrupted by an old white bus with rust streaks down the side. All the windows in the bus are open, and listless, worn-out South Asian men can be seen inside, returning to their squalid shacks after a day of exhausting labour in the Middle Eastern sun.

“If and why?” thinks Wally Groodle, disturbed by the suffering of the men who built this extraordinary city. *“If there is so much wealth here, why are the guest workers given so little?”*

At the Jumeirah Beach Resort, Wally Groodle checks into his suite and reviews his itinerary. His mission is to meet his counterpart, Ahmed, at 6pm. And don't forget the code: *R-Nought-55*.

At ten to six in the evening, Wally Groodle ascends to the Uptown Bar on the 24th floor. He orders tomato juice and wanders out onto the balcony to take in the stunning views of the *Burj Al Arab* hotel

that is located on a man made island a few hundred meters distant. Huge spotlights bathe the side of the Burj in multi-coloured light.

Wally Groodle becomes aware of a presence close by, and he turns to see a tall, suited Arab man standing right behind him, wearing a pale blue R-95 facemask. The Arab man leans forward and mutters something unintelligible with a heavy accent.

"I'm sorry," asks Wally Groodle, suddenly concerned.

The man looks around to see they are alone. He lowers his mask and says, *"I not so good with English. Arenoort-55."*

"Right. Well that's kinda close enough." Wally Groodle retrieves the manila folder and passes it to the man, who slips it silently inside his blazer pocket and turns to move away.

Wally Groodle eases a sigh of relief. *"That was easy."*

Chapter 5 - Jakarta

After a few days enjoying Dubai, Wally Groodle steps aboard a commercial flight to Jakarta, Indonesia. The First Class Service is excellent and he notices that the ache is gone in both arms. He's as good as new, and is able to carry the bag - now containing four manila folders - in either hand, with no discomfort.

At Jakarta International arrivals, an Indonesian national politely asks him to accompany her to a waiting room. He is there ten minutes or so before the door opens and a customs guy, a security guard and a nurse enter the room.

"Oh, not again," says Wally Groodle.

"It is a condition of entry into Indonesia that..." begins the customs guy.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Covid vaccine I get it. I've already had two. Two. Which one have you got here?"

Covid-22

“Here we use the Chinese Covid-19 vaccine,” says the nurse.

“Bingo!” says Wally Groodle with a flourish. *“I’ve already had it, just a few days ago, in Dubai.”*

“Oh, no,” says the nurse. *“In Dubai they use the Sinopharm vaccine. This one is Sinovac.”*

“Sinopharm! Sinovac!” Wally Groodle arcs up. *“What’s the damned difference?”*

The customs guy intervenes, *“This is CoronaVac, and you cannot enter Indonesia without it.”*

“What do I look like? Shiva?” Wally Groodle explodes. *“How many arms do you think I have here? This is madness. I want to call my embassy.”*

The security guy steps forward, and Wally Groodle raises his hands to calm the situation, *“It’s all good, mate. I just need to make a call.”*

It takes twenty minutes for Wally Groodle to get through to his

handler. The handler is gruff and direct, and asks, *“Do you remember when I asked if you accepted the mission?”*

“Yes,” says Wally Groodle.

“And what did you say?”

“I said I would accept the mission.”

“Then take the jab and stop whingeing.”

Wally Groodle ends the call, perplexed. *“Does it have to go in the arm?”* he asks the nurse.

“I can put it in the thigh”.

Mumbling angrily, Wally Groodle drops his dacks and grimaces as the steel needle once more pierces his skin.

Chapter 6 - Mistake

Later, Wally Groodle is in a pensive mood, sitting at the bar of the Jakarta Hilton, his fist gripped around the base of a whiskey glass. Normally, he doesn't drink, and has been getting light-headed just sniffing the vapour of the whiskey.

He has spent the afternoon researching Covid vaccines and is mightily unimpressed with all the foreign material that has been injected into his body over the past few days.

Remember, this is a guy who arcs up when he reads the ingredients of his hair conditioner.

Wally Groodle hears a familiar accent and looks up to see a countryman approach the bar. The Aussie guy rubs his upper arm as he settles himself on the stool.

"Covid jab?" asks Wally Groodle.

"Yeah. The bastards got me at airport on the way in. What's in it, do you reckon? Bleach?"

“You can use bleach as a Covid vaccine,” says Wally Groodle, glumly. “But it has low efficacy and serious contraindications.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means it doesn’t work and will probably kill you. The shot you got at the airport contains deactivated coronavirus.”

“Shit, hey? I hope it bloody works.”

Wally Groodle nods, and drifts off in his thoughts. Minutes later he is distracted and he turns back to the Aussie guy who is looking at him intently.

The Aussie guy leans forwards conspiratorially and says, “*R-nought-fifty-five*,” and gives a knowing nod.

“Ah, yes, the package,” thinks Wally Groodle. *“Shit! Where’s the package?”*

He forgot all about it and left it in his room.

He thinks quickly and says, *“It’s in a safe space. Stay here for five minutes and I’ll retrieve it.”*

Stepping off his stool, Wally Groodle moves quickly towards his suite. It’s a big hotel, and he wonders whether he can get back within the allotted time. Why did he say five minutes and not fifteen?

When he returns ten minutes later, the Aussie Guy is gone, and Wally Groodle gets a disturbing feeling. Failure is not an option in this business. And there will be consequences.

Chapter 7 - Consequence

The consequence arrives at 3am, the witching hour. Wally Groodle wakes with a boot pressed into his chest, bouncing him up and down against the bedsprings. A powerful light beams into his face. Gasping for breath, he covers a forearm across his eyes but the arm is dragged away by powerful hands and he is hauled out of the bed and onto the floor. A heavy man sits on top of him, pinning Wally Groodle to the ground.

“What happens next?” wonders Wally Groodle? A bullet to the head? A garotting?

The man activates a zoom call on his smart phone and Wally Groodle views the screen with the one eye that is not squished into the carpet. It's his ASIO handler looking mightily pissed.

“Agent Orange, you failed me! So I took a look at your file. What sort of name is Groodle, anyway?”

"It's Albanian," says Wally Groodle from the side of his mouth that is free to move.

"I'll give you one more shot at delivering the package to our Jakarta man. But, one more slipup and I'll excise you from this agency like a tick torn from a spaniel's ear. You understand?"

"Loud and clear, Sir," mumbles Wally Groodle into the carpet.

Then the heavy weight is released, and Wally Groodle hears his assailants depart the hotel suite. He lies on the floor, gasping for breath, trying to ascertain if the brutes cracked any ribs. Eventually, he crawls from the floor and onto the bed where he falls into a restless.

Wally Groodle dreams of the old houseboat that was his home in the final year of his studies. The *Good Ship Olive Oyl* was anchored close to the shore in the Noosa River. She was ugly and old, and leaked from above and below. On the high

tide, moving from the boat to the shore meant lowering your body into belly-deep water. Sometimes the water was deeper still. Up to the chest, even.

In his dream: Wally Groodle steps off the houseboat in the dark, and the cold, salty water rises to his chin. There are rays down there, hugging the sandy bottom. And Bull Sharks. And funny looking shrimp with long feelers that move in and out of the long, fibrous weed that cover the underside of the boat. He takes a hesitant step towards shore and lands his foot on the back of a ray that startles and flaps away. Something hard brushes against his leg. Is that a Bull Shark sniffing him out for a meal??

Wally Groodle wakes with a start!

He lays in the bed, exhausted, tense and breathless. Sunlight is coming in through the gap in the curtains. Another day begins on Planet Earth. Another day to survive or die trying.

Chapter 8 - Russia

Over breakfast, Wally Groodle gathers his thoughts and realises that he has lost his composure. All this Covid vaccine business has thrown his compass. He's gotten quite discombobulated by it all. He needs to be the master of his destiny, and that begins by knowing what comes next. He reviews the list of packages and spends some time googling the Covid-safe protocols of the respective nations he is yet to visit. Once he has dispensed with the package for the Jakarta Connection, the next venue is Russia where they have the *Sputnik-V Covid vaccine*.

Sputnik-V was famously the first-ever Covid vaccine, hence the reference to Sputnik, the first orbiting satellite, launched by the Russians. The 'V' in Sputnik-V refers to the word Vaccine, but the dumb Western journalists see the V as the Roman numeral for 5, so they call it Sputnik-5, and

everyone gets confused. How can it be the first if it is #5?

Touching down at Vladivostok International, Wally Groodle psyches himself for another injection and subconsciously donates his right buttock for the cause. Off the plane, he is taken aside by burly, grouchy men, and left to his own devices in a stark, cold waiting room. When the door opens, Wally Groodle lowers his pants and leans over the table, ready for the jab. Seconds pass, and nothing happens.

He glances around to see two Russian officials looking at him with peculiar frowns. One of the Russians says something that roughly translates to, “Stupid *Kangaroo Boy*.”

The other Russian speaks passable English, albeit with a heavy accent. He informs Wally Groodle, “*You in Russia now, Kangaroo Boy. Outside is corridor. One way is gulag. Other way is Kalshnikov*

bullet. Put your pants on. Grow some balls."

Embarrassed, Wally Groodle raises his pants, and zips up his fly.

"You're not going to give me the Sputnik?" he asks, perplexed.

"You want satellite up your ass?"

"No. Actually, I am all good now," says Wally Groodle, blushing as he tucks-in his shirt.

Chapter 9 - Military Bar

Delivering the third package in Vladivostock is a hair-raising ordeal on the grounds of an abandoned factory at night. A military helicopter passes low overhead, a distant machine gun fires, and a truck that looks like a tank pulls up, its headlights pinning Wally Groodle against a chain-mail fence.

Through the glare of light, a sinister looking man with a moustache steps out of the vehicle with his hand resting on the stock of an AK-47 machine gun. He moves into Wally Groodle's personal space.

Wally Groodle is wracked with pangs of death fear, knowing that if the armed Russian wanted him gone, it would be all over in a second. A few rounds from an AK is all it takes.

After what seems an age, the big Russian man makes a growling noise that sounds sort of like,

“Arrrrrrr. Noooooort. Fiefty. Feive.”

“Ahhh. Yes. Excellent. Fantastic. Wonderful,” fumbles Wally Groodle, never so happy to hear a poorly spoken password, and hand over a package.

Then the big Russian slaps his hand on Wally Groodle’s shoulder and declares, *“Hey! You the Kangaroo Boy!”*

He turns to his mates in the black truck and shouts *“This Kangaroo Boy!”* There is the sound of cheers and laughter from the truck. *“You come. We make drinking,”* says the burly Russian.

“Thanks so much for the kind offer,” says Wally Groodle, *“but I really must be getting back to my...”*

Before he can finish his sentence, a burly hand forces him through the glare of the headlights and into the back of the truck.

“*Sanitise*,” instructs one of the soldiers inside the truck. Wally Groodle puts out his hands expecting a dollop of gel, but instead gets a dash of vodka.

“*Rub, rub*,” says the soldier showing him how. Wally Groodle rubs the vodka into his hands as he sped away into the dark night in a truck full of drunk Russian military men.

When he finally emerges from the truck, he is outside a venue that looks like a hybrid between a Red Army military base and a nightclub.

There is an armoured personnel carrier painted pink and white, anti-aircraft guns draped in flashing lights, and a *TOS-1 thermobaric multi rocket launch system* with bikini-clad girls in fur boots dancing on the hull. Hypnotic trance music pumps out of the venue, and there is the scent of gun-smoke, vehicle exhaust, perfume and hashish: an aroma of opportunity, the opportunity die in a foreign land.

Wally Groodle is hustled into the nightclub surrounded by a wall of Russian muscle, then directed to a booth where a bevy of Slavic beauties ensure that he is comfortably seated. Shortly, he is joined by the burly Russians who abducted him. Stockholm syndrome quickly follows.

Two glasses are plonked before him: a tumbler that is promptly filled with cranberry juice, and a shot glass overflowing with vodka.

“What sort of vodka is this?” asks Wally Groodle.

“Is treeple feeltered woka,” says the burly host.

“I mean what brand?”

“Votever is on special.”

The booth is filled with laughter, and the playful slaps and kisses that Wally Groodle receives tells him that he is among friends tonight. He can let his guard down, tonight.

“F**k it!” Wally Groodle skulls the vodka, slaps the glass on the table.
“Fill her up, comrade!”

Chapter 10 - Nuclear Subs

Wally Grooodle wakes to the sound of a Russian vacuum cleaner.

He opens one eye to see the floor under the table. There's broken glass and cigarette butts down there, and little squares of paper.

Slowly, he raises himself, taking stock of the pounding inebriation that occupies his head. It's a peculiar experience waking in this Russian nightclub. He slowly looks around the empty booths and his attention is drawn to a large metallic structure that pokes a long barrel through a purpose built hole in the roof. The machine is the *Tulip*, a huge motorised mortar that can lob an explosive shell over 20 kilometres. Setting it off at midnight was the highlight of the night. Wally Grooodle's ears are still ringing from the *boom!* when the cannon went off.

Then Wally Grooodle takes stock of the debris on the table, and key details of the night come to mind.

There is a vodka glass with an empty vial inside. He lifts the vial from the glass and studies the Russian text on the label.

“*Oh, no,*” groans Wally Groodle as he remembers the early morning drinking game: *Vodka with Sputnik-V shooters*. Kangaroo Boy won the game hands down. Six doses before black-out.

At that moment, Wally Groodle is overwhelmed by his own life, and he starts to wail. It’s a peculiar noise a cry of desperation, a cry of despair, a cry of anguish. And at the same time, a cry that embraces the insane ridiculousness of human existence. A cry that turns to laughter. And then a chilling sensation.

Wally Groodle wonders what the handler would think about an secret service subcontractor found drunk in a Russian military nightclub.

Wally Groodle rises, and steadies himself against the table. When

the moment is right, he slinks quietly out of the club and finds his way back to his hotel.

He sleeps through the day. That night he wakes to see a strange green glow coming through the curtains.

Curious, he opens the drapes to see the neighbouring property is shipyard full of ruined military submarines. The conning towers and hulls of these vessels have been cut open, and the nuclear reactors exposed.

Wally Groodle feels the warmth of ionising radiation on his face but is unable to move away, it is like he had been hypnotised by the green glow of radiation. He stands there a while soaking up the beta-particles, and eventually breaks a sweat and comes to his senses.

He closes the drapes and returns to his bed, drags the mattress into the bathroom, and sleeps there, where there are some walls to block the radiation.

When he wakes in the morning, he has a deep feeling of unease. He checks his itinery and is reminded that his next parcel is to be delivered the central Asian nation of Kazakhstan where they have their own Covid vaccine.

Chapter 11 - Death #6

The next packet is to be delivered in Khazakstan where the *Kazakh Research Institute for Biological Safety Problems* has created a Covid vaccine called *Qazcovid*.

Something about the name *Qazcovid* puts Wally Groodle in fear of his life.

“They’re going to inject me with Qazcovid,” he says to himself over and again as he waits in the departure lounge at Vladivostok International.

He holds his hand out and sees it trembling. It’s not usually like that. He wonders whether the tremble is caused by the *Astrazeneca*, *Sinopharm*, *Coronavac*, *Sputnik-V* coursing through his veins, all fused together by an unhealthy dose of radiation from a broken nuclear submarine.

Soon, it will be augmented with *Qazcovid* from Khazakstan. Wally

Groodle feels giddy, and he forces himself to get a grip.

A woman takes a seat opposite. She is dressed in a white summer dress with long, straight blond hair tied in a braid. On a pendant, she wears a shiny metal formed from three interlocking circles inside a circle incomplete at the bottom.

"You seem troubled," she says with a calm, knowing voice.

Wally Groodle feels compelled to speak honestly and freely, and he blurts out, *"Over the past week, I have taken four different Covid vaccines, and I am shortly to get another."* That's the first time he has spoken the words and it feels good to get them out.

"I don't know what the medical implications of that are," says the woman. *"But there are always consequences to extreme circumstances."*

"What is your name?" asks Wally Groodle.

"I'm Necessity."

"I'm Wally Groodle. What is the symbol on your pendant?"

"It's a Vitan symbol called the Quenn. It speaks to the balance of humans in nature. What are you most worried about?"

"Umm, dying, for example," says Wally Groodle.

The woman moves across the aisle, takes a seat next to him, and takes his hand in hers. *"Would you like me to help you with that?"*

"Help me with dying," Wally Groodle asks, anxiously.

"I'll help you with your anxiety about dying."

"Okay. I'd like that."

"I want you to close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to calm yourself and prepare something else."

Wally Groodle does as instructed and within a minute, his heart rate

slows to a calm pace, and he feels open for instruction.

“Okay?” asks the woman, and Wally Groodle nods.

The woman leans close, and says in a whisper, *“I want you to imagine five different ways that you will die.”*

Wally Groodle opens his eyes in surprise. *“What? Are you serious?”*

“It’s called Memento Mori. It’s a practice that dates back to the Ancient Greeks, the Stoics. Just try it.”

“I’ll try,” says Wally Groodle.

“Say it aloud so I can hear your death.”

Wally Groodle closes his eyes and imagines being outside of himself, looking down and observing his own death.

“I die in my sleep. I stop breathing but don’t wake up as it happens. And then I just pass away.”

Covid-22

“Well, that’s a bit dull,” says Necessity, “what’s next?”

“I wake-up unable to breathe, and I cough and splutter and tense-up and eventually pass-out and in my bed.”

“Okay. What’s next?”

“I am admitted to hospital with breathing difficulties, put on oxygen, then shot up with drugs and intubated, and I spend two weeks in a delirious haze breathing through a tube, then the pain kicks in from organ failure, and the medical team decides that prolonging me will deny treatment to saveable people, so they beef up the morphine so that I suffer heart failure in a delirious, numb haze.”

“That’s great work. One more. But in this one I want you to really suffer before you die.”

“You mean really suffer?” asks Wally Groodle with his eyes still closed.

“Yes. Worst case scenario.”

“Okay. I’ll try... I wake up coughing uncontrollably, wracked in pain. An ambulance comes. The drug me and load me onto the gurney, but as they move the gurney down the steps, they slip, and I crash onto the ground floor and break my leg bone. I am screaming in agony. They want to give drugs that ease the pain, but they can’t because of the drugs they have already given me. So, they bundle me into the ambulance, with me howling in agony. A plane has crashed in the town, so the ambulance is diverted down a dirt track. The track is full of potholes, and the ambulance bounces up and down and each lurch this way or that pressures my broken leg. The nurse slips, accidentally drags open a cupboard and a pair of sharp scissors falls into my eyeball. I scream out, and a tractor bashes into the side of the ambulance which rolls over, and I am tossed out of the gurney, landing with my broken leg underneath me, and a fire breaks

*out and I gag on the acrid fumes
and the flames reach me
consuming me slowly..."*

Wally Groodle halts, breathing heavily. He can feel his heart pounding in his chest.

"Do you feel it?" asks Necessity.

"Yes."

"What do you feel?"

"I am going to die, anyway."

"Of course. We all know that. We just don't necessarily accept it. Or live it. We don't live with death in mind. So, we fear it. We fear that which is inevitable. So silly."

Wally Groodle casts his eyes around the departure lounge as if he is seeing the world anew. *"And unless I choose the time and manner of my death, I don't get to choose the time and manner of my death."*

"Beautifully put," says the Vitan woman, chuckling. *"Can you say that again, in another way."*

"I don't want chance to dictate the time and manner of my death," says Wally Groodle.

"Really?" she chuckles. "So, what is your fifth death?"

"I talk to my friend, and he gives me a handgun. I leave a note to the right people. I find a suitable place to watch a sunrise over the ocean. And when the sun is directly in my eyes on the morning of my last day, I shoot myself through the mouth, destroying the base of my brain."

Wally Groodle, his eyes closed, inhales and exhales deeply, processing his thoughts. The Vitan woman directs his thoughts by asking a question.

He can feel Necessity close to him. He can hear a noise, the sound of her writing on a piece of paper.

She asks, *"Would you rather kill yourself in a time and manner of your own choosing, or take your chance with fate?"*

Wally Groodle remains silent, his eyes flicking back and forth behind his eyelids. The answer comes eventually.

"I'll take my chance with fate."

"What are you doing here? What is your self-directed purpose?"

"I am writing a book called If & Why?"

"Will this initiative help keep nature - the human life support system - intact?"

"I don't know. Yes. I think so."

"Then take your chance with death and write your book."

Wally Groodle remains, eyes closed, feeling and sensing and considering all these things. When he finally opens his eyes, he finds himself alone in a busy airport terminal.

Necessity is gone, never to be seen again.

In the distance is a screen filled with letters and numbers. Wally

Groodle discerns the patterns and realised that it is time to board the plane to Quazcovid in Khazakstan.

As he collects his bag, he sees that the Necessity has left a postcard on the seat next to him. He raises it, and reads:

- 1. We humans & all that dwell on Earth are parts of a planet-sized life-form called Vita.*
- 2. Vita maintains the ocean & the atmosphere to foster an abundant Living Planet.*
- 3. All that evolved enhances Vita's life-support system, but humans neglect our duty.*
- 4. Greenhouse emissions & the destruction of nature threaten our race & the Living Planet.*
- 5. It is our duty to fix this crisis by swiftly restoring our wounded Earth to full health.*
- 6. Then, we may enter the Verdant Age, when humans & the Living Planet thrive together.*

*7. For a good life before we die,
advancing the Verdant Age is how
we can belong to Vita.*

Wally Groodle ponders these words at length. Eventually, he flips over the card and sees that Vitan woman has written another version of his death.

Necessity's Death #6 is much more meaningful than Wally Groodle's deaths 1 - 5.

Chapter 12 - Khazakstan

With his new enlightenment about life and purpose, Wally Groodle marches into Kazakhstan and takes a dose of Quazcovid in his stride.

He meets his counterpart, hands over his package, and within hours he is back at the airport waiting for a plane to his final destination, the *Good Old US of A*.

Wally Groodle is surprised to see his counterpart has followed him into the departure lounge, and approaches him with the package in his hands.

The man hands the package to Wally Groodle saying, "Would you pass this back to your government with the following message,"

"Umm, sure, maybe, I guess..."

"Tell them: thanks, but no thanks." The man turns to walk away, hesitates and addresses Wally Groodle again. *"Maybe instead you would say: very, very*

no thanks. Why do they think we would participate in this ecocide?"

Perplexed, Wally Groodle stands there with the returned package in his hands. He sees that the package is ripped open at the top.

Wally Groodle removes the contents and lays them out on his lap. There is a cover letter and a pile of maps. The maps show forest areas slated for logging. These are Koala forests. The letter explains that the Australian Government is committed to eradicating all of the remaining old growth forests and koala habitat for economic reasons: to turn them into monoculture plantations. However, the issue is so politically sensitive at home that they want to out-source the logging work to international firms.

Reading this, Wally Groodle is stunned. He remembers the death proposal given to him by the Vitan Pansophist and he retrieves the document from his pocket. It is unnerving.

This is what the Vitan pansophist wrote: *Wally Groodle joins a forest camp where committed people run interference on logging operations in old growth forests. One day, a young activist full of tears and grief runs towards the machine that is cutting down the trees. This is dangerous and completely out of protocol. Wally Groodle runs in and pushes her out of the path of the machine. She survives, but Wally Groodle is hit. He is all busted up, and lays amongst the felled trees and mud, cringing in agony for two hours with environmental activists caring for him as best they can, while forestry workers stand back with their arms crossed, and watch on scornfully, before he dies of heart failure just as the ambulance arrives.*

Underneath this handwritten death proposal, the Vitan Pansophist has added a two-word footnote:

“Die purposefully.”

Covid-22

The words force Wally Groodle into flow of thoughts that forces him to lose time.

Chapter 13 - No USA

An hour passes before Wally Groodle comes out of his trance.

Through that hour, he has remained motionless in his chair in the departure lounge with his heart pounding and his mind bouncing around like a steel ball in a pinball machine.

There is only a finite number of things for the steel ball to bash against in the pinball machine, and these are these things reverberating through Wally Groodle's mind.

Over the last week, he has:

- delivered four packages, calling for the destruction of the last remaining old growth forest and Koala habitat in Australia.
- been injected with five different Covid vaccines.
- been inebriated with triple filtered vodka (on special) and *Sputnik V* covid vaccine shooters.

Covid-22

- been irradiated by nuclear submarines.
- met a Vitan woman.
- imagined six different version of his own death.
- come to understand *and to feel* that he is a part of the Living Planet - *no less than the trees and the bees, the whales and the snails*
- and that his inevitable death ought to be meaningful.

That's exhausting.

Wally Groodle comes to his senses, checks the time to find that he has missed his flight to USA. There is no way he'll get to deliver that final parcel.

He doesn't want to deliver that parcel. He doesn't want to live this life anymore. He just wants to go home.

Wally Groodle collects the Khazakstan and the USA parcels and drops them into a rubbish bin. Then he books a flight back home.

Chapter 14 - Sneeze Once

When Wally Groodle finally touches down in Australia it is late at night. He falls asleep in the back of the Uber on the way to his apartment. Back at home, he takes a shower and then crashes onto his bed where he sleeps for a full 24 hours.

When he wakes, he senses that dawn is close. Laying in his opulent and mega-comfy bed, he feels a deep sense of unease. It's not just the torrent of pinball thoughts going through his mind, it is something gurgling and growing inside of him.

He glances at his phone to see angry messages from his ASIO handler, but he is not worried as he has left that life behind.

A pale blue glow shines through the window as the sun slowly rises, and Wally Groodle feels a yearning to be around familiar faces. So, he rises, dons his spandex bike pants and rides down to Local Markets.

He arrives at Sparrow's Fart minutes before the barista turns the power onto the coffee machine.

"Oh, you are back," says the barista.

"Back with a vengeance," says Wally Groodle with a flourish.

"How's your book coming along?"

"To be honest, I haven't written a damned word. I talk about it, but I don't do it."

"You and everyone else, huh? Too busy with your IT work."

Wally Groodle doesn't have the heart to lie anymore. He is done with secret service work. If he can't tell the truth, he'll just remain silent. He shuffles in his place and says nothing.

"So, you want a Soy-Latte?" asks the barista.

More silence from Wally Groodle.

The barista wears a worried look and asks, concerned, *"Are you*

okay, dude? You are looking a bit queasy."

"Huh?" asks Wally Groodle, distracted. He can't see straight. His head has gone all fuzzy. He feels something growing inside of him. His face is flushed.

He says, *"I died six times in the past few days. The last one was the best."*

Wally Groodle takes a step back, feeling woosy. *"Ooh, I'm feeling a bit odd."*

"If you're going to puke," says the barista, pointing, *"do it over there."*

Suddenly, all the mucous membranes in Wally Groodle's face go into hyper-drive, and his sinuses fill with fluid.

Instantly, Wally Groodle feels as though he is drowning, and his instinctive reaction is to blast the drowning fluids out of his face.

This occurs through a massive and instantaneous sneeze. It doesn't

Covid-22

build up like a normal sneeze. Instead, it just explodes out of nowhere:

“Atchoooooooooohahhh!!”

The poor barista doesn't have a chance. Standing there with a 16oz Soy-Latte in his hand, he is blasted with a trillion high-velocity snot droplets that pelt against his face and moosh into his hair.

Within a microsecond, he has inhaled millions of these blobs.

The remainder of Wally Groodle's snot droplets drift in the breeze, swirling around until they are eventually inhaled by some poor, hapless *Homo sapiens*.

Unbeknown to anyone at that time, Wally Groodle's snot droplets are infested with a seething mass of virus - a new type of virus.

That single sneeze sets off a new pandemic that the World Health Organisation's *Covid Task Team* would come to call COVID-22.

Chapter 15 - R-Nought 55

Those medical people who study infectious disease would come to regard Covid-22 with both fear and reverence.

This was an extraordinarily fast-spreading disease and one with a very selective mortality.

The cocktail of monkey snot and coronavirus parts that swilled inside our hero Wally Groodle - subsequently irradiated by Russian submarine reactors - combined to form a virus that had an amazing replication rate: *R-nought 55!*

This means that everyone who got it passed it onto 55 other people. Sometimes the transmission happened in seconds.

For those who contracted Covid-22 - which was nearly everyone on the planet in the space of a few weeks after Wally Groogle doused the barista in snot - there were two different reactions.

Covid-22

If you caught Covid-22 you either sneezed once and quickly recovered or sneezed twice and dropped dead!

From that first mucus-rich sneeze in the Local Market, Covid-22 spread quickly around the city of Brisbane. However, with a busy international airport, the disease spread rapidly around the world.

Covid-22 was not particularly deadly. It had a fatality rate of less than 1%. However, it killed only a narrow segment of humanity. Not the old, not the young, not those with compromised immune systems.

No, Covid-22 only killed *assholes*.

Alongside mass-murderers, child rapists, and corrupt politicians, the leaders of fossil fuel companies were particularly hard hit by this new virus.

Here is a classic example:

The directors of the oil company BP were holding a board meeting.

As the chairman stood to announce the company's success in bribing corrupt politicians to delay the transition to a safe climate, a sneeze came over him that reverberated through the room.

At first, there was a mild tickle in his nose. Then, as if from nowhere, a tremendous gush of wind blasted through his mucus-filled nasal cavity.

“Atchooooohahhh!!”

That hoary old plutocrat dashed virus-filled snot particles straight down the airways of his fellow board-members, the evil humans who oversaw the destruction of the biosphere through pollution and climate change.

Within a second, each of the board members felt their nasal passages flood with fluid and they all sneezed at the same time.

“Atchooooohahhh!!”

The air was hazy with a cloud of intermingled mucus droplets and

Covid-22

the noses tickled again and they all sneezed a second time...

“Atchoooooohahhh!!”

AND DROPPED DOWN DEAD!!!

...face-first on the board room table.

This spectacular scene this was captured on security camera, leaked to the press, and shown on news broadcasts around the world.

Very quickly, the public woke to a new reality. Nature was fighting back. Covid-22 was sent by the planet to kill the planet-eaters.

From Moscow to Houston, coal, oil and gas executives trembled in their boots knowing that the planet had finally had enough of them.

Covid-19 was a wake-up call that we humans should stop destroying the biosphere that is our life support system. But we didn't learn. Instead, we elected leaders who pitched ecocidal concepts as 'Gas Led Recovery.' And opened up old growth forests for logging.

Covid-19 was a shot across the bow. A warning. Covid-22 was firing for effect. Mother Nature wasn't gunning for the normal people. She was coming for the guilty.

After all that bribery and corruption, pollution, greenwash and lies, *Vitae-planeta* spat the dummy. She used our hero Wally-Groodle as an incubator, and grew a virus that only killed the assholes.

Covid-22 didn't kill the little guys in the fossil fuel or logging industry, the workers. Most of those guys never got enough education to know right from wrong. Or they got so locked into debt and obligation that they had no option but to do whatever work came along.

On the other hand, the educated ones, the powerful ones, the rich ones, the ones who made the decisions: Covid-22 snuck its way into their air ways, bred like mice in a plague, used then once for

Covid-22

propagation and then killed them
stone dead on the second sneeze.

It was beautiful to see, and well
overdue.

Chapter 16 - Aftermath

The Covid-22 pandemic snuffed itself in just a few weeks.

At the end of it all, the world was a better place.

All the rich and powerful planet-eaters sneezed twice, dropped dead and were quickly shovelled aside into graves and crematoriums.

With these parasites removed from the face of the Earth it was possible for the progressive movements to move the world onto a more stable and sensible path.

The world was now free to transition to a zero-carbon economy based in large part on regrowing vast stretches of wilderness.

As for Wally Groodle, he did what he could to apologise to the barista, but his Soy-Latte never tasted the same after that.

Covid-22

Wally Groodle spent more time at home, and finally got to writing his book.

The difficulty was after Covid-22, there weren't so many bad things to write *If & Why* about.