

26 Mr. Apple

If looks justify a name, he would have been called Mr. Prune but instead, for the evening's proceedings, they called him Mr. Apple. Whitte had only seen the man in pictures, the last being on Mo Boucher's Wall of Shame, but Anton Bolo was a caricature in real life. His ears were droopy as if they had relinquished their attempt at listening and his jowls sagged. His nose was battered, hook-like and spread out over his face and covered in age spots. He was a dried up man, just over 80, shrunken into a well-tailored yet crumply tux. His yellow teeth and skin overpowered his starched white shirt and while Whitte didn't initially get within twenty yards of the man, he knew he carried that stink of the old—that antiseptic stench found in nursing homes of mixed urine with Lysol. Chronic halitosis came to mind.

Most treated the tatty man with a hushed reverence because he had advised presidents, prime ministers, and premiers long ago deceased and manufactured his own wealth through hedge funds, insider trading, and currency manipulations. Now, he was becoming an industrialist. He demanded that we drive battery-operated cars to save the earth but he owned dozens of coal-fired electric generation plants on five continents. He lobbied governments throughout the world to ban incandescence light bulbs while owning two factories in Thailand that manufactured mercury-laden compact fluorescent bulbs, paying his employees pennies a day.

To Whitte, he was evil personified because he represented an elite who believed

themselves better than the rest of us and certainly believed that they knew how we should live our lives. This man told us what our foreign policy should be, what our domestic policy should be, how much money to print, what we should eat and drink, and, occasionally, whether or not we were in cultural style. It was a study in contrast and broken stereotypes. Whitte had grown up with money, never wanting for anything yet as a man who commanded an oil company, he always was an advocate for his employees; always looking for ways to help them improve their lives. Bolo was born in a latrine and clawed his way through the mud and raw sewage to become one of the most powerful men on the planet. Bolo still carried the stink from where he had escaped and his contempt for those in lower stations, those still in the muck, was well documented among business circles.

Bolo's crowning achievement, though was the development of the Free World Development Fund and with this, the old media fawned over him like Mother Teresa—as exhibited by the attendance of media stars from the major U.S. television networks and two cable news outlets. The FWDF served as a sun for other philanthropy endeavors to orbit around. As Mo Boucher had suggested, it was a public relations action that also helped to make the man even wealthier.

There was a podium at the front of the room but Bolo chose to inhabit the area nearest the first row, shuffling around out front, using his presence as a type of gravitational force. Whitte noticed that most of those in the audience sat with rapt attention.

His voice was gravelly and juicy, slightly subduing his accent gained from behind the lowered Iron Curtain and as he spoke, there was always a threat that spittle would explode over the first row—kind of like Shamu at Sea World.

“Each of us is blessed in certain ways by the Creator and what I see before me is certainly the most blessed of all,” he said as a few chuckled and clapped. Whitte did neither.

“God has chosen us.” Apple made the statement matter-of-factly and did not bother to examine the faces of the crowd. “I am a humble servant of God. I feel His presence and His direction in me. I feel the direction He has put in us all and I know this is a crusade of the righteous.”

Whitte briefly wondered whether he were in the hands of old fashioned revivalists.

“We share this planet, this wonderful birthplace of Adam and Eve where simplistic existence offered true salvation. But the devouring of an apple, the seed of human knowledge, spoiled it thus dooming mankind to a hereafter of torment and desperateness. Our movement, our philosophy is strengthened by the currents of time and we are reminded of this as we peer back through the ages. Was it not Plato who suggested that mankind needed shepherding? He expounded on the need to apply mathematics and logic to determine a superior class that must be bred and given reign over the kingdom. Did not Sparta practice the separation of the strong from the weak to bring about purity in their realm? The monarchies of Europe practiced the arraignment of marriages for power and to establish a virtuous, superior class to better mankind and keep him from destroying his own existence. Even some of the leaders in more recent times—both cruel despots and true saviors—have used the ideas that we have adopted to further mankind. And as I look among you, I see these dividends of our forefathers have been delivered and we together are ready to proceed.”

Whitte almost said aloud, *Amen*

“Man and his divisions have created a hostile world where man now dances with the devil. This dance has brought us into a world of terror, suffering, and pestilence. Man’s greed has harmed us all and we are now before the feet of God, asking for deliverance. God has given us the means to fuel our hungers and tame our earth in His plan but man betrayed God. They have allowed their greed to devour their souls and deliver them into evil and so we have to make difficult choices and we shall all become one and we shall overcome their transgressions. Our deliverance is achievable and at hand.”

Apple had a phlegm-filled coughed and swallowed. Whitte felt ill but no one else seemed to notice.

“God gave them fossil fuels to enhance their existence but instead they used these resources with greed and it fueled their wants and not their needs. God has given them plentiful harvests but with their greed of wants now threaten our own needs for food and water. The growing costs of energy now threaten even their meager crops and the cost of energy keeps food off their tables and will eventually take food from our tables.”

Whitte was losing interest in this spectacle. He glanced around the room, large enough to fit the seventy or so that were now sitting at round-top tables—and no one was going to be taking any food from these tables. Eyes were fixated on Apple, the High Priest of this religious gathering. They were all dressed in formal attire, as was he: a tailored tuxedo provided by Harold, his man steward. The past 24 hours had been a little strange. He had woken from a two-day coma, basically. Had a massage. Met a movie actress. Hiked around what he could only describe as a manufactured paradise and now he was sitting here, beside Brita, watching a decaying man, drone on about his version of reality.

Once he had dressed after returning from his hike, Harold—an aging gray-haired man who bore some resemblance to the beaming man on Uncle Ben’s Rice—escorted him to the resort where Brita met him and steered him into this banquet room.

The food had been nondescript. Despite his wealth, Whitte had never developed a taste for hoity-toity food—that faux glop that, in this instance was passed off as *haute cuisine*. Soup had come first followed by something that tasted like a corn fritter but was square with a purple sauce dribbled across the top. Then came a game fowl, possibly pheasant, with roasted potatoes and what looked like seaweed with a tasteless dressing. After those plates were cleared, a peach tart with a small scoop of ice cream was served with an after-dinner brandy. Whitte had chosen to drink the rich coffee instead.

“God has given mankind the earth to shepherd and man has repaid His confidence by abusing His earth and threatening our very existence by polluting our lands and creating a global catastrophe that must be addressed immediately.”

Being in the oil industry, the threat of global warming was bashed on the backside of Whitte’s head for a few decades now. He had bought into it at first but as he conducted his own literature review, he found nothing that suggested man-made global warming existed. The earth was coming out of a mini-ice age about the time that industrialization came on the scene. There was no doubt that there had been some warming since then but it could be accounted for by natural warming after a frigid climate. Whitte didn’t try to talk people out of their beliefs; he simply asked them to conduct their own, non-biased research before they reached a definitive conclusion. Hearing the code words for global warming coming from Bolo pushed his attention away once more.

He started looking around the room, eyes darting over the audience. He recognized about half of them. There were journalists and actors, Wall Street financiers and politicians from both major parties, and even some of the anonymous power people that his friend Mo prominently displayed on *The Wall of Shame*. But he wasn't admiring the self-proclaimed illuminati; he was looking for an old friend. Whitte spied a waiter moving among the attendees and caught his attention. It was time to end his self-imposed temperance. Brandy just didn't do it for him and so when the waiter answered his call, he ordered a T&T. When the waiter returned, he also brought an electronic cigarette. "For your pleasure, sir," the waiter had said. Whitte sucked on it and, surprisingly a stream of "smoke" entered his lungs and was, actually, similar to the real thing. It was obvious that the staff had been briefed on all of the guests' idiosyncrasies and was prepared to meet their needs. It took a depth of organization to be this prepared. Of all the trappings Whitte had witnessed, this was probably the most impressive.

And Apple droned on; much of his dribble was lost on Whitte.

"We have made tremendous strides in the past year." Apple coughed and held a handkerchief to his mouth before continuing. "Much of our agenda has been forwarded and the sheep are restless. They will soon throw off the yokes of their current masters and will begin looking for new leaders, new visionaries to usher in a new era of mankind. In this, our labor will yield fruit."

Thus the theme of this monkey show, thought Whitte.

"God has chosen us."

Well, that was rather presumptuous.

“I am a humble servant of God. I feel His presence and His direction in me. I feel the direction He has put on us all and I know this is a crusade of the righteous...”

Or the self-deluded...

“And the sheep, yes the sheep, our sheep, are beginning to open their hearts for solutions. They grow weary of their governments’ inabilities to correct the problems. They grow weary of their governments’ failure to protect them and their way of life. They grow weary of the promises made and broken in the name of freedom, of liberty, and other false notions as freewill. And so the void must be filled, as we have predicted, by members of a higher class of accepted wisdom, a higher class of men and women who thinks not for himself but for the fostering of mankind.”

This was an applause line and it didn’t disappoint. It wasn’t raucous but as close as it came with these people.

“Yes, I am simply reaffirming our status but that must be confirmed time and again to insure we carry our burden forward to save what we can of our endangered world. Democracies are sloppy, though useful, and national interests undermine the true inherent nature of man to live in simplicity and so our rule shall be of carrying our own sacrifice for the men of this earth. We carry a heavy burden, no doubt. We feel the guilt of having while billions have not. But is it not on the hands of those who understand original sin; those of us of wealth and prestige, the ones who guide the world who must provide that route to salvation? We must offer our own sacrifice to make the compact between man and the Deity whole again. But how do we accomplish this? How do we make man simple again, respectful again, humble again? How do we, as it is said, lead them not to temptation but

delivered from evil?” Apple cleared the phlegm from his throat again. *Yuck.*

“Rest assured that the fruits of our labor are being realized and there should be no concern for mankind is being humbled. Technology is where I labor and where our fruits will be harvested to our ends. Technology, my brothers: this is both the evil and the glory. Yes, it is a double-edged sword for it can be used for creative regeneration of our lives and also as a degradation of our very soul. Man has become too enamored with technology but this is not an evil unto itself. It can be a good. Many believe that technology speeds our lives to the point of anarchy. Information flies through the air with little or no regulation and so a lie can become truth and a truth a lie in but a matter of moments. And so, in reality, it is not technology to fear but information. Information becomes a story and a story becomes reality and reality, regardless of truth, does not lie. It is not technology that must have absolute control but rather the flow of information. Control information and you control every living soul in this world. Brothers, our control of information is at hand. It will be realized much sooner than we had hoped and so our moment in the sun draws near.”

It was with this last proclamation that a lightning bolt of fear struck deep into Whitte’s core; it was a revelation. If this guy was serious, and Whitte had no doubt that they all believed they were dedicated, then you would need two things to control the world: energy and information. Whitte Industries had both. Oil and gas production was essential to any industrialized economy however WO&G’s production was barely a thimble full in an ocean of fossil fuels needed on a daily basis.

But it was the other thing WI owned that sent a shiver up his spine. Patel+Whitte

developed and owned the premier software system intended to control and manipulate—in a positive, utilitarian way—a business: Triage internally, Mirage, externally. Whitte had never considered the ramifications of Mirage out in the open. If in the wrong hands, the program, coupled with the ability of the user to hack into other systems, could in fact control the information being disseminated throughout the world. Mirage was a silent weapon. No one, not even the best of the best, could detect its presence. Just a little change in a news article could change how that news was viewed. But it could also do more.

The world was in turmoil. Governments were being threatened throughout the globe and with Mirage, secrets could be exposed, as had already happened to the United States, and a government could be toppled. From the Middle East to the streets of Europe, the people demanded more: More money, more freedoms, and in a contradictory manner, more governmental intervention. The old order was under assault and, reminiscent of the nineteen thirties, totalitarianism threatened every nation, including his own. Could these people actually have that much power and were they after maybe the one thing that would allow them to control everything?

“It is our generation,” Bolo whispered as if in a church, “It is we,” he said a little louder, “the ones we have been waiting for.” The applause began. “For we are the chosen.” They all stood now, including Brita, and began loudly clapping and with the beginnings of an explosion, he then hit the crescendo: “For we are the ones who will lead our flock into the New Jerusalem.”

Oh, please.