



**A**  
**SHEPHERD'S**  
**REASON**

**ALIENATION SERIES VOL. 6**  
Ryan Gray

By Ryan Gray  
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## **Alienation Series**

A Shepherd's Trilogy:

A Shepherd's Dilemma - *Vol. 5*

A Shepherd's Reason - *Vol. 6*

A Shepherd's Solution - *Vol. 7*

*The Alienation Series consists of 7 Volumes*

## Table of Contents

Ethan Hunt's Revenge	5
The Degradation of Sanity	7
Ignorance is Bliss	10
Invasion of the Soul Snatcher	11
Parson, Preacher, Soldier, Spy	14
The Beginning of the End - Which is the Beginning of the ALL	17

## A SHEPHERD'S REASON

### Ethan Hunt's Revenge

"Hey, there, son. Is it this way to the bar?"

"Excuse me, sir?" Replied a young guard leveling a pistol at my chest.

I swayed very subtly. "I've been wandering around for quite a while after hitting my head, blut...I need re-charge...wars da bar?" I added a little hiccup for emphasis.

The security guards exchanged glances, looked me over once more, then rolled their eyes and holstered their sidearms. "Ok, sir, come with us; we'll get you back to the party."

I almost sighed with relief but caught myself just in time. Instead, I dug deeper into my character, pulling on all the classical theater training my 16-year-old brain had retained when I had donned the role of Willy in the play *Death of a Salesman*. That was more than 20 years earlier.

"Hey, there, young fella, get your hands off me! I said I needed a recharge, not that bore of a party. Drop me off at the nearest wet bar, and we'll have no hard feelings."

Forty-five minutes later, I was escorted back to earth discreetly.

Just in case the powers that be checked up on me, Phil drove me home on *designated driver mode*. But first, I had a stop to make.

The self driving pick-up pulled off the highway into an industrial section. Phil drifted up to the smallest row of warehouses. I climbed out of the vehicle and ran around the side to a flight of stairs. I stomped my way up to the top floor. Moving through the building, I dropped off the 'package' at the prearranged spot, turned, and headed for the door.

"Hmm," I grinned, "Maybe I could give Ethan Hunt a run for his money."

As I opened the door and started to take a step forward, I froze. Two military drones hovered at eye level. Laser sites danced around my face. Half a second later, floodlights clicked on and blinded my ability to see anything else. Strangely enough, I was calm. I shrugged and muttered, "I guess I spoke too soon, Hunt can keep his job." My back shuddered as something hit me, and my muscles seized. My breath was knocked out of me, and tingling traveled up, then down the length of my frame. "*No! Not this again.*" My jittery voice squeaked out as all went black.

The hood over my head smelt sweet but also turned my stomach. I figured it had to have been washed in heavy-duty chemicals, and I found it ironic that they took such precautions against infection for illegally seized prisoners.

“That sickening sensation forming in the pit of your stomach is the tiniest bit of chloroform. It’s a little trick I picked up when doing wet work for the CIA in South East Asia back in the day - Malaysia and Thailand mostly.”

I knew that voice from somewhere but could not quite place it.

“The chemical makes you a little weak and groggy and puts you at a disadvantage when avoiding my questions.”

“Samuels? Is that you?” It was the agent who had come the day of 4-11 to *handle me* and to prepare me for what I would *say* to my flock.

The hood was yanked off my head. “Oh, so you do remember me? I am flattered. Well, in this instance, Shepherd, since you have decided to act against all moral obligation and privilege gifted to you, I think you’d better stick to Agent.” A row of tools lay atop a leather case. I recognized a few of the implements, most of them I did not, but all were meant to terrify; the shiny chrome instruments did their job well.

“Torture tools are a little too on *the nose*, don’t you think, Samuels?” I quipped, trying to play it cool.

Samuels smiled and picked up a small square object, “Tried, and true methods, Shep...and I said, you can call me Agent.” He stuffed the object under my ribs and clicked the red button on its side. I didn’t understand what had happened, only that it was quick and so painful that my breath escaped my body.

I pulled at my arms to defend myself but only then realized that my hands were zipped tied behind my back in an old wooden chair. When I had finally caught my breath, I barked out, “Ouch...what in hell’s bells is that thing?”

Samuels grinned, and a glint sparkled in his eye, “Like it? We developed it a few years ago. It shocks only the nerves attached to your spine. But only for a microsecond. You see, we don’t want anything seizing up or anyone going into shock. Nope, it’s pain we want, not damage.” He cocked his head and looked at my face, yet I noticed he avoided my eyes.

I knew where this was going, but something inside me did not care. My amazing wife, Noreen, was right. For a long time, I hadn’t stood up against what was wrong. Unlike what’s portrayed in the movies, abandoning your morals happens down a slippery slope of convenience and ego. For me, the crumbling of my conviction...of my faith, happened through one micro tear, one microfracture, one little compromise at a time.

For instance, when I peddled off my original God-given congregants, drug addicts, and poor single moms to someone else because I had become too much of a *big wig*. Or how about when the Bible was torn apart through massive edits because “aliens” showed up; I knew it wasn’t right, and I had the platform to oppose it, but did I? Nah, I took the easy road...again. Like this stupid sub-cell phone and “third eye” camera. But, I always had a good excuse, I always “did” what was right,

I didn't drink, I didn't smoke, no foul language...my societal moral compass was impeccable. But my soul was barren, like a well-made coffin, only suitable for death.

I searched out Samuel's eyes, whether he wanted to look me in the eye or not. It was time I did what was right, no matter the cost! After five tense seconds, the old assassin finally looked me in the eye; I grinned, "Let's get it on, Mr. *Peace Agent*."

## The Degradation of Sanity

The world had really gone downhill. Of course, whiny, ungrateful brats have been complaining about that for centuries. But, this was different. The New World Peace governing bodies did not allow for things like crime stats or the rise and fall of the average household income. Their reasoning: "Negativity gave way to unrest, and unrest stole one's peace." However, I had picked up on a few tell-tale signs. I had noticed more and more police vehicles zooming around and sirens blaring. There were advertisements everywhere for more workers in surveillance and law enforcement. The most disturbing? A homeless encampment I had passed on my way to work for almost two years disappeared - overnight! City officials and social workers - not a soul alike knew where the homeless or their belongings had gone.

Beyond that, there was less joy in the air since the 'event' of 4-11; growing despair and fear felt all but tangible. It was as if we didn't just lose 30% of the world's population, but rather, THE 30%! Maybe "the taken" were not our world's brains, feet, or fists...but the heart.

In a matter of a split second, the earth lost its soul!

Twenty minutes later, no wait...thirty, actually, it doesn't matter. Even if I could keep track of the time, why would you care? What you need to know is that I was bleeding from every orifice on my face and in more pain than I knew the human body could handle.

"The world's gone to hell, Shep, don't you think?"

I looked up at the *World Peace Agent* as he finished taking off his thick leather, blood-soaked gloves and sipped from a water bottle. He leaned against the old table behind him as he wiped beads of sweat from his forehead as if taking a break from a leisurely game of tennis.

"Ironic, you should say that," I spat blood and two teeth onto the old factory floor. "I was just thinking the same thing." I looked him in the eye and grinned through the pain, "but just cause the world's gone to hell doesn't mean we still can't get to Heaven."

Samuels rolled his eyes, "Oh, for universe's sake! Is that what this is?"

You've reverted back to that backward, old-fashioned mumbo jumbo? Some Jew dies a martyr thousands of years ago and tells his people He'll be back, but where is *He*? It's been generations, hundreds and hundreds of years, thousands, even!"

Then, suddenly, something changed in the bald, middle-aged man. The *peace* agent's eye twitched, and his jaw set so hard that I heard cracking in his teeth and a pop from his jaw. The lights around the defunct factory flickered. Agent Samuel's stepped forward, but someone else spoke.

The voice was gravelly, uneven, and unnatural, "He'll never come, you know. I've been waiting for a millennium to see the *King's* return. But he's left this world to its fate, and only the strong survive... be on the winning side, Shepherd. Either we'll do great things together, or you'll die here and now."

At that, the unseen tension eased around the room, and Samuels was back and smiling.

"You ok?" I asked.

He chuckled, "Better than ok. The Liberators have the technology to project their essence into any team member."

I balked at him and scoffed at his comment, "You idiot, didn't you ever go to Sunday school or see the old classic horror movie: *The Exorcist*?"

Samuels reacted with genuine defensiveness. "Yeah! I've seen the *Exorcist*, okay, and..."

I cut him off. "You know that was based on a true story, right?"

"Well..."

I did not let the agent reply but cut him off again. "Unlike you, the little girl was smart enough to fight the demon with the help of a bunch of priests. Not invite it to stay for dinner and a sleepover, you moron!"

"Now listen here, you de-evolving monkey..." Samuels raised a finger into my face, but it quivered; he was losing his cool.

I didn't know what could be accomplished by making this psychopath lose control, but it seemed better than doing nothing, "Let me guess...this new *tech* required that you swear loyalty?"

"No...you just need to..."

"Then you had to slaughter a goat or bite a chickens head off, drain some of its blood..."

"That's not what happened!"

"Then you sucked the blood down right before they fitted you for a brand new prom dress?"

"Enough!" The peace agent backhanded me, "Shut up!"

I snapped my head back as my eyes locked onto his, "It seems these soul-sucking demons, who call themselves aliens, like their dates in tiny, short,



frilly dresses, tell me Samuels, what color is yours?"

"Shut up, shut up, shut up!" Samuels screamed as he drove his fist into my head, jaw, and head again.

I didn't care. If nothing else, I'd go unconscious and be unable to answer any more questions. And I was pretty sure the grey bugs hadn't worked out how to heal brain tissue.

Samuels shook my shoulders and screamed into my face, "Now tell me... who you're working with?"

I was punch drunk and seeing double, but coherent enough to notice something interesting out of the corner of my eye. I kept calm and smiled, teeth coated in blood, "I love this...God help me, I can't tell you why, but I'm having a great time. Thanks, guys."

Agent Samuels sighed and relaxed. He shook his head and sat up, "Fine, have it your wa..."

"Oh, and don't kill him," I added.

"Don't what?" The old assassin spun around just in time to meet a quick female fist smashing his nose. A foot sweep forced his knee to buckle and then a strong arm slithered around his neck before Samuels could hit the ground.

"Wait, don't kill him, Connie!" I pleaded.

"Shep, you need to see your face; this dude's messed up. He needs to go." Connie retorted, still choking the "peace" agent.

"Clear!" James announced as he headed towards us from the other side of the factory warehouse. Stewart followed close behind.

"James - James, please tell Connie we need this guy."

James looked the strangling peace agent over and then my face, "Shep, you have any idea what it takes to make a man do what he did to you? Governments either find a psycho or make a psycho. Either way, this man is a remorseless killer."

I rubbed my wrists after Stewart cut them free from the zip ties which had locked me to the chair. I argued, "So, to defeat a remorseless killer, we too must become remorseless killers? Doesn't that also make us psychos?"

The big man drooped his shoulders with resignation, "Yeah, I guess... Connie, tie him up and bring him."

"Hmmpf," the lady tough growled, still squeezing the life from Samuels. His face had gone a slight purplish. After a grunt and firm look from James, Connie whined and allowed Samuels to collapse to the ground, "But, keeping him alive is gonna be so much more work, guys!"

## Ignorance is Bliss

The middle-aged bald man was strapped to a chair. His head hung suspended from his neck, pulling on his shoulder muscles. A 150w light bulb pummeled illumination at the unconscious prisoner - but cast a solid ring of darkness in every other direction. From the shadows, a bucket of ice water was tossed onto the slouching figure. The shower woke the peace agent much faster than he wanted. "Ahh...ouch! What was that, acid?"

I opened my mouth to say 'no' when James put a finger to his lips and smiled. He leaned into the ear of our prisoner and grinned, "Yep, we have some catching up to do with what you did to the shepherd's face."

Agent Samuel's breathing went shallow and his eyes wild. "That's messed up, man!" He looked around desperately, "When I get out of here, you'll pay. You degenerate scumbags will pay with blood. You have no idea who you're dealing with!"

I leaned back and sighed. This little man's threats were hollow and meaningless; he knew it, and we did too. Without the power of manipulation and fear he had grown accustomed to wielding, the little frightened bald guy was just that: small, unremarkable, and unhappy.

He pulled and tore at his restraints. His arms were zip tied to the arms of a steel chair, twice. "Don't bother; your subcell and third eye were removed. And look," I lifted my arm, displaying a bandage around my wrist, "So were ours!"

"What? How dare you! You had no right!" Agent Samuels was shocked, indignant even.

"Had no right? You son of..." Connie moved so fast that no one could stop her from popping him across the jaw. James stepped in to drag her away, "You traitor!" She screamed, "I hope you burn for selling out humans to those bugs!" Connie continued her rant as she was dragged from the room.

Stewart emerged from the shadows to place a sympathetic hand on the peace agent's shoulder, "Sorry about that."

"What's her problem?" Samuels sneered.

"That's just my sister, Mr. Peace Agent. She just likes to punch things that upset her." Stewart spun Samuels around and leaned into the middle-aged man's face, "And she really doesn't like you. Let's hope you make us happy. Or we promised her to take off your restraints and leave you alone with her until she had her fill of..." Stewart paused and stood as he grinned, "caring for things that upset her."

Samuels swallowed hard, and his lower lip quivered.

"Yeah, C-dawg likes to play with her food before she eats." Sam's tattooed face emerged from the shadows long enough to add his two cents.

“Ok, ok, that’s enough. Ya’ll give me a minute with him.”

“Boo! Ahhhhhh, come on Shep, we are all just having a little fun.” A chorus of eye rolls and jeering erupted as I shooed the spectators aside and dragged a wooden chair into the edge of the light. I plopped down on the seat, holding a bottle of water in my right hand, and sighed.

“I’m sorry about that. They all want to exact some kind of revenge on you,” I motioned at the cuts and bruises on my face with my hand, “cause of all this...oh shoot, the water. Did you want some?” I offered my olive branch to the agent.

He smirked at me, “What, you’re the good cop? Who’s a little too on the nose now, Shepherd?”

I placed the water bottle on the ground as I sighed again and shrugged my shoulders in defeat, “Yeah, I told them it wouldn’t work. You’re just too smart for that. So, then I thought, I’d just talk to you. I’ll come at you as a shepherd.”

“Oh, yeah?” Samuels rolled his eyes at me, “Come tickle my ego and tell me it’s gonna be alright. That’ll make me talk. You’d have better luck with one of your crappy sermons; enough of those, and I’d beg for mercy!” The agent mocked me; he clearly saw me as no threat.

I joined in with his laughter, “I know, right? How silly. I’d just try to be the same guy who got me into this mess. I mean,” I slapped him on the knee in jest, kidding around, but I also purposely invaded his personal space as a slight test. I observed a slight wince as I did. “I mean...talk about doing the same thing over and over and expecting another result.” I laughed again, but this time I left my hand on his knee for several seconds.

“Stop it, don’t touch me, stop!” Samuels jaw set and his eyes snapped back and forth.

I grinned, and my eyes narrowed as I removed my hand from his leg, “So, instead, I decided to speak to someone the entire world thinks is dead and gone.” I leaned forward and placed both hands on his legs, “I’m gonna speak to you in **His** name!” A sinister grin grew on my face, and a twinkle gleamed in my eye.

Samuel’s eyes went wide, and he swallowed hard. Painted all over his face was absolute terror.

## **Invasion of the Soul Snatcher**

Sometime later, I eased through a side door into the adjoining room.

Everyone stood and stared at me, desperate for answers.

Leaning against the wall next to JT, Big James spoke up first, "The colonel and I are very impressed, Shep. That scumbag was singing like a bird."

"What the hell did you do to that guy, Shep?" Devon asked. "We heard crying, then screaming, and then whimpering, repeatedly, for darned near an hour!"

I grinned, "Probably more accurate to ask what the 'Heaven' I did. Basically, I just prayed for him. And, for the first time in a long time, I prayed in Jesus' name!"

The group all took a simultaneous step backward.

I cocked my head back and allowed a big chuckle to escape.

"Then, don't you dare put that magic whoodoo on me, man!" Connie warned. "Not gonna make me fall apart like that."

I chuckled again and shrugged my shoulders, "Since Samuels destroyed my recording device, we needed information! And trust me, I got all the answers we wanted, probably more than we wanted. So I think it was a pretty good strategy."

"You got all the info without leverage or torture...what kind of voodoo are you playing with, preacher?" Sam demanded.

"Ain't voodoo; just raw power," James interjected as he rubbed the greying stubble on his big jawline. "I remember a few times my grandma prayed for the sick in Jesus' name. It's like even the air around us froze for a second. And darned if I'm lying, those sick folks got up and went back to work that same day!"

"It's all hear-say," Jason interjected from the back of the room.

"You calling me a liar?" Big James looked more hurt than angry.

Jason's eyebrows furrowed with confusion, "No, not that. Well, technically, yes. Your story is hearsay, but..."

"Get to the point, Jason," JT demanded.

"Whatever information the shepherd has is inadmissible in court. We have only coerced testimony." Jason concluded.

"That doesn't matter!" Devon wheeled his chair closer to Jason. He wanted to engage in this argument too.

I smiled and drifted to the side of the room, ignoring that everyone began arguing about our next move without asking me what Samuels had confessed to knowing. I was starting to understand that we all kinda knew what was happening this entire time. Now we have proof...a testimony from the enemy. Even if it's not hard evidence, we have permission. Yes, exactly...the group was gaining permission to believe what our guts had been saying all along. However, our eyes couldn't see the facts, nor did our intellect comprehend the conclusion.

When the reptilians were defeated and the greys showed up, there was

almost an immediate divide in culture. Those who chose to trust in a new hero versus those who saw through their charity and demi-god like technology. For instance, my beautiful Noreen. She could not prove it physically, but something in her guts said these things were evil to their core: Their goal was to control... power—the reptilians by force, but the grey bugs through manipulation.

Yet, there was another group that did not trust them. Those of us who had not disappeared, those who were not ready for an unexplainable journey of our hearts. Those of us who were willing to trust our senses that not all was as it seems, yet unwilling to trust our souls. In retrospect, the lack of trust in my soul, refusing who I was made to be, was only self-delusion.

Even though beings that were only characters of legend and science-fiction mere decades ago had shown up doing all this “good,” my heart had gone callus. I allowed my soul to be suppressed. Denying a greater and more evident power - **The Power**.

Oh, I said God was there, and if you pried it out of me, I would have acknowledged the relevance of His Son, if only to get to the *important stuff*. Using meaningless catchphrase pop terms like:

“How do we advocate for that?”

“How can we affect change?”

“How is that relevant in today’s culture?”

“Let’s unpack what that means to you?”

The infamous “How does that make you feel?” Etcetera.

As my grand-pappy used to say, “Hogwash, son. Speak plain.” The plain truth was I just wanted to ensure my people showed up every week to pack my services. At first, I only wanted A group on Sunday to love and teach. Then I wanted a **Bigger** group on Sunday to love and teach. Before I knew it, I **NEEDED THE LARGEST** GROUP TO “LOVE AND TEACH” on Sunday.

In retrospect, what did I accomplish? I’ve listened to thousands of sermons and teachings in my time, and I can remember maybe five. And of those five, I can only recall the main points. Yet, my past decade has been dedicated to nothing but venue building and sermon prep. Oh sure, we sponsored some homeless shelters and drug rehabs. And most of the folks running those programs were taken in the 4-11 disappearance, as was over half my congregation. But, I can no longer stand atop a loosely disguised corporate structure and claim others’ good deeds as my own. I can no longer pick the fruit from someone else’s tree, hand it to others, and claim it’s from me.

I stopped and looked over the mismatched group of rebels before me as I slid to the back of the room. I needed to get back to my roots and original purpose...I needed to focus on Him and on loving once again. Looking over the group I’d been matched with, I was beginning to understand something. I had

been given one last chance to do what I'd been put on this earth to do: care for people.

### **Parson, Preacher, Soldier, Spy**

An old leather sofa waited for me in the corner. It was the type of furniture a group of men would keep in their side office for breaks or the occasional naps. If I were to guess, I would say this old abandoned warehouse had something to do with auto parts or metal works of some kind. I plopped down, suddenly remembering how old and fat I was.

"But how can we expose this conspiracy without hard evidence!" Jason was still driving his point home as the idealistic scientist.

"Hmmmm," I leaned my head back against the old faded leather and felt a slight warmth in the very center of my being I hadn't felt in a long time. I was content with enjoying the small yet potent feeling of happiness in my gut, but the happiness wasn't satisfied. *HE* wanted more. Joy reignited my soul and spread through my gut, through my chest, down my legs, and up my spine. The warmth, so tangible - so incredible, exploded through my nerves and out of my mouth.

I erupted into laughter.

The great debate stopped abruptly as everyone turned towards me.

The cracking in my split lip, my busted jaw, and three broken ribs - gave me more agonizing pain than I knew I was capable of withstanding, yet, even the pain made me feel so much more alive - I loved it!

I waved my hand at the group, trying to ask them to excuse me, but I couldn't get a word out. The explosion of happiness was so intense that I could barely breathe.

"So...our holy man has lost his mind...not a good sign." Stewart quipped.

Sam grinned, nodding his head knowingly, "Nah, he's got it all figured out: he knows. There's relief in that laughter."

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry." I finally managed to exclaim. "It's been a long, long, long time since I've felt this joy! *His* joy!"

JT rolled his eyes as he stepped closer to me. "Do I even want to know what you mean by that?"

"Should we be readying for a sermon, Shep, promising us that it's all going to be ok, and good will finally prevail?" Connie teased.

I sighed and used the back of my hand to dab tears from my eyes. "Yes, well..." I paused and smiled, looking from one face to the other. "OK, here's the bad news: there's no way to win this fight. It's over. The conspiracy to take the

planet over is done, and the bad guys won." I tossed my hands in the air, "And any of you who wants the truth can figure it out for themselves." I paused, and the group stayed silent, staring back at me.

I sighed and smiled, placing my hands on my hips. "The repurposed materials from earth on the alien ship - the piece of the missing nuclear sub? That's because the bugs aren't from the other side of the universe; they've been living here," I pointed to the ground, "on earth, all along. They probably took the sub for its nuclear core." I paused and looked back at the door I had just come from, "At least that's what Samuel's claims happened." I shook my head, chuckling, "Oh, and the conversation I overheard between the bug and something else." I rolled my eyes, "It was the reptilian commander! They are all in on this together. The reptiles are working for the greys. They are second-class beings." I began waving my hands around and rolled my eyes sarcastically, "And when you know they aren't from a distant galaxy, and one of their first acts was to pressure us to amend the one book that warned us about these evil suckers, then it's really not too difficult to figure out the rest."

Connie, Jason, and Devon opened their mouths and took deep breaths to demand more than just my dire exposition. But, I cut them off, "The good news: It doesn't matter. In 1-3 years, all this," I motioned with big arms, "will be replaced by perfection, His perfection."

"More of that old religious stuff?" Stewart waved his hand at me and turned to walk away.

"I'm sorry," I sat forward as I wiped tears from my eyes, "I'm so sorry; it's just so clear to me now. I didn't see it all before because I didn't want to see it, and I just didn't want to give up on all of this." I leaned back into the old sofa. I threw my hands above my head and then dropped them into my lap as a sign of submission and defeat. "This temporary life we think can be turned into utopia."

Connie stepped forward, "What in the heck does that mean?" She spun her hands around, mocking me, "What do you mean, all this is temporary?"

"Anything you can see with your eyes, taste, touch, and smell, the physical world we know."

The ever-scientific-minded Jason chuckled at me, "No offense, Shep, but I think everyone here is not ready for old Bible tales and spiritual babble."

I chuckled back at him, "Ok, how about logic? How did you and JT discover the grey bugs weren't who they claimed they were?"

JT crossed his arms and answered from a sideways glance, "A dimensional rift in space between Saturn and Titan."

"So you discover proof of an extra dimension?"

They both rolled their eyes and answered in unison, "Yes."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but that would theoretically mean anything

existing in a 5th or 6th dimension, the dimension you found proof for, could be here with us right now, and we could not see it?"

"Yeah." This time, only JT answered, but cautiously.

"So, theoretically...let's pretend I injected you with 5th dimension super juice, making you an extra-dimensional being. Even though you are human, you would no longer be visible to us, as you would be living in a world with one extra universal law. Since the aliens come from there, can we surmise that an extra substance we do not understand exists and someplace else exists, beyond our understanding?"

"I suppose." JT conceded.

"So, wait...you're saying..." Stewart asked politely.

Dev rolled his eyes, "He's saying since technical super-beings came from a different dimension, they themselves are proof there's stuff we can't see: Proof that there is a spirit world."

Jason stepped in, "He's also saying that since the reptiles and bugs come from a different dimension and not a different world, they act as proof of the existence of God."

James waved his hand at Devon, "As far as I'm concerned, there's always been proof of a higher power. The question is, who is *He* or *She* and what do they want?"

"I still don't get it!" Sam forced everyone backward in the conversation.

"Yeah, me too," Connie conceded.

"Which part?" I asked.

"For starters, what does it matter if the aliens come from another planet or another dimension?" Sam questioned.

"Because if we are the only intelligent life in the universe, in this dimension, we are something special, almost god-like." JT rolled his eyes but conceded the point with a considerable amount of reluctance.

"So Connie will finally have to admit my status as a deity?" Stewart teased his sister.

"No," JT shook his head in frustration. "Like God, as in, a mirror image of Him. If we are the only intelligent life in this entire universe, then we have been placed in charge of everything we can see and more. As the dominant species, we decide the entire universe's fate."

Jason took over for his colleague. "And...if pure evolution were to be proven, versus some type of implantation or construction...."

"Creation! Please, just say evolution versus creation, *please!*" Big James hurried Jason along.

"Fine, creation...if creation were wrong and evolution right, then



there would be aliens from a different planet, which had evolved over millions of years....but....”

“But...what?” Sam looked very scared and eager that the words coming next would be accurate and that they would hit hard.

Jason continued, “We can't find any life signs in space, not even proper building blocks to create basic plant life on another planet. Then, some imposter race shows up and goes to incredible lengths to lie to us about their origins, specifically, hiding their true nature: A.K.A. being from an extra dimension. Plus, they work hard at making excuses why we can't explore the galaxy with them. Well then....”

“Stop doing that!” Sam snapped, “Don't assume I know what you are about to say...then what does all this mean?”

JT stepped in, “Then everything the Shep is saying is true, and the Bible is right, and we may just be seeing the end of the world playing out right before our eyes.”

### **The Beginning of the End - Which is the Beginning of the ALL**

Jason was pacing in front of a massive stack of weapons next to a large duffle bag, which I had only just noticed. I was about to ask, ‘Why so many guns’ when Jason steered my mind back on topic. His high-powered brain rolled through multiple possibilities. “The ultimate conspiracy isn't that there is no God, but that there is nothing special about us! Think of the implications. If a seemingly more powerful race suddenly showed up, then they convinced us that not only are we not unique in the universe but inferior to them, we could be giving up rights or responsibility to care for the most incredible of gifts in this universe.”

“Which is?” Connie asked.

“Choice.”

“Just another speech about freedom,” Stewart rolled his eyes.

“Is that so hard to believe?” Jason's pacing intensified with a finger on his chin, chasing a growing thought. “From the dawn of time, if the Bible is to be believed, we were given the rulership over the garden of Eden, the ability to name the animals, and even the ability to choose good or evil.” He turned around and shrugged his shoulders, “Most ancient manuscripts and religions speak of man's ongoing battle to do right or wrong, ancient gods fighting over control, tempting humanity one way or the other. And no one can deny that there is always a scientist, government, or greedy organization waging war to force humanity into their way of thinking. Communism turned into dictatorships, the slavery wave of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. And the need for civil rights

and equality due to skin color, or even the right for women to vote. All a battle for humans to be able to make their own choice!”

“Yeah, like the church and their crusades or witch hunts.” Stewart quipped with an eye roll.

This time James' deep baritone voice broke into the conversation, “Just ‘cause someone calls themselves a church or says they fight for God doesn't make it so. Even Hitler claimed a divine right to massacre millions of Jews, Polish, and anyone else he hated. Even so, ain't we getting off-topic?”

“No!” Snapped Stewart, “I don't think we are! If what you are saying is true, where does that leave me? A gay dancer, doomed to an existence in hell. Why? Just cause I like men? I mean, you can't trust those bugged-eyed creeps. I agree they are not who they claimed to be, but at least they support MY people.”

“Oh, so cause I'm not gay, I am no longer *YOUR* people?” Connie snapped back. “After all we've been through, how could you say that to me?”

“Come on, Connie, I didn't mean it like that.”

I stood up and put a hand on Stewart's shoulder. “It's ok, son. People who think they are acting for God have been mistreating folks they don't understand forever. Gays, prostitutes, drug addicts, and the homeless. But you have to understand that's not love, and God is love. All that hate is their own human weakness, and their bad choices are speaking, not Him. Don't let the evil others have done make decisions for you. That's just another form of control.

“That goes for each one of us. We each have to decide for ourselves. We have to search for the path to God individually, one at a time. No one can make that choice for you. And as our esteemed Peace Agent Samuels, who is tied up next door, so elegantly stated earlier while beating on me, ‘I believe the path to God lies with a martyred Jew 2,000 years ago.’”

“You're skirting the issue, Preacher.” Stewart glared daggers back at me. “Is my love for another man a sin?”

“I think I have a better question for you.” Over the past twelve years, I hadn't dealt with this type of tough personal questioning: a real and raw inquiry. Until now, I had never really known what to say, but I felt a long-forgotten Spirit inspiring my words from deep in my belly, “Do you care if you are right or wrong, or do you just want to know if you can be accepted for who you are?”

“You're just avoiding the question...”

“Just give me a chance,” I butted in, hoping he'd stay open for a few more moments. “If I say that being gay is a sin, then you might just cut me off, AND cut God's love off as well, even though His love is so much better and bigger than that. Also, I won't lie to you and trick you into trusting God, pretending I think romantic love to the same sex is God's best. But one of the greatest conspiracies this world has fallen prey to is the disguised control of

religion. Following a set rules to please God in order to get to Heaven through rituals and man-made morals.

“Do you know what sin means? Somewhere down the line, it became a word that meant bad and yucky. But when Jesus said it, it meant ‘missing the mark.’ And guess what, people?” I waved to the entire group, “In one way or another, we have all missed the mark; everyone... man, woman, and child on this earth has made a mistake. Except Jesus Christ. That’s the entire reason God sent Him here. To make up for all of us missing the mark. But, I’m not Jesus, I’m not God...I can’t tell you how you missed the mark; only He can. The only sure way I can help is to guide you to Jesus, and He can help you decide how you have missed the mark.”

I looked back at Stewart, made eye contact, then smiled warmly as I concluded, “Jesus loves who you are, all of you. And only by going to Him as you are - warts and all - can you be in His love. If you give Him a chance, the two of you can sort the rest out.”

The group was dead quiet. I noticed the sound of a dripping pipe behind me and traffic from a nearby highway for the first time. The few moments I took to catch my breath and continue my spontaneous sermon felt like an hour. Not because of fear but a sense that every person in the room was thinking, contemplating, and battling within themselves. Was it really this simple? Could I be accepted no matter what? Will God love me after all the drugs, violence, stealing, sex, pornography, hateful words, and thoughts?

I sat down and continued, “Look at me, guys; I’m 45. I’m a fat, newly minted alcoholic preacher. Until a few hours ago, I’d completely lost my faith, and I only found it again as I was given an impossible choice by a madman beating me to death.” I shook my head, “Did I tell you that one of those grey bugs took control of Samuels, possessing him like a puppet, and gave me a choice? He said I could give ya’ll up, and I’d live on the winning side or die right then and there. I didn’t pray some long, drawn-out prayer or make some ritualistic gesture. I just made a choice in my mind to go back to God - 100%. Just like that,” I snapped my fingers, “Poof, He took me back.”

I choked up, forcing words through a swollen throat and tears puddling in my eyes, “An old, fat, failing drunk who’d already betrayed Him and the people He entrusted to me.” I wiped my eyes and settled my gaze onto Stewart, “Son, I’m not avoiding your questions about being gay; I’m saying that Jesus cares more for you than what you do, so much that he died for you.”

Sam sniffed hard and wiped snot and tears from his tattooed face, “Dam...I mean dang, ah hell, I don’t know what to say...but if you can talk like that with a face cut up and swollen that bad, then preach, can’t imagine what you sounded like in your prime.”

I chuckled, which sent waves of pain through my face, but I didn't care, "Son, if it weren't God speaking through me right now, I'd be curled in a corner crying myself to sleep in pain right now."

A sudden and violent quake rocked me off my feet.

When I finally managed to clamber to my feet, I looked to the others for help. Their mouths moved, but no sound came from their throats. The group was shouting and pointing, but nothing they said had any volume. Stewart gripped my shirt, screaming something over and over, but still, only his mouth moved, and no words came out. A ringing grew in my ears as Stewart rolled his eyes and changed tactics. He kept his grip, dragging me to the rear door with a tight fist full of shirt. I peered back to see the group arming themselves from the cache of weapons. Sam pushed Devon's wheelchair in my direction while the disabled man sported a sawed-off shotgun and an AK-47.

Realization of what was happening hit me just as I registered I couldn't breathe. But, why? My mouth was fine; there was plenty of air. Stewart was still dragging me to the back door when I dug in my heels and motioned to the young man at my mouth. He couldn't make out what was happening. However, his sister stepped in and slapped me across the face.

Shocked, I sucked in air, then coughed. "Ouch! That hurt" My voice was muffled but audible.

Connie smirked, "Works every time....Well, actually, every other time...."

"Let's move, people!" Devon bellowed.

"Moving!" A shout came from the doorway leading into the warehouse. Sam burst through, then turned, fired into the opening, and lowered his weapon just long enough for big James to fall into the room; Sam fired twice more after him, with Devon adding two shotgun blasts from his wheelchair for good measure.

James looked up at me and everyone else, "What the hell are you still doing here? Get gone!"

"Where's Samuels?" I demanded. Bad guy or not, he was still our responsibility.

"He's gone. Attack drones took him out first. Poor sod; he probably thought they were there to rescue their *good soldier*."

The big former Fed dug through the big black duffel bag next to the weapons cache. "We got two of 'em, but two more still out there, waiting for backup. Probably be ground troops next." Agent James clipped a tactical vest on, then retrieved a helmet from the black bag. He clicked it on his head as he shouted, "Y'all need to move now. I am going to buy you some time. Just in case

the worse happens, go to a safe house I don't know about..."

"I'm staying with you." Connie checked her ammo as she stepped up next to James, digging around the same duffle bag, looking for another vest.

"Nah, you ain't, kid. Only one of us needs to hold this door, now get outta here before they come, and they cover the rear entrance."

"No, old man," Connie sneered, "I ain't leaving your slow, decrepit butt alone."

James laid a massive hand on her shoulder, forcing eye contact, then smiled warmly, "It's ok, kid, I'll be right behind you."

Stewart jumped in, stepping into Connie's face and screaming, "Sis, NO! This is a one-way trip for James, and if he's willing to play hero, good for him." Stewart calmed a bit and swallowed hard, "Not you! Not yet!" Stewart's eyes pleaded with her.

Connie was defiant, "I don't run from a fight, ever!" She fastened the rest of the velcro straps on the black bulletproof vest.

James shrugged, "Oh, is that it? Just stupid pride?"

Connie scowled and snapped her head around to face the big man. But to everyone's shock, she was met by James' massive fist. Not seeing it coming, Connie caught all of the strike right on the button and folded like a cheap suit.

James snatched her up by her tactical vest and hefted her onto Stewart's shoulder. "Tell her I'm sorry, but she hasn't earned the right yet." He smiled warmly at the young dancer, "Besides, since my kids vanished, watching out for you two kinda helped me out a lot. I don't think I can take seeing either of you get killed."

"Thanks, you're a good friend," Stewart grunted. Tears gathering in his eyes, he turned and followed Devon and Sam towards the rear door.

"Can we talk about this?" It was JT, James' best friend. He twisted his neck and cleared his throat, desperately trying to contain his emotions.

James put a heavy hand on JT's shoulder, "It's time, old friend. It's time." He sniffed, and a tear streaked his mahogany cheek, "I'm 56, my wife and kids are waiting for me on the other side, and the preacher just confirmed everything I've been thinking for the past year." He shook the smaller man in jest and smiled, "My brother, I choose Jesus. And I hope," James paused to swallow hard and looked up to the ceiling, using gravity to keep the tears inside. He grunted as he continued, "No, I pray that you make the same choice one day before you die."

JT raised an eyebrow and grinned, "Talk about a guilt trip."

James chuckled, "My grandma would say, 'Boy! Whatever works - works.'"

JT let the tears flow, raised his head, and exhaled at the ceiling, "Oh, I hate you so much right now."

"Love you too, buddy," James replied.

JT wrapped smaller arms around the big man, and they embraced for a moment before JT broke away, wiping his nose, "Give'em hell."

James snapped to attention and grinned, "I always do, sir." But held his salute.

JT also snapped to and returned the salute.

As JT crossed the room towards me, James reached back into the duffle, pulled out what looked like a black baseball, pulled the pin off the dark orb, then turned around, took a step, opened the door and tossed it into the warehouse. The old warrior then turned back and peered over his shoulder at me just as JT was exiting, motioning with his head that I should follow.

But just as I turned to leave, James' final words gave me pause, "Preacher, when I get up there, I'll look for your wife and kids."

An explosion shook the door James held onto, readying himself to breach.

I stiffened my upper lip and did not know how to respond and told him so. "I don't know what to say."

James shrugged, "You've said enough, but promise me you won't give up on JT, even though he's thickheaded and stubborn."

I nodded solemnly, "Promise."

At that, James smiled a big toothy grin, winked, and hefted two extra weapons across his right shoulder, slipping through the warehouse door and into the fray.

That day, Former Secret Service Agent Lincoln James was our first casualty, but sadly he would not be our last.

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**End of Part Two of the Shepherd's Volume Trilogy**  
**Stay Tuned...**

*A Shepherd's Solution Alienation Series Vol. 7*

A Shepherd's Reason

## Gray Family Missions

grayfamilymissions.com

ryantgray2@gmail.com

# A SHEPHERD'S REASON

