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Opening extract from
**The
Synchronicity
Factor**

Written by
Stephen T. Hancock

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THE CREATION

Andrew stared into the microcosmic world that he had created. Tiny shafts of golden sunlight splintered from the minute precision engineering. Cogs and spindles whirled in their own miniscule spaces; rubies and diamonds sparkled, embedded in lightly oiled Invar and other rare metal alloys. Only now as a complete entity, with every part in place, each playing its pre-determined role could it function. Tick...counting tiny slivers of existence, tick... in perfect synchronised harmony... tick. It had come to life at last!

It had always seemed strange to him, that at the moment before the last piece of a timepiece was put in place, he held in his hands a collection of valuable but totally useless metal and jewels. But a heartbeat later – there it was, a miniature engine working as though it were alive and would last forever.

In his imagination it seemed as though this timepiece symbolised the science of chronology itself, the arrangement of events in time. But this was no ordinary timepiece. This was something very special. Andrew King had been making this watch on and off for almost a year, ever since the dreams started. At least they seemed like dreams. Now he was not sure where the line between dreaming and waking was drawn.

Soon after he had started, he began to wake at night with new ideas and had gone to his workshop to incorporate them in the construction of the timepiece that he wanted to be his finest

creation. As time went by he would often find himself rising from his bed at two or three in the morning when the cold mist was settled over the surrounding countryside and he pulled the shutters closed to keep the blackness out. During those lost hours he would work like a man driven by unknown forces, using skills he had mastered over many years.

Now he held the timepiece in the palm of his hand and gently pressed the casement into place. It closed with the softest hint of a snap, the tiny satisfying snick of a perfect fit, leaving no trace of a seam. It was as if this final act consummated a lifetime's work and closed a chapter.

He stared at it as though waking from a dream, seeing it for the first time, and shook his head in wonder. He had never seen a design of this kind before with its amazing pattern of symbols and engravings. And now it was done, the spell was broken.

Suddenly he felt exhausted. He had worked late into the night and his mind and body needed rest. He slipped the exquisite object into the blue velvet case and after locking it in the workshop safe climbed the stairs and collapsed on his bed, falling immediately into the deepest and most restful sleep he had had for a long time.

He awoke to sunshine flooding in through the cottage windows, with the sound of birds chirping their thanks for a warm day, and realised that he had been so tired that he had forgotten to close the window and draw the curtains before getting into bed.

Although it was November, it was one of those glorious golden English winter days that seemed to be becoming more frequent. Probably something to do with global warming he thought wryly. Then smiled to himself – too cynical, just enjoy it while it's here.

He looked out over the fields and lost memories of childhood came flooding back. Times when life was simple, the

morning promise of endless summer, images of his father the parish vicar, coming back from morning service at the village church; his mother baking bread and the smell of the delicious cakes that his friends regarded as the best reason to come home with him after school.

In the distance over towards the woodland, cows grazed, a wisp of smoke spiralled upwards from the farmer's cottage half a mile away and the grass seemed amazingly green, glistening with dew. It was as if spring had suddenly happened early at the flick of a switch. He stretched and yawned. For the first time in what seemed an eternity, life felt good and he was hungry.

After a long luxurious shower he wrapped a towel round his waist and went to the basin to shave. Leaning forward to wipe the mist from the mirror he recoiled in alarm at the shocking image that stared back at him. The stranger had deep shadows under his eyes, ragged stubble and long unkempt hair. His mind struggled with reality, what had happened to him? At forty-five, he had been considered reasonably handsome. Slightly longish face clean cut features, dark hair greying at the temples, and the deep-set brown eyes that Cindy had fallen in love with.

A surge of panic gripped him. Had he been so absorbed in his work that he had let himself go to this extent? Angrily he smothered his face with foam, clicked in a new razor blade and attacked the stubble with savage determination. Time to get his life back on track.

He descended the rustic wooden stairs and went to the kitchen, ducking the huge oak beam that had caught many an unwary visitor. After putting bacon under the grill, he couldn't resist going to the workshop for his creation, taking it back to the kitchen table to examine it in daylight. He slipped it out of its velvet pocket and a mantle of calm descended on him as his thoughts turned to the symbolism of the timepiece.

It wasn't exactly a clock or even a pocket watch; it was too big for that, quite heavy, probably weighing around 150 grams. Its radiant slightly domed surface and seamless face fitted perfectly

in his hand like a beautiful gold and crystal egg. As he stared at it, the shape, proportion and symbolic designs created an image of immutable perfection that numbed his senses with its beauty.

Much of the work had been performed in a kind of rapture and he wondered how he could have performed such a feat of craftsmanship without fully understanding what he was creating. But his pride of achievement was tempered with a sense of puzzled unease. There was a hidden duality, something that suggested enormous power and energy but also something that touched his feelings with icy undercurrents of danger, and he had no idea why.

All he had hoped for when he had started was to create a fine timepiece that would restore his reputation after the ignominious parting from Argento Industries. He looked at the casing and lightly traced a finger over it. It was so intricately designed; fashioned from inlaid gold, platinum and sparkling crystal that it seemed to radiate a light of its own. It was the sort of beautiful object that called out to be touched, and when held seemed to have the same calming effect as the Greek Komboloi.

Did I create that? He shook his head and wondered if he was going insane. Unfamiliar thoughts ran through his mind. The device seemed numinous; its blind insentient functions somehow able to influence the owner, averting disaster, or maybe leading to darkness and destruction...

Artefact? The word jumped into his mind and he went to the study shelf to pull out the Oxford English dictionary.

Ar.te.fact n. 1. An object produced or shaped by human craft, especially a tool, weapon or ornament of historical significance. 2. A structure or feature not normally present but visible as a result of an external agent or action. Hmm... possible I suppose. Both definitions might fit the bill although why it could be an object of historical significance eluded him. He held his head in his hands trying to think.

How long had it been? He grabbed his diary and flicked the calendar pages back. After a quick calculation he put it down in

surprise, it was almost a year since he started work on the horological masterpiece. He shook his head to clear it. The bacon sizzled and smelled delicious, so after turning off the grill he put the timepiece in its case, placed it carefully back in the safe and returned to the kitchen to make his bacon sandwich. He was going to forget about the fruits of his labours for the time being and get on with life again.

The letterbox clanged and Andrew heard the thud of *The Times* hitting the floor. He went to the front door and scooped it up along with the mail. 'More bills!' he muttered and returned to his waiting sandwich and a cup of strong coffee.

As he took the first mouth-watering bite, he spread the paper out on the table to scan the headlines. The usual doom and gloom was being purveyed by the media on the state of the world economy, but his eye caught a small picture towards the bottom of the page. It was Ratty his old friend from Cambridge. Raatib had studied Comparative Philosophy and Religion when Andrew was taking Micro Engineering and later a PhD in the science of building things atom by atom, molecule by molecule, – nanotechnology.

He remembered looking up the meaning of his friend's name once and was surprised to discover that it meant 'Arranger.' He was mystified as to why Raatib's parents had chosen to call their son The Arranger, but as Andrew got to know him it became obvious that that was one of his major talents. Maybe, he thought, Raatib's parents had some precognition of their son's abilities at the time of his birth.

The familiar dark, Middle-Eastern face now had a short beard and looked more gaunt and earnest than he remembered from their last meeting. There was a paragraph about Raatib returning from a lecture tour in America, and as usual causing a stir with his radical views on philosophy versus religion. This

time he was proposing the concept that every individual lives in their own time and space in their own mind, because no two people's life experiences are the same. 'Ask any practising psychiatrist,' he had said at a press conference. Based on that, he seemed to be calling into question the validity of all religions.

'How could any prescribed set of religious beliefs have true living reality for more than one person at a time?' he was quoted as saying, 'and if there was one true set, why wasn't the whole of mankind following it?' Andrew was rather surprised at the change in Raatib's philosophical orientation as he had been a devout Muslim when they had been together at Cambridge. However he found the whole thing slightly boring and decided to skip the rest of the article.

The phone rang.

'Hello Andrew, remember me?' Andrew's scalp tightened as he recovered from the shock of surprise – it was Raatib! Although they had maintained ad-hoc contact over the years since graduation, they hadn't spoken for nearly four years – in fact since Andrew had gone to Switzerland to work for the international giant Argento Industries on their top secret *New Era Concept* watch design.

'Raatib –how extraordinary! I was just reading about you. How did you get my number?'

'Easy, I have connections Andrew. Anyway how are you, why haven't you kept in touch?'

Andrew felt slightly embarrassed. It was during his assignment in Switzerland that things had started to go wrong with his life. At the time he hadn't wanted to discuss it with anyone. Not even a close friend like Raatib.

'I know,' he said, 'I should have, but I had a few problems. Cindy and I temporarily split, and I went slightly off the rails, so Argento paid me off and I was going to semi – retire. I didn't really want to talk about it'.

'That's the trouble with you Andrew; you never did want to talk about your problems. What are friends for? Anyway you're

much too young, how could you possibly retire? Look, why don't we meet up for dinner next week and catch up. By the way I'm still lecturing at Cambridge so we could meet at my house and then go to eat at the club.'

Andrew had to admit that it sounded like just the break he needed. He had been working nearly every night now for as long as he could remember and his social life was almost non-existent. In any case he actually wanted to talk to Raatib about the disturbing process he had gone through with the timepiece. Raatib was into all kinds of esoteric studies; maybe he could shed some light on the strange geometrical designs on the casement.

'Great idea, I'd like that. Is next Wednesday any good? OK, give me your address and I'll come over at seven.'

'Make it six; there are some things I'd like to talk to you about before dinner'.

'That would suite me fine. As a matter of fact I've just finished working on a new timepiece that I would like your opinion on.' He scribbled down the address and hung up.

Andrew sat down on the swivel chair by his desk. Something nagged at the back of his mind. It seemed too much of a coincidence that almost at the very moment he saw Raatib's picture in the paper, he telephoned him out of the blue. He shrugged. Oh well, you can never figure out coincidences, so no point in trying.

That night, unlike the previous night, he tossed and turned in fitful sleep. In the darkness of his dreams he thought he heard voices calling out to him and in one moment of anguish heard Cindy sobbing. Then just before waking, the dream subtly changed. Strangely he felt at peace and bizarrely... he was bearing a child. In his sleep, the impossibility of this surreal experience only vaguely impinged on his dreaming consciousness. In his dream state he just accepted it until – suddenly there was a crack of thunder so loud that it seemed a thunderbolt had hit the house and split the roof. At that instant

in his dream he gave birth! Simultaneously he awoke and sat bolt upright, rigid, wringing with sweat and wide-eyed with shock.

In the morning he casually asked in the newsagents shop if there had been a thunderstorm during the night. According to the locals, there hadn't been a storm, except for one single bolt of lightning and a clap of thunder somewhere in the village, but nowhere else. The delivery man reckoned 'it was a bloody meteorological miracle' and others thought nothing of it. Something held Andrew back from getting into a discussion about it, but secretly he felt that his experience, although deeply disturbing was symbolic of something that had great relevance to what was happening to him.

The next few days only increased his puzzlement. Small insignificant concurrences kept happening, nudging his subconscious in an intangible and perplexing way. On the one hand he felt much calmer than he had in a long time and the coincidences seemed to be beneficial. On the other hand he liked to feel in control. And things seemed to be happening to him over which he had no control.