

# **Counterproductive Man**

**Jeff Inlo**

**Sample Chapters 1-4**

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By Jeff Inlo

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**\*\*\*Important Note\*\*\***

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Thank you.

*To Joan, for making all of this possible and productive*

# Chapter 1

It was not a good day. The fact that it was Friday didn't really help matters. I read somewhere that companies tend to notify terminated employees of their new and unfortunate status closer to the weekend. It's more a matter of safety than convenience. Notification on Friday tends to reduce the potential threat of conflict. I suppose the thinking is that the fired individual will be more concerned with making an early run to the liquor store as opposed to beating his or her manager to death with an excessively large expense report that can only be obtained on Mondays.

If you haven't guessed already, I'll admit it; I lost my job. I was told my services "No longer met the business requirements of the company," which is Latin for "We found someone in Sri Lanka who is willing to do your job for a boiled doughnut." I don't think you're supposed to boil doughnuts, but I've never been to Sri Lanka, so maybe it's a delicacy there.

I had to pack up my desk under the watchful eye of a security officer. He seemed a decent enough fellow, just doing his job. I showed him the personal belongings I was packing into a box, and he just nodded. The truth is, I really don't think he cared. To this day, I still wonder what he might have done if I started to take the actual desk drawers or even the office chair. I doubt he would have bothered to stop me.

Just as I finished packing the last of my non-furniture related items, that's when my life really changed. You see, it wasn't the cold, faceless letter informing me of my unanticipated and totally involuntary entry into the job market that truly altered my life's path. And it wasn't the follow-up package of bold-faced lies about how the company would assist me with education and training. It was the breaking of glass that heralded my journey into the absurd chaos which would become my new life.

Like most database administrators, I used to sit in a cubicle that was packed along with several others in a jigsaw pattern upon the open floor of a multi-storied office building—a structure constructed mostly of steel and glass. Several large windows formed the west wall, and it was through one of those glass panes that the obnoxious intruder made his entrance.

I was not alone in my surprise at the sudden and destructive appearance of a stranger into our corporate midst. Those nearest the window scattered and ran for cover like cats that somehow knew it was appointment time for the vet. Those further away from the commotion mostly stayed put but cautiously peered above their cubicle walls.

My immediate cube neighbor was a highly intelligent engineer named George Draffer. I liked George because he was quiet, and that was really all I cared about. George could have been raising sentient water chestnuts to sell to slave labor camps, but as long as I didn't hear anything from him, he was a great guy.

I think George liked me as well because I didn't interrupt him. George was a heavy concentrator, a zone-out kind of guy. Half the time I didn't know if he was actually concentrating on his work, just daydreaming, or sleeping with his eyes open. Every now and then I'd see him staring at his computer screen. He wouldn't move at all. He could have been dead for all I knew, but I didn't really want to find out. If he was dead, I didn't want to have to fill out any forms about how I found him. I hate forms. If he was alive, I didn't want to interrupt him, because as I said, that's why he liked me.

Unfortunately for George, this wasn't going to be his best day either. The shattering of glass broke him from his concentration, or woke him from the dead, and George jumped from his chair just as I stepped into the cubicle aisle to get a better look at the commotion.

After the initial screams of panic died down, I heard a great many groans along with a few shouts of joy. The mixed responses perplexed me for it did not match what I saw. Near the broken window, I spotted a masked man brushing glass off his shoulders. I could only see his head over the tops of the cubicle walls, and I could not ignore my own immediate rush of concern.

The first thought that ran through my head was that we were being attacked by some kind of terrorist group. We worked on some government contracts, even some jobs for the Department of Defense, so it wasn't totally inconceivable we might be targeted. Immediately, I looked to the security officer for instructions.

"There's someone with a mask over there," I warned the guard while remaining as calm as possible. "I think he broke through the window. What should we do?"

In truth, I was actually more angry than concerned. If terrorists were going to assault the building and take prisoners, I wondered why they couldn't have waited until after I left. I did, however, think of a few managers I could offer up as principal hostages, and since I was no longer important to the business needs of the company, I doubted I would be a prime target. If the terrorists didn't believe me, I would have just shown them my termination letter.

The security guard arched his neck as he raised his eyes above the short cubicle walls to get a better look. He then turned his attention back to my desk.

"Don't worry about it. It can't possibly concern you."

"Can't concern me? What are you...?"

Before I could finish my question, I heard one of the mail clerks yell out with obvious glee.

"Hey, it's him! It's Counterproductive Man!"

The intruder stepped several paces further into the building and I got a much better look at him. A dark blue cape hung over his shoulders, and a black mask covered the top half of his face. At the center of his white dress shirt, he wore a dark gray 'P' with a red slash through it. He put his hands on his hips as he shouted across the floor.

"I'm looking for George Draffer!"

I looked quickly to George. He appeared as if he wanted to dive under his desk.

"Do you know this guy?" I asked.

George just blinked.

The masked man repeated his question even louder. "I said, I'm looking for George Draffer! Is he here?"

George finally spoke up, but his response was halting and uncertain.

"Uhhh, that's me, I guess."

"You guess?" The masked-man glanced over the wall at the top of George's head. The eyes of the costumed stranger narrowed as he peered through the slits of his mask.

"You're not sure? I like that. Perhaps I have the wrong man."

Counterproductive Man suddenly leapt forward and stalked his way dramatically through the network of cubicles. With obvious intention, he didn't take a direct path. He

took several wrong turns and appeared like a mouse in a maze searching for cheese that he could smell but could not see. Eventually, he made his way to where I was standing.

As he got closer, I could see he wore a wireless earpiece with an attached microphone that hung about the side of his face, and he had a pocket protector filled with tiny gadgets. He also had some kind of knapsack strapped over his shoulder, but I couldn't get a good look at it since it was covered by his cape.

I probably shouldn't have said anything, but I just couldn't resist.

"How did you get through that window?"

The stranger leered at me.

"Do you work with George?" Counterproductive Man asked.

The security guard that showed little to no interest in anything other than my desk answered for me.

"He's being let go today."

"Unemployed, eh?" And then he just nodded.

Yeah, I was about to be unemployed, so at that point I didn't care what I said.

"I asked you a question. How did you get through that window?"

"I jumped," and then he turned to George. "We have to talk."

"You jumped?" I questioned. "We're four stories up."

At that point, Counterproductive man ignored me. He appeared much more annoyed with the neatly stacked piles of papers on George's desk. He grabbed a handful contemptuously and tossed them into a disorganized mass.

I thought George was going to pass out. I looked over to the security guard that kept a calm watch over my computer.

"Aren't you going to do something about this guy?" I questioned.

"No."

"No?"

Counterproductive man gave me a sideways smile. "I like you. You repeat yourself. That's a good waste of time. You also ask people the same questions twice. That's a good waste of other people's time." He then turned to the security guard. "Make sure you fill out a report on his request, probably a SG413 would be best. It was a pointless request, which I like, but you still have to complete the necessary paperwork."

"I have to escort this guy out of here first," the security guard responded, seemingly unfazed by being told what to do by an apparent lunatic.

"Which guy?" the nut in the cape and mask asked.

The security guard pointed at me.

Counterproductive Man frowned. "Oh yes, I forgot about him."

"You forgot about me? I've been standing right here the whole time!"

He gave me a look I can not describe. It was beyond vacant. It looked almost as if his brain had just been wiped clean with a damp cloth. He stood that way for several seconds, and then without further explanation, he turned his attention back to the guard.

"After you finish with the escort, have a coffee break and a smoke, then the SG413 report." He then looked at his watch, twice. "That should be enough work for one day. Call it a day when you've finished the report."

"Works for me," the security guard said with a shrug and returned his gaze to my desk.

I didn't know what to say.

Counterproductive Man stood stone still for several moments as he stared at the blank cubicle wall in front of him. He looked like George when I thought George might be dead. I almost poked him, but suddenly he came to life.

He raised his head in the most dramatic fashion as he turned to look back and forth down the aisle. His focus seized upon a young woman standing at a copier. As she hit several buttons, he clenched his fists and hunched over slightly, almost defensively.

The woman finished her task, pressed some more buttons, and then turned to be on her way.

Through the slits of his mask, I could see abhorrence fill the eyes of Counterproductive Man. He called out, almost in a rage.

"You there! Stand your ground!"

The young woman, a finance manager, said nothing. She just looked about with uncertainty.

"Yes, I'm talking to you. Wait there!"

The intruder took great strides down the aisle, pumping his arms at his sides as if he was power walking. Again, he made at least two wrong turns that took him off the direct path to the copier, but eventually he stepped in front of the finance manager with all the authority of a commanding general standing before an ordinary private.

"I saw what you just did. You made a dozen copies and then you had them stapled independently."

"Yeah, so?" the woman asked with a lift in her shoulders and an extended open hand, giving the clear impression she did nothing wrong.

That was apparently a matter of opinion.

"When you were finished, I also saw you reset the machine to one copy, no staple," the costumed nut declared as if daring her to deny her unwarranted behavior. "That is simply unacceptable."

The woman gaped at the interloper, astonished.

Counterproductive Man returned the stare with stern admonishment.

"What are you trying to do? Save paper? Someone's time? Or both? When you set the copier to something unusual, it is your responsibility to leave it that way. Force the next person to fuss with the controls. Perhaps they'll even break the machine. That would be excellent. Time wasted in waiting for a technician is time well lost."

He then started pressing the copier buttons furiously, probably setting it to copy twelve times darker than normal, on legal-sized paper, both sides, and enlarged by two hundred percent.

"There, that's much better," he beamed with pride.

The manager hurried away.

"Don't run!" the intruder cried out in earnest. "There's no meeting so important that you can't be ten minutes late."

I looked to George.

"Do you know this guy?"

George rubbed his head briskly.

"I've heard of him, but I thought he was an urban legend. I didn't think he was real."

"You've heard of him?"

Counterproductive Man called out to me across the room. "You're a good man! You keep repeating your questions. I like that... a lot! You're headed for big things here, I can tell."

"I've just been fired!"

Counterproductive Man jumped straight back as if dodging a speeding car in the middle of a highway. He looked about the room as if someone threw something at him. He then started another meandering path back to George's cube.

The rest of the office personnel returned to their duties, but with a much reduced level of attention and activity. No one else seemed to care about the presence of the apparent madman.

"Now, let's get back to you." Counterproductive Man asserted, as he finally reached his destination. He focused entirely on George, ignoring me completely. "I have reports that you are making great progress on your designs."

George just stumbled backward and sunk back into his chair.

I, on the other hand, had a thousand questions explode in my mind, and I blurted a few of them out like machine-gun fire.

"How do you know this? Who the hell are you? Why are you making everything so difficult? Why doesn't anybody throw you out? And how did you jump four stories into this building?"

The questions were answered in quick succession.

"I am well-informed. I am Counterproductive Man. It's my job. They can't. Government issued equipment."

The loon tensed as he looked me over, apparently waiting for me to make the next move.

I simply shook my head as I tried to understand his responses.

Counterproductive Man relaxed as another frown of disappointment shaped his lips.

"Aren't you going to ask those questions again? No? Perhaps, I was wrong about you. Perhaps you will not go as far in this company as I thought. Maybe only middle-management."

I found my voice.

"How the hell can it be your job to make things difficult for other people, and what kind of equipment can allow you to jump four stories?!"

The frown of disappointment flashed to a smile of triumph. "Because that's what I do, and you'd be surprised what government issued equipment can accomplish. You're back to asking the same questions over again. Maybe you are pure executive material."

"I just got fired!"

That simple fact did not faze Counterproductive man in the least. He went back to ignoring me and turned his attention right back to George.

"Enough of that, let's talk about you. I know what you're up to. I also know you're well beyond your expected design requirements for the year."

George gasped. "How do you know this? My files are encrypted."

"As a fully licensed agent of the United States Government, I have unlimited access. I have seen your files. What you're working on now will advance the technology by a large margin. We simply can't have that. Haven't you even considered the current products on the market? You will be creating technological obsolescence way too early in the product

life cycle. Haven't you heard of advancing current technology by small increments rather than by making huge leaps?"

George seemed to be gaining his nerve and began to defend himself.

"But there was no way to make a small leap in this technology. Incremental development was at a standstill."

"That's no excuse."

"It's not meant to be an excuse!"

"Sounds like one to me. Normally, I like excuses, especially bad ones. Nothing starts the day like a good ol' bad excuse."

I could not believe what I was hearing. "Did you just say, 'A good ol' bad excuse'?"

The nut slapped me on the back with great pride. "Now you want me to repeat myself. If you're not on the fast track, you should be. Yes, there's nothing better than a good ol' bad excuse."

I bit my tongue only for a moment. I did not tell him for the fourth time that I had been terminated. Instead, I questioned the logic of his previous statement.

"How can you have a good ol' bad excuse? I mean, that's like having a wakeful sleep or a bright darkness. It doesn't make any sense."

Once more, I got the glazed over expression. He looked like a stunned kid that just got hit in the head with a snowball in the middle of summer. He shook his head and dismissed me yet again.

"When you make an excuse," Counterproductive Man began to lecture George, "you make one to avoid work. Never, *EVER* use an excuse to justify doing more work. That's just inexcusable."

George turned red in the face.

"I wasn't making an ex... never mind. Look, the technology as it stands has hit a barrier. It can no longer be advanced without taking a completely different approach."

"I understand," the masked-man said bluntly.

"So that's what I've been focusing on," George continued. "I can't just tweak the process anymore."

"Clearly."

"There are certain steps that have to be completely altered."

"I'm aware of that."

"That means a totally new direction."

"Blazing a new trail."

"So to speak, yes," George said, almost offering a sigh of relief. "The benefits that are inherent in this new process can't simply be minimized to maintain slight incremental development."

"Makes perfect sense."

"Then you agree, we have to make this one huge leap in technological improvement in order to move forward?"

"No."

"No?"

Counterproductive man smiled broadly. "Now you're making me repeat myself, just like your friend here. You're probably both on the executive fast track program. And yes, I said no."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing and I dropped my chin into the palm of my hand.

George made one last ditch effort. "There's no other way to improve the technology at this point."

"As I said, I understand," Counterproductive Man allowed.

"Then how can I possibly make minor improvements to the technology just to avoid technological obsolescence?"

"It's not always up to you to make advances."

"Who else is there?"

"Haven't you ever heard of Marketing?"

"Marketing?" George exclaimed in disbelief.

"Does that mean you haven't heard of them," the caped madman asked, "or are you trying to make me repeat myself again?"

"Of course I've heard of Marketing."

"Ok, then yes, Marketing."

"How the heck is Marketing going to improve the technology?" George demanded.

"They're not. They're going to improve the customer selections. New colors, new scents, new accessories, new advertisements, perhaps a nice travel companion set; they can do quite a bit."

"But that's not a real upgrade."

"You might not think so, but there are entire demographics that are looking forward to the new cranberry shade."

I decided to enter the conversation once more. "If that's the case, then why don't you go bother the Marketing Department? They're on the second floor. You won't have to jump as high to reach them."

"I never worry about Marketing. They will get along just fine without my guidance."

"You're not guiding anybody up here. Seems to me you're just getting in the way."

Counterproductive Man put his hands on his hips once more.

"And that's my job!"

George groaned in flustered disbelief. "So you're going to keep bothering me until you think it's alright for me to continue with my work? What about my company? Don't you think they're going to complain about this? My new design would make them a lot of money."

"Your *past* design is making them a lot of money. They wish to maximize those profits before they release your newer design. Besides, they get government subsidies for cooperating with me."

I nearly fell over. "You have got to be kidding me! I get fired for not being part of the 'business plan' and on the same day you show up to tell George to stop working. And the government is going to pay this company for going along with that?"

"You seem to be surprised."

"Of course I'm surprised."

"You shouldn't be. The government is always looking for new ways to work with American businesses."

"So what happens to George, does he get fired? Will he get a big envelope filled with forms deposited on his desk next Friday?"

"Of course not."

I waited for some kind of further explanation, but the lunatic just stared at me again. I decided to try and prod him along. "So you're telling him he has to stop his work, but he doesn't get fired?"

"Is that the same question?" Counterproductive Man asked, genuinely curious. "I'm not sure I followed it."

"I just want to confirm this. George keeps his job, but doesn't have to do any work. Is that right?"

"As right as root beer on rainy days."

I couldn't believe any of it.

George just rubbed his temples as he looked about the office. "What am I supposed to do here? Just sit around and do nothing until you say it's alright?"

A smile returned to the hero's face. "No, not at all. You can write some computer viruses."

"Viruses?!" I shouted in amazement.

The nut flashed me another smile as he nodded quickly, but then resumed his advice to George. "Nothing major of course, just a bug that brings a server down for a day or two. Anything beyond that is destructive, and that goes too far. If you feel that's beneath you, then just play some solitaire, or take a little time to set up a local network for a multi-player game. Is that really too much to ask?"

George could not contain his astonishment. "What about my manager? No one's going to get mad? They'll still pay me for this?"

"Of course," Counterproductive Man laughed, "people get paid for it all the time. It's not really like any of you have a choice. As a duly deputized officer of the United States Government, I have complete authority to keep you from working any further on this design."

"What if he decided to ignore you?" I asked.

I thought the nut was going to have some kind of seizure. He started to shake as the visible portions of his cheeks just below his mask turned ash gray. His eyes almost bugged out through the slits in his mask.

"No one can ignore me! I'm Counterproductive Man!" He quickly regained his composure as he made his point clear. "Don't make me do something drastic here. If George doesn't comply on his own, I will make things extraordinarily difficult for him."

It wasn't my neck on the line, so I decided to press it.

"How?"

"I don't think George would have a great deal of time if he was to be summoned for Federal Grand Jury duty, and if that doesn't work, I will go to the Director of Human Resources and have George scheduled for weeks and weeks of required training. Let's see, there's diversity training, avoiding sexual harassment in the workplace classes, lectures on professional ethics, and of course all those seminars on information security."

George appeared to just give up. He flipped off his computer in a sign of complete capitulation.

Counterproductive Man made his assertion final. "Now, we've put in a busy day. Let's go get a candy bar from the vending machine and empty the coffee pot."

I watched in disbelief as George allowed the "hero" to lead him away from his desk and toward the break room. A few vice presidents nodded and smiled at them as they

passed. No one asked where they were going. No one seemed to mind that George wasn't at his desk laboring away.

My confusion turned to anger as I looked at the security guard keeping a watchful eye over my soon to be ex-desk. I threw the box of my personal belongings on the floor in disgust and shoved the large envelope that contained my departure forms into the arms of the guard.

“Give this to Human Resources and tell them to mail it to me.”

“That’s not my job,” the guard protested.

“Do it or I’ll make twelve more security requests right now and you’ll be filling out SG413 forms until midnight. As for that box of junk, you can keep it or throw it out. I don’t care. There’s nothing in it I really want.”

And it was true. The only thing I did want at that moment was to follow Counterproductive Man.

## Chapter 2

After Counterproductive Man left George's side—and the coffee pot empty without making a new batch—I followed him down the stairs. At first, I thought he was going to use the elevator. He pressed both the up and down call buttons, but then he simply walked away whistling.

Moving down the stairs was pretty slow going. I had to stop and wait behind him twice as he paused to catch his breath. I worried he might see me and wonder why I was following him, but he didn't seem to care about his surroundings.

Once in the lobby, he bolted into the men's room. I decided to wait outside and just watch the door. Counterproductive behavior in a bathroom was not something I wanted to be a part of. After a few minutes, he came out without his mask or cape, and the slashed 'P' was removed from his shirt. Of course he looked a bit different without his costume, but I was sure it was him when he passed the elevator and once more pressed the call buttons before walking out the front door.

Once he hit the streets, following him didn't become more difficult, it just became more annoying. He took three taxis, four buses, and several long walks just to end up at a parking lot two blocks from the building where I no longer worked.

He was about to get into a very large vehicle I could not identify. It was part pickup truck, part SUV, and part luxury sedan. It would have looked perfectly acceptable in one of those Monster Truck events that happen on "Sunday, Sunday, Sunday!" and my guess was it got about five yards per gallon of gasoline.

As he grabbed the door, a car alarm went off and I had to cover my ears. He patted the vehicle as if rewarding it for doing a good job, but he did nothing to stop the noise. Of course no one came running over to stop a car thief. The only other person I saw was an angry man shouting for him to "Shut that damn thing off!"

After a very long period of time, the madman finally killed the siren. I called to him just as he swung open the driver's side door.

"Hey," I said.

He froze, went stiff, corpse stiff. He didn't acknowledge me in anyway. It was like looking at a rabbit in a field that went stone still hoping no one would notice it. The problem for him was he was standing next to a truck that was nearly as big as a house and was painted lime green. It's not like he blended in with his surroundings.

At this point, I want to explain my own frame of mind. I was just fired that morning. I feared it for a while, but I didn't really expect it. I don't think anyone does. For most people, it's a shock, like seeing pancakes drop out of the sky during a rain storm. Being fired is like that, only the pancakes are moldy and there's no syrup or butter.

I lived by myself, so I relied on my paycheck. I had some savings, but not a lot. I knew the job market. Out-of-work database administrators were becoming as common as exercise equipment that can fold up and fit under the bed. Even a blind optimist would see my prospects were dim.

Personally, I believe that the day you're fired is the time you're most willing to take on any opportunity available. Depression hasn't quite set in at that point, and just about any path seems viable, especially when compared to joining the ranks of the unemployed.

In some cases, it's the moment ideas are born, most of them bad, but at that particular moment, sound judgment is not something that flows naturally.

For me, I thought of George Draffer and how he was going to keep his job despite not having to do any work. That was because of the man in front of me. Counterproductive Man had made it so, and if Counterproductive Man was able to do that for George, well then by God, he was going to do it for me.

I walked over to the nutcase and made my intentions clear.

"I know who you are, and I want you to help me."

He remained stiff, would not look at me, and he said nothing.

I sighed. "Look, I know you're Counterproductive Man. I followed you."

His head snapped about as he looked to his left and his right.

"You followed me?"

"Now you're making me repeat myself. Yes, I followed you."

His eyes narrowed as his brow furrowed into a half-dozen deep lines. "I know you! You're the one on the executive fast track."

"No, I'm the one who just got fired today."

"That's what I said."

I shook my head in disgust. "Fine, whatever. Obviously, you have some kind of pull somewhere. You were able to jump four stories without getting hurt, you gained access to George's files, and you were able to halt his design work without much effort. George can now sit around for a while and play games and still get paid. Me? I'm out on the street. I'm not happy with that situation."

"Then why don't you go back inside?"

"I mean, I lost my job."

"Ah, the unemployed. Spending time updating your resume, looking through job ads, calling friends you haven't spoken to in years—a great time of life."

"Maybe to you, but I liked my job. I liked going to work. Actually, what I liked was getting a paycheck. And that's how you're going to help me."

The clarity with which he actually understood what I was talking about shocked me.

"You want me to get you your job back?"

"Yes! Can you do that?"

"Yes."

Optimism filled my spirit. "You can?"

Counterproductive Man smiled at me. "Of course, I can do just about anything. And I like you."

"That's fantastic. When can I go back to work?"

He paused, looked straight up in the air, and then started counting on his fingers. Eventually he gave me an answer.

"Six years, four months, and twenty three days?"

I stared at him in disbelief.

"Does October have thirty days?" he asked

"No, thirty one," I replied without thinking.

He started counting on his fingers again. "Make that six years, four months and twenty nine days. Unless that brings us to February, which I know only has twenty eight days. In that case it's six years, five months, and one day. Unless of course that happens

to be a leap year. If so, then it would remain six years, four months and twenty nine days.”

I couldn't care less if it would bring us to February or December. The only thing that mattered to me was that amount of time was not acceptable.

“Why will it take so long?” I demanded.

“Well first of all, you have to be out of work for at least six months before you can apply for federal aid. I can't do anything until you're eligible for federal aid. Then the request has to go through proper channels. It just doesn't come right to me. You have to go through case workers and investigators and auditors. Once you go through all that, your assistance eligibility will expire and you will have to re-apply. There's another six month waiting period where you get kicked back to state agencies. Once they put you through their system and that expires, you can apply for special status at the federal level. At that point, you get added to a database...”

“Stop, just stop. That's not good enough. I'm not going to wait six years to get my job back. You're going to help me now.”

“Are you related to a Senator?”

“No.”

“Then, I can't help you.”

At this point, I got angry.

“Yes, you can help me and you will. I know who you are, I know what you drive. I can write down your license plate. I'll go to the press with this story. I'll tell everyone in the world about Counterproductive Man.”

“Fah!”

“Did you just say 'Fah'?”

“In fact, I did.” He put his hands on his hips as the uncertainty left his voice and he spoke with greater authority. “Counterproductive Man fears nothing, especially not the press. What are you going to do? Go on some twenty-four hour news broadcast and allow some talking head cupcake to interview you? You think they are really going to take an interest in your story? Maybe on some morning show, and while you're there you can talk about Area 57 while you're at it. No, I'm not afraid of you—or the press—and I must say I'm a bit disappointed in you. In fact, I believe I will talk to your managers and have you removed from the fast track executive program.”

I wanted to hit him, but not as much as I was determined to use him to my advantage. All my life I heard about how the government was helping out these people or those people. All I got was taxed. That was going to change.

“You go and do that. You go and tell some VP that they have to take me off the executive fast track and put me back in my old job. We can go right now. My office is just two blocks away. We can take care of all of this in a few minutes.”

Counterproductive Man's eyes glazed over. I thought he might faint as he began to sway slightly. The concept of getting something done quickly and efficiently was obviously just too much for him.

I didn't want to risk losing him and I tried to snap him out of it.

“Hold on there, don't pass out on me. If you want, we can take a couple of cab rides first, maybe even stop for doughnuts.”

He perked up. “Doughnuts?”

“Sure, why not?”

Suddenly, he seemed to accept my proposition, but he threw out a condition regarding helping me. “We can go for some doughnuts, but I have to check my appointment book before going back to your office.”

“Fine, check your appointment book.” I doubted the loon had anything else scheduled for the day. That would have been too productive. I figured the only thing he had left on the day’s agenda was probably a nap.

“It’s at my headquarters,” he revealed.

I groaned. I saw how long it took him just to go two blocks. Unless his headquarters was in the next parking space, I couldn’t imagine how long it would take him to get there. At that point, I knew there was no way he was going to take care of my situation with any sense of urgency. If I told him I wanted to create a traffic jam in mid-town, he probably would have jumped at the chance, but being helpful in any form was just not in his DNA.

Now remember, this was the day I got fired. I don’t know if ‘desperate’ is the right description, but I certainly wasn’t going to give up without exhausting my alternatives. I decided I needed to get as much information on him as possible.

“Not a problem,” I finally replied, “because I want you to take me to your lair, your secret laboratory, your cave, your hideout, your orbiting satellite space station—wherever it is you use as the base of your operations. We can look at your appointment book together.”

He jumped back and threw his arms up in a defensive position. He swirled around to check if anything was behind him before facing me once more in a hunched over position.

“I can’t take an ordinary citizen there!”

“I think you should. In fact, I think you have to. I just revealed I know your secret identity. Despite what you think of me going to the press and despite the fact you fear nothing, I could potentially be a threat. As some kind of superhero, assuming that’s what you think you are, you have to acknowledge all threats.”

The lunatic scratched his head.

In that moment, I realized how to deal with Counterproductive Man.

“Let me ask you this, where would be the least rational place to take a complete stranger? Keep in mind, that if it’s not rational, it must be irrational. Irrational behavior can be defined as foolish, absurd, illogical, and most importantly... *unproductive*. That means, by nature, you should take the most irrational course of action possible.”

I didn’t wait for an answer. I just got in the vehicle.

## Chapter 3

We drove for a while, a long while. He had to stop for gas and directions, twice. Eventually, he pulled into a townhouse community. Despite the fact there was obviously limited parking, he parked his monstrous vehicle diagonally across three spaces.

“Why did you park like that?” I asked. “You’re taking up more space than you need. Won’t the neighbors complain?”

“They already have.”

I just looked at him.

“I’m the president of the homeowner’s association,” he continued. “I see the complaints all the time.”

“Well, why don’t you stop parking like this?”

“I haven’t seen the notification from the association that there’s a problem.”

“But you’ve seen the complaints!”

“That’s different, that’s not an official decision from the association. That’s just a complaint. I don’t have to change my behavior over a complaint. I would only have to comply with an official notification.”

“But you just said you’re the president of the association. Aren’t you responsible for sending out the notification?”

“Technically, no.”

“Technically? What the heck does that mean?”

“It means I don’t send out the notification, the secretary does.”

“Then why hasn’t the secretary sent out the notification?”

“Because there hasn’t been any official action on the matter.”

“What does someone have to do around here to get a complaint acted upon?”

“Complaints have to be made in writing to the association. They are considered at the board meetings. When a complaint is received, I—along with the other board members—decide on an appropriate action, and then I inform the secretary to mail out a notification to the individual breaking the rules. Until I see the official notification, I shouldn’t assume anything is wrong. There are proper procedures to follow.”

“So you’re just going to keep parking like this until you, as the president, decide it’s wrong at some meeting?”

“That’s a good way to put it.”

“When’s the next meeting?”

“I’m not sure. I haven’t been to one yet to find out the schedule.”

“If you haven’t been to any meetings, then how did you see the complaints?”

“I have the only key to the association mailbox, so I get all the correspondence.”

“You mean you pick up the mail, but don’t go to the meetings?”

“You’re very good at that.”

“Good at what?”

“Asking the same question in a different manner. You get me to repeat myself or confirm something I’ve already said. I like that. I’m going to have to practice that myself.”

I doubted he needed much practice. Still, I couldn’t help myself from questioning the logic of his statements.

“How does the association know what’s going on if you have all their mail but you don’t go to the meetings?”

Yet again, I got that dazed look from him. It almost seemed as if he thought I was speaking in an alien dialect. I don’t know if he was staring at me, staring through me, or just staring at some dust speck floating in space. His expression was completely vacant, and so I just gave up.

“You know what, never mind. It doesn’t matter. I want to take a look at this secret headquarters of yours.”

“It’s not really a secret,” he revealed as he immediately snapped out of his self-induced trance.

“Excuse me?”

He gave me an appreciative nod. “I said, it’s not really a secret.”

“You tell people about it?”

“No, but it is recorded in the U.S. Government directory of services.”

“Under what department?”

“The Commission of Fine Arts.”

I almost asked him to confirm that yet again, but this time I stopped myself. “Why doesn’t that surprise me?”

“It shouldn’t surprise anyone. The Commission of Fine Arts administers the National Capital Arts and Cultural Affairs program. That program is responsible for supporting organizations that perform, exhibit, or present the arts. I’m covered under the section for exhibits in public display before live audiences.”

“But you don’t exhibit anything that can be considered art,” I exclaimed.

“That’s a pretty common complaint, but those of us that are covered by the program are instructed to respond that art is in the eye of the beholder. I’m told my costume will eventually be put in the Smithsonian.”

I did not want to give up. I don’t know why, but I continued to voice my displeasure. “It’s still not art! And even if it was, it would have to be art for the nation’s capital. That means you would have to work in Washington D.C. for that program.”

“I have an office there. I have an office in all fifty states, but D.C. is my main headquarters. All the others are just branches.”

I shook my head. “Let’s just go inside.”

Counterproductive Man put the truck/SUV/luxury sedan in park, but left the engine running as he leapt out the door and onto the parking lot.

“You left the engine on!” I called out over the thunderous roar of the idling motor.

He ignored me or he didn’t hear me. He went straight to his front door and pulled out a ring with about thirty keys. One by one he attempted to stuff a key in the lock and turn the latch only to fail about seventeen times. Eventually, the door opened.

I’ve never actually seen a real command center, not a military one or even one for a large corporation. I used to imagine what they might look like, but now I no longer have to. What existed in this three bedroom townhouse exceeded any of my wildest expectations.

In truth, the setup went far beyond any kind of practical command center, and it lacked any true purpose. It was one large mess of distractions. The place was lit up like a night sky over a carnival during an out of control fireworks display. There were flashes of light, flickering monitors, three dimensional displays, and LED ticker boards all around

me. My body tingled with the surrounding electricity and I wondered if I was being scanned as I stepped into the center of the living room. I heard voices, but they came from the speakers and sound systems—the audio output connected to monitors throughout the room. Despite the fact that there were workstations galore, there was not a single other person to be seen.

“Is this how you kept track of what George was doing?” I asked.

“I keep track of many things.”

“I assume the government pays for all this stuff.”

“Pays for it? No, no, no. You really don’t understand how the government works, do you?”

“Enlighten me.”

“That would be beyond the scope of my powers.”

I couldn’t just leave it at that. I was there to get as much information from him as possible. I figured the more I knew, the better off I was going to be, so I forced the issue.

“Fine, let’s try it this way. What would be the most inefficient use of your time right now?”

He answered without hesitation. “Studying the migratory patterns of non-migratory birds in the West Indies.”

It was my turn to stare at him with an expression of complete astonishment. I, however, recovered more quickly. “You’re probably right on that, but let’s say it’s something that doesn’t involve birds and something you would have to do right here and right now.”

Again, he answered without hesitation. “Try to drink my weight in water.”

That was something I almost wanted to see. After about twenty gallons, I figured he might explode and create short circuits all over the place. In the end, though, I stayed focused on my specific needs.

“An extremely inefficient use of your time would be to answer the pointless questions of a total stranger. That would be me, so I think you should answer my questions and waste your time.”

He frowned and then ran to a computer terminal in the corner. After entering a few keystrokes, he made his findings clear.

“I’m afraid you’re wrong there,” he corrected me. “I can come up with twelve hundred and ninety seven things that I could do right here and now that would be a more inefficient use of my time.”

I was not beaten so easily. “What if you factor in the uncertainty of what I might ask? The randomness of my questions is an unquantifiable variable.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, the computer there can’t really tell for sure what I’m going to ask you. Some questions may not be a great waste of your time, but others could create an enormous backlog of work for you. For example, I could ask you about your work or I could demand you explain, in detail, the migratory patterns of non-migratory birds in the West Indies.”

He tilted his head as he considered my argument. He started entering more information into the computer, but then stopped abruptly. He deleted several characters, started hitting the keyboard again, and finally stopped for good.

“Have I said you’re very good at what you do?” he complimented me.

I thought of how many times he stated I must be on the fast track to upper management in my ex-job. "In a way, yes."

"Alrighty then, you have my attention. What do you want to know?"

"Who pays for all this stuff?"

"No one."

I looked around and marveled at the technology. There had to be millions of dollars of equipment from where I could see alone.

"Someone has to pay for it, or are you saying you get it for free?"

"No, it isn't free, but that doesn't mean someone has paid for it. To have something *paid for* would imply that something of value has been exchanged. These items have been acquired through requisitions of the United States Government."

"Fine, there was a requisition order, there still has to be eventual payment."

"Not when it comes to the United States Government."

"So companies deliver this stuff here, you use it, and they get nothing in return?"

"They get a promise that it will be paid in the future, a promise backed by the full faith and credit of the United States Government."

"Remind me never to give you a loan."

At that point, I decided to throw him a random problem, just to make sure he believed my questions would remain an unproductive use of his time.

"What is the birth weight of an African mole rat?" I asked without expecting an answer.

"Nine grams," he answered swiftly.

"You didn't even have to look that up."

"I study trivia in my spare time."

"I'm shocked. My next question requires a bit more depth in your answer. I want you to explain in detail what gave you the right to tell George Draffer to stop working on his designs."

The "hero" put his hands on his hips. "I have that right as a fully licensed agent of the United States Government. It is my job to see that our current technology advances at a slow, steady rate. It is in the best interest of the nation."

I found his explanation difficult to believe and I made it known. "I thought it's in the country's best interest to move ahead as fast as possible. George's designs were pretty important and dealt with things from home conveniences to military equipment."

Counterproductive Man shook his head. "You don't see the big picture, do you? You'll have to work on that if you want to make executive level. As long as we have an edge, all we have to do is keep it. There is no benefit in widening the margin of our leadership. The key to success is staying just ahead of everyone else. That way, no one gets jealous."

"You know, we're not ahead of everyone else in many things anymore. We're falling behind in quite a few areas."

He appeared to ignore my statement, as if I never said anything at all. Perhaps he believed ignorance was bliss.

"Our current technology is very useful," he stated proudly. "It makes the people happy. Sure, they'd like more. But we don't have to feed it to them all at once. Give it to them gradually, guide them along small step by small step. It makes it easier on everyone."

Remember, the faster you come up with new ideas, the quicker your old ideas become obsolete. That means abandoned sales and lost profits."

"I'm not sure that's the best way to keep the competitive edge."

"The United States Government has funded a number of studies that indicate you are wrong."

Of that, I was fairly certain. Researchers that wanted funding from someone usually didn't return with an answer the funding agent wasn't going to like. If a candy company paid for research on the effects of chocolate, the researchers are going to come back and say it reduces cholesterol, kills bacteria, and leads to happier life styles. I would not argue with that conclusion, but that's not the point.

I decided, however, not to argue with Counterproductive Man. Instead, I wanted to determine the extent of his influence.

"Are all major corporations aware of your activities?"

"Absolutely."

"I figured as much. And they have to do whatever you say?"

"They are not bound by law, but it is in their best interest to comply. Actually, most corporate CEOs enjoy working with me."

"I'm not surprised by that either. If you told them to hire someone, would they listen?"

"As long as they receive government subsidies, they will listen to just about anything."

I thought I finally had my opening.

"For argument's sake, let's say you wanted to get me inside a large corporation, to get me a job with one. How long would it take?"

"Why would I want to get you inside a large corporation?"

"Does it matter?"

"Of course it matters."

"Fine, let's just say you needed me to keep track of certain activities."

"That would be spying. That's the CIA. I don't work with the CIA."

"The CIA works on foreign operations," I shot back. "This would be a domestic corporation."

"All major corporations have foreign operations."

"Fine, let's say the job is with a smaller company that has no foreign operations."

"There would be no involvement with activities outside the country, no foreign operations at all?"

"Right."

"Then it's domestic surveillance and that's the FBI. I don't work with the FBI."

"Alright, let's say it's not spying at all. Let's just say you want me to go work for a corporation just to make sure they're not progressing too quickly in their technology. I would be sent in to slow them down."

"You mean like a plant?"

"Sure."

"That's the Department of Agriculture."

"Not that kind of plant! Look, just tell me how long it would take you to get me a job for any reason that you think is acceptable."

“Six years, four months, and twenty three days. Wait, does October have thirty days or thirty one?”

Once more, I wanted to hit him. “Never mind about October. Why so long?”

“Because you have to be out of work for six months before you can apply for federal aid. After that...”

I cut him off. “Seems like we’ve been down this road before.”

“Yes, we have. You’re very good at that. Have I told you that?”

“Yes, you have.”

“And you were right,” Counterproductive Man smiled, “this is a waste of my time. I’m proud of you.”

And that gave me the idea which would change my life forever.

## Chapter 4

At first, I needed to confirm certain suspicions before I made my request.

“By being a fully licensed agent of the United States Government, I assume that means you are also considered a government employee. Is that correct?”

“Yes,” the costumed madman replied, as if he was just continuing the process of answering random questions.

“In your capacity, do you have the authority to hire people?”

“Of course.”

“So you could give a government job to anyone, should you choose to hire a staff?”

“I don’t require a staff. I am self-sufficient.”

“But you could if you wanted to, right? Do you have the proper authority?”

“My authority, just like my security, is at the highest level. I could hire as many people as I wanted. I only face certain budgetary constraints.”

“You mean you can’t spend over a certain level?”

“Goodness no, I can spend way over my budget. I do it all the time.”

“Then why is it a constraint?”

“I’ve never been able to figure that one out.” He then smiled broadly. “Good for you! You finally asked me a question I couldn’t answer.”

“Yes, it’s wonderful that I stumped you.” I needed to confirm one last thing before I made my play. “You said no one pays for this stuff here, all of this equipment is obtained through requisitions and promises to pay, but there is no actual payment. Does the same apply to you or do you actually get paid for your work? By that I mean, do you receive an actual paycheck, not an IOU, from the federal government?”

“Government employees always get paid in U.S. dollar denominated funds deposited directly into our checking or savings accounts. We do not accept any type of promissory notes. We also receive a very generous benefit package.”

Bingo.

“Ok, I’m done with the random questions. I now have a request to make. I want you to bring me on as your partner,” I stated firmly.

“A partner?”

“You’re a quick study,” I noted.

He looked more baffled than usual.

“Pardon?”

“I’m congratulating you on your response,” I offered. “You’re making me repeat myself. That’s something you said you wanted to learn from me.”

He suddenly appeared very proud of himself. I, however, kept the pressure on him.

“Yes, a partner,” I repeated.

“But I don’t need a partner. As I said before, I’m self-sufficient.”

There are times when things just fall into place, when every response just flows naturally. Words come out as if they were practiced for days. For some reason, the mind just lights up with one idea after another. For me, this was one of those moments, and I explained thoroughly why he was wrong.

“Did you ever read comic books when you were a kid?” I asked, but then explained without waiting for an answer. “I’m talking about those superhero comic books; the ones

where the main character wore a fancy costume, just like you, the ones that took up a fight for a larger cause, sort of like you, the ones where the hero fought against injustice.”

I couldn't add the “just like you” to that last one. I didn't think there was any injustice in being too productive, but maybe that's just me. Still, I had made my point.

“Don't you think you're a little like those superheroes?” I questioned. “I think you must. Why else would you wear a cape?”

Now I thought I had him trapped. I couldn't imagine there would be another reason for wearing the cape. I was wrong.

“The cape is required under the grant specifications of the National Capital Arts and Cultural Affairs program. By wearing it, I'm considered a full-fledged exhibit.”

“Yes, I'm sure you are. But have you ever wondered why they wrote that into the grant? I think it's because they always expected you to act exactly like a superhero.”

“I won't argue with that,” the fanatic agreed with his chin lifted slightly and turned to the side to make it look as if he was staring off into the distance.

As he made his hero's pose, I decided to capitalize on his perception of self-importance.

“It's common knowledge that the most famous heroes have a partner or a sidekick—someone who tagged along. For the most part, the sidekick acted as a sounding board so the hero could speak his mind without appearing to be talking to himself. If he did that, he would appear like a lunatic.” I gave him a quick glance and realized I shouldn't let that sentiment linger. “Having a partner gave the hero a chance to explain the situation to someone; it allowed him to reveal what was going on in his head.”

To be completely honest, I didn't think there was anything going on in Counterproductive Man's head, nothing that made sense anyway. Perhaps, however, that was the only way of surviving as a government employee. If you tried to make sense of what you did, your head might explode. Despite this understanding of Counterproductive Man's propensity for less than logical thinking, I continued my argument in the most matter-of-fact manner I could maintain.

“In those comic books, having a partner served as a tool to convey the story to the readers, but for you, it would allow you to speak out loud all of your thoughts. Think about that for a minute. Wouldn't it be great to have to repeat everything you're thinking, to have to actually waste time articulating your thoughts? Sure, you could do it on your own, but a partner would *force* you to do it—even make you repeat yourself several times. A partner would be a heavy weight on your shoulders. I want to be that burden for you. I want to be your sidekick in your fight against productivity.”

“You mean to assist me?”

I'm not sure if he was smart enough to set up a deliberate trap, but the wrong answer here could have ended my efforts. If for one moment he thought I might actually help him, it was game over. Luckily, I measured my words before I answered.

“No, not to assist you, in fact, just the opposite. Most sidekicks never really help the hero. Most of the time, they just get in the way. They get captured and turned into hostages. They make mistakes and force the hero to clean up after them. They also need a great deal of guidance. Let's face it, think of every comic book superhero that had a partner. How helpful was that partner really? Most fans wanted the little pain killed off before too long. You know that's the truth.”

He lifted his head like a squirrel that hears something in the distance but isn't quite sure if it should make a dash for the tree or keep searching for another acorn. I had clearly caught his attention, but I wasn't certain if my idea was truly sinking in. I tried to show him the acorn.

"I watched you today," I stated, hoping to inflate his ego. "It's your job to keep things from progressing too fast, and you obviously take that job seriously. You utilize a great many tools to assist you. I mean, look around you. Look at everything right here in your own headquarters. How much of this stuff is really necessary for you to do what you need to do, and how much of it is just here to drive you to distraction, to make you nuts with all the blaring sounds and flashing lights?"

He looked around and nodded.

"I often get a headache here," he confessed.

"See? And what bigger headache is there than a partner. Ask any business owner that's involved in a partnership. Heck, ask most married couples."

"I am not married."

I was sure there was a very grateful woman out there somewhere. Rather than mention this, I made him focus on why I would be an asset by being a burden to him.

"Think about what you did this morning. You didn't just tell George to slow down his work. You threw papers around his desk, you made a security guard fill out a pointless form, and you set a copy machine to wreak havoc the next time it's used. You did this because you know enough to use every means at your disposal to slow things down. You obviously take your job seriously, but you're clearly missing something. You're missing a partner!"

"How does a partner help me without assisting me?"

"Because I won't really be helping you. All I would be doing is getting in your way. It would allow you to truly be Counterproductive Man. Isn't that what you want?"

I'm not sure if he was weighing the issues or just arguing for the sake of arguing. Still, I was unemployed and I didn't want to stay that way. I also didn't want to wait six years and however many months to get him to help me. I wanted a government paycheck and government benefits, and I wanted them immediately.

"Did you read comic books when you were a kid?" I asked again, but this time I waited for an answer.

"Of course, I still read them now, great time wasters."

"Wonderful. Think of all the heroes in the comic books that have had some kind of sidekick or partner. How much time did the hero waste having to explain things to their associate? How often was the hero's concentration split between catching the criminal and keeping an eye on his junior partner? How many times did the hero have to go way across town just to save his partner while the crook was planning some heist at the same time? When there was no sidekick, the hero was always so much more effective, so much more *productive*! If you really want to live up to your name, and who wouldn't, you have to take on a partner. If you don't, you're not being as incompetent as possible."

I decided to make one last push to seal the deal.

"Look, you're Counterproductive Man. You obviously have a reputation. I saw that when you came into my office this morning. You have to live up to that reputation. If the people trust in you to make things more difficult for them, then you have to make things

more difficult for yourself. You have to be the role model you were meant to be, you have to be the true *Counterproductive Man*.”

I knew I struck the right chord as I watched him place his hands on his hips and thrust out his chest in pride.

“I have to admit, you make a good argument,” he answered.

“And that’s something we could do all the time—argue, and you know that’s not productive. Just think of how much less efficient you could be if I tagged along asking you questions, making you repeat yourself, and just arguing with you all the time.”

“This is a very interesting proposal,” he mused.

He paced about the room muttering under his breath. I couldn’t make out anything he said, but he clearly did not dismiss the idea. Several times, he would stop stone still and stare at me while scratching his chin. After a few moments, he began pacing again. Eventually, he spoke loud enough for me to hear.

“I have to admit, you’ve already forced me to waste quite a bit of time today and you’re not even my partner yet. I like the fact that you’re on the executive fast track where you work, that means you have potential.”

I almost corrected him, and then figured I shouldn’t confuse him with the facts.

“A partner would also take up space,” he continued, as he looked me up and down once more. “You don’t look like you move too quickly, so you definitely would slow me down. I would probably be tripping over you constantly.”

How could I argue with him? In fact, I made a mental note to trip him several times in the future on purpose, just to please him.

“I’d have to order more equipment,” he continued. “You wouldn’t be allowed to touch any of my stuff. You would need your own. That means more requisitions. They’re always fun.” He then turned to me with a distinct measure of authority. “I admit I like the idea. I might even be able to use it to my advantage in other ways. I could list you as a dependent on my tax return.”

I didn’t like the sound of that.

“Whoa! Hold on, I’m just talking about being your partner when it comes to this government work. I’m not going to be moving in or anything.”

“Do you have a pet chicken?”

I couldn’t fathom where this question came from and why he asked it. I suddenly wondered if a government paycheck and government benefits were going to be worth it.

“No, I don’t,” I admitted.

“Shame, I could have reclassified this property as farmland.”

“Why would you want to do that?”

“Tax benefits. You really don’t understand the tax code, do you?”

This one, I could answer quite honestly.

“No, I don’t.”

“That’s ok, no one does. Would you mind getting a pet chicken?”

“If it means you’re going to give me a job, then I suppose I could. Can I keep it here?”

“It has to stay here if I’m going to classify this as farmland.”

I decided that this was a small price to pay to obtain that government job.

“You sign me up as a government employee and I’ll make sure I have a pet chicken by Monday morning.”

Counterproductive Man suddenly dashed about the room throwing papers in every direction. Eventually, he settled on a handful and brought them over to me.

"This is great," he confessed. "Adding another person means a great deal of pointless work for me... and for you as well. What you have to do now is fill out these forms and get that chicken."

I sighed. I hated forms, but I had to accept it. It didn't matter where I went. If I was going to apply for a job, it meant I had to fill out a boatload of forms. If I was going to work for the United States Government, it would probably be a battleship-load of forms. I quickly perused them and made a comment before realizing I should have known better.

"Most of these forms are from the Department of Energy," I exclaimed.

"Yes," the lunatic replied as if there was no issue.

"I thought you said you worked under the Commission for the Fine Arts."

"I do."

I waved the application at him that was clearly marked "Department of Energy." He said nothing.

"Am I going to be working under a different agency?" I asked.

"No," he said simply.

"Then why am I filling out an application for the Department of Energy?"

"Paperwork Reduction Act."

I sighed, but started filling out the form.

As I began to write, he called for my attention.

"Hold on there, that's not a bad idea."

"What's not a bad idea? The Paperwork Reduction Act?"

"No, that was a terrible idea, but that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about having you work under a different department. It would create a communications and logistics nightmare. It would double the paperwork. You're a genius!"

He grabbed the papers from my hand and dropped them into a shredder. He rifled through several desk drawers grabbing new sets of forms and applications. He threw them in front of me with a big smile.

"Use these instead."

I looked through them briefly.

"Ummm... it says these are for the Commerce Department."

"Yes, I know."

"Is that the agency I'm going to work under?"

"No, you said you wanted to work under the Department of Energy."

"I don't care what department I work for... wait a minute! You took away forms that were from the Department of Energy. Are you saying that I have to fill out forms from the Commerce Department to work for the Department of Energy?"

"Last I checked that was the proper procedure."

"Then why even have application forms marked 'Department of Energy'?"

"For people that want to work for the Commission of Fine Arts."

"Yes, I can certainly see how this reduces paperwork," I replied with yet another sigh and went to work on the forms in front of me.

### **A Final Note from the Author**

**Counterproductive Man** does not end here. The entire book is available for sale at many on-line ebook stores. For more information on obtaining the rest of the story, please visit [www.sitelane.com](http://www.sitelane.com).

If you have a comment or question about this book, please feel free to send me a note. Also, please let me know if you encounter any difficulty with the formatting. Contact information can be found on my web site at [www.sitelane.com](http://www.sitelane.com). Please consider my other novels, including *Soul View*, *Soul Chase*, *Detached Lives*, *Slow Fall*, *Alien Cradle*, *When Do I See God?* and the *Delver Magic Series*.

Jeff Inlo lives in New Jersey, USA with his wife, Joan.