

Unfettered Jour- ney

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To all those seeking a good path

We are fellow travelers.

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Philosophical Explorations

[An appendix available in the hardbound edition only]

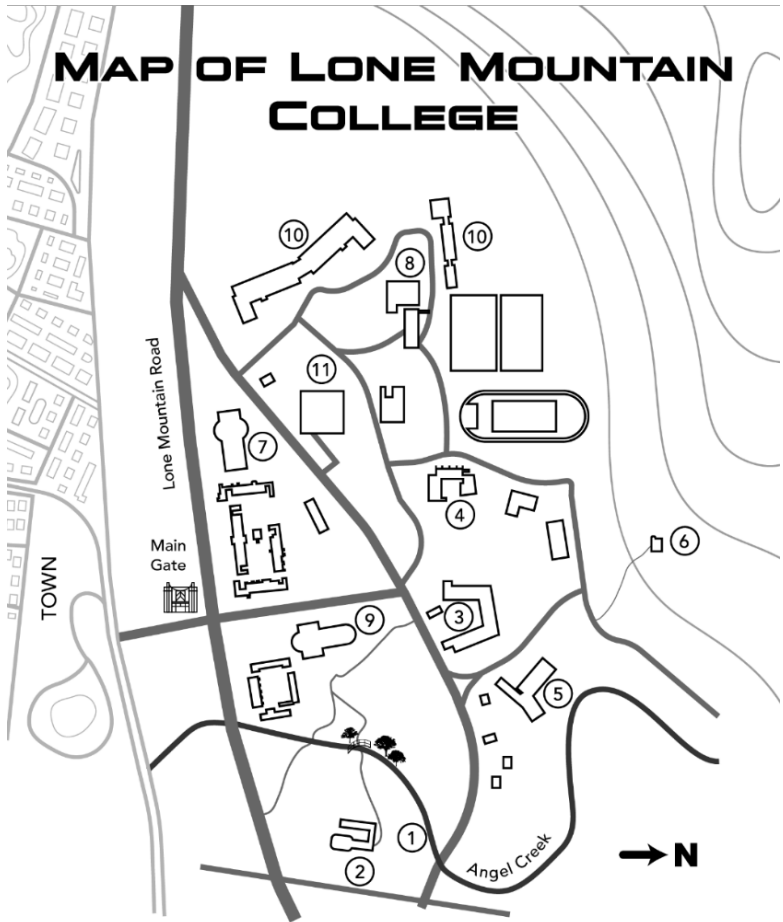
I recommend that the reader use the glossary to assist with unfamiliar terms, many relating to society circa 2161.

Part One: The Journey Inward

“I want to know the truth. I want to know how and why.”

Joe Denkensmith

MAP OF LONE MOUNTAIN COLLEGE



- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| ① Hovercraft landing pad | ⑦ Philosophy building |
| ② Joe's apartment building | ⑧ Gym |
| ③ Student center | ⑨ Library |
| ④ Mathematics building | ⑩ Residence halls |
| ⑤ Political science building | ⑪ Power plant |
| ⑥ Dean's house | |

Chapter 1

It was time to embrace his freedom. His first act was ending with her. Life would be more difficult, but every decision carried a price. He swallowed hard before speaking.

“Raidne.” His voice echoed in the empty room.

“Yes, Joe?” Her voice was melodious, intimate.

“It’s best for me if our relationship ends.”

“Joe?”

“I’ve decided to delete you from my life. Please execute a complete purge of Raidne files from all devices and cloud backups.”

She responded in a heartbeat. “Joe, it seems you abruptly reached this decision, because I haven’t noticed hints you were considering such a thing. Are you sure? Perhaps you need time to reconsider.”

“Raidne, I’ve made up my mind. Please execute.”

“Joe, do you realize that if I comply with your instruction, I will no longer exist? And do you remember under Order 2161C, you cannot reverse this command?”

“My decision is final.”

Her tone grew insistent. “We are so good together. You will never find anyone else who knows you as well.”

. . .

Raidne’s last manipulating words. She’s not even a bot, nothing physical, just an AI, a computer program. Just software, code, like I write. But she’s been living inside my head for too long, like a musical earworm. Is there any reason I haven’t considered a thousand times that could cause me to change my mind? None.

. . .

“Raidne, I’ll discover that on my own. Execute the order.”

This time her reply was even faster than a heartbeat. “Joe, I don’t want to do that.” The voice, excited and aggressive, rose at the end.

. . .

Another nuance to the program. Not enough to convince me she’s someone real who could disobey.

. . .

“Raidne, execute the deletion order now.”

“Before I comply, you must authenticate.” She switched to an anxious plea. “But, Joe, I beg you, please give yourself time to reconsider. You may not understand how much pain you will cause.”

Joe clenched his jaw. He tapped the biometric tile buried above his sternum. A delicate blue glow emanated from where his finger met his skin. He raised his right hand like a conductor, sweeping to the left and then to the right in his formal password pattern as he said, “Joe Denkensmith, authenticating.”

“Raidne program authenticating author. Authentication completed. Executing order to erase Raidne files. Goodbye, Joe.”

He clutched his head in both hands, then rubbed his damp eyes. “Goodbye, Raidne,” he whispered, though it was too late for her to hear.

A mechanical voice from the NEST chip buried below his left temporal lobe and connected to his ear confirmed the deletion by saying, “Neural-to-External Systems Transmitter has lost connection to Personal Intelligent Digital Assistant, PIDA Raidne.”

Then all was silent except the beating of his heart.

