

CHAPTER 1

The Munro Foundation

At the original meeting in Luxembourg, the originators of what they eventually called the Prometheus Project had discussed starting a search for extraordinarily clever children who would otherwise be overlooked by the world. They had to decide on a name for the project. Names like Einstein or Leibniz or Newton, the famous scientists of old, were considered and discarded. Also, the Luxembourg Institute was felt not appropriate as, even then, they felt that they would eventually have to move to the US as there really was no prospect of being able to launch rockets into space from Europe, which was in the process of self-destructing. Eventually, practicality ruled, and it became the Munro Foundation—after Neil Munro, a former heavyweight champion boxer, now a surgeon, who ran the residential school for the children they had found so far.

The type of advertising to be used was discussed, and eventually, it was decided that print, focused mainly on teachers especially in the poorer countries, was the way to go. Financial inducements were limited for the finders of the children because if too much were offered, it would attract scammers, who would swamp the system. The applicants would have to be scored in-country by a psychologist, who would also have to be paid carefully. He would have to be on a retainer and know that if he turned up with totally inappropriate candidates, he would be let go. Not only IQ but also the big five personality traits were known to be important. The committee examined various reports on these traits and decided that they needed creativity and conscientiousness, realizing that these were poles

apart. They did not want empathy as that would tend to smother the other traits. Empathy was not going to help them in their quest to take mankind into space in what was effectively a lifeboat, which could hold a limited number of people.

No decision was written in stone, and after the first few children came through their system, changes might have to be made. Given the stiff criteria, it was not anticipated that many children would qualify, but they initially had no idea of the actual numbers. Additional building and expansion of the chateau in Luxembourg could be done if necessary.

La Contessa was the first significant child, and she was so quiet, clever, and delightful that all thought they had found a winning formula. Recruitment, however, turned out to be as difficult as they had originally anticipated. Some parents would not relinquish their children. Some children would not leave their parents. Some were too homesick and had to be returned. Some were unmanageable and disruptive, and they were sent home. Some of the initial children were just very clever but not as exceptional as they had hoped. These ended up going to the charter schools for very bright children rather than the selective homeschooling planned for the more brilliant.

La Contessa was everyone's favorite. The next two exceptional girls arrived soon after her. One was from Rotherham, that dirty, depressing town in the north of England, which later became infamous for the so-called grooming gangs. Her name was Agnes Hinchcliff. She did not know who her father was, and her mother was a hopeless drug addict. She was age seven when a schoolteacher noticed the advertisement for the Munro Foundation in one of his teacher's journals. He knew this child, from a dreadful background, was quite extraordinary and thus wrote to the foundation. A psychologist contacted the teacher, and arrangements were made to test the child. She came in at roughly 170 IQ. She also scored very low on empathy and high in conscientiousness. One of Manon's people arrived to reward the teacher and negotiate with the mother, who was coming down off a high and wanted more drugs and, in exchange for very little money, happily signed a form indicating that her daughter would be attending a private residential school in Luxembourg, where the group was based.

The child packed her own few pitiful belongings in a bag given to her by the female assistant sent to collect her and left without looking back. She hugged the teacher, who had come along for the negotiations to try to

ensure that all would be well with the child and who was the only person in her whole rotten world who had ever shown her any kindness. She ignored her mother as she left her house and entered the limousine, which was there to take her away.

The other child was Maria Martins, who was found on the island of São Miguel in the Azores. Her parents were honored that their child had been chosen to attend this mainland school. They were very proud of her. They had always felt she was exceptional. They were reluctant to take money. The only thing they asked was that they could see the child once or twice a year.

Maria, who spoke only Portuguese and a patois, or a form of it, initially had some trouble with communication but picked up English very quickly. The board had decided that the children should learn mainly English as this was the only truly international language. Living in Luxembourg, of course, they would also learn French and a form of German. They also learned some Japanese because Munro's first wife had been Japanese, and in consequence, he and his mother learned to speak it. He wanted to ensure that his own children would not lose that ability and thought it would be useful for the other children also. Munro decided that since this was a new beginning for the children, they could call themselves anything they wanted. Munro felt one name was enough, but that was up to the child. Maria was quite happy with her own name.

Agnes Hinchcliff hated the name Agnes. She elected to call herself simply Hinchcliffe. Maria was a happy child, but Hinchcliffe was a stern little thing. She gloried in the fact that she was allowed to shoot. Initially, she was so small that the ninja gave her a .22 pistol. He had been sent by Munro's first wife's father as a bodyguard and had remained to look after the children of that marriage. In the household, he functioned not only as a protector but also as a martial arts teacher. When he told her it was an assassin's gun, it mightily pleased her. She loved the ninja, that silent man of iron who saw in this damaged little child a kindred spirit. He taught all the children martial arts but only Hinchcliffe the use of the *shuriken* or throwing star. When she was older, he taught her all weapons, including knife throwing, nunchaku, and kendo or Japanese sword fighting. She loved war and violence. Jacques, the video journalist who worked with the group, had an extensive collection of movies and had no problems, or seemingly no problems, in obtaining copies of almost anything. No one mentioned the word *pirate*, and Jacques did not volunteer anything.

The 1964 movie *Zulu* was one of Hinchcliffe's favorites, and she would loudly sing the song "Men of Harlech," which the Welch Fusiliers sang when the Zulu impi attacked. Her other favorite movies were almost inevitably Clint Eastwood's Westerns, especially as Sergio Leone's *Man with No Name*. She made Munro promise that someday he would let her meet Clint. When she was with the ninja, he would only speak Japanese to her so that she learned it well enough that, together, they could watch the original *Seven Samurai* movie without subtitles.

She had one of these eidetic or photographic memories, which was quite spectacular. She was a voracious reader, especially of history, in particular military history, although as Munro would say, there really is no other history. Munro, who had always been interested himself and who had an excellent memory, would gently spar with her. It soon became apparent that she not only had read *Decisive Battles of the Western World* but she also remembered them. She knew that the Zulu at Isandlwana and Hannibal at Cannae had used the same battle plan.

The ninja taught her of the four hundred terrible years of civil war in Japan before the rise of the shogun, and he and she would sit under the sakura or cherry blossom trees that Kodama, Munro's first wife, had had him plant at the chateau. Munro himself, coming originally from Scotland, also a feuding, warlike culture, adopted and loved the concept of the sakura blossom time, when the fragility of the falling flowers makes one ponder on the fleeting beauty and sorrow of life. How the young samurai had their brief flowering and died in their thousands. They would all sit under the cherry blossom trees and make up haikus, those famous three-line poems. Munro collected all the poems produced by the entourage. He felt someday they would have enough memorable ones to put into book form.

Hinchcliffe, mightily impressed by the ninja's stories about Japan, took to writing short letters to Kodama, Munro's first wife, who, because of homesickness, had returned to her homeland, asking her about various facets of Japanese history. Kodama did not quite know what to make of this fierce little girl. Tomiko-san, the Japanese policewoman and pistol shooter, when she first met Hinchcliffe years later, recognized her being similar, if not a soul mate. The child actually managed to finagle an invitation from Kodama to visit her in Japan. Kodama's father liked the little girl, who by this time spoke excellent Japanese. She wanted to see Edo Castle and some other places she had read about, especially Hirosaki, where the last samurai battle had taken place. Munro had told her how stunningly

beautiful Hirosaki was in April, with the old castle grounds full of both sakura trees and magnolias both flowering at the same time.

Hinchcliffe had been taught kendo by the ninja. She wanted to learn to fence. When offered a choice of weapons, she picked the saber, dismissing as sissy the foil and epee. When visiting Don Pedro, a great friend of Munro's who lived in Spain, they took her to a bullfight. Immediately, she saw it for what it was and loved the skill and courage of the matador. She thought the moment of truth, when the bullfighter went in over the horns to kill the bull, was the most lyrically beautiful thing she had ever seen.

Maria, in contrast, loved music; in particular, she liked the haunting fados of her own country. At a young age, she sang the songs of love and loss, hope and despair. She also loved the songs of Edith Piaf, which were equally tragic. This was surprising because she was not a sorrowful child. Jacques saw an opportunity, and at an early age, he had recordings done of her singing. He managed to establish a small market in France for the Piaf songs and got a foothold in both Portugal and Brazil for the fados. He thought he could have taken her singing career much further, but Maria had little interest in the exhausting life of a troubadour. She would sing at selected meetings if asked. Her records had a slow but steady sale. One of the surprising places, or maybe it was not so surprising, was in the camps at the mines owned and run by Elizabeth, Munro's second wife, and among Elizabeth's father's roughnecks at the oil wells. Lonely men recognize agonizing songs of loss and sorrow even if the language is different.

The girls, of course, with their high intelligence, simply excelled in scholastics and, at an early age, began to take university courses. The committee had decided that a degree in engineering was probably the basic requirement. Manon, a board member who was Munro's business partner and who ran a growing conglomerate, also made sure they studied accounting and employed them as interns in her numerous and growing businesses. Because they were chosen largely for their mathematics excellence, they simply raced through these courses. After that, they could do anything they wanted or nothing further academic. It was up to them.

Both Maria and Hinchcliffe grew into beautiful young women, aided by a vigorous exercise program since they were little children, with some orthodontics and some minor plastic surgery here and there as required. Munro could not see any reason not to help nature. Once they became old enough, they learned how to dress from Edith's fashion boutique, co-owned by Manon and her partner and former employee, Edith.

Both children went home to visit six months after they first moved to Luxembourg. Maria thoroughly enjoyed herself. Her family and her neighbors were proud of her success. She brought some of her new recordings with her, which they played in the local taverns. These places asked her to sing, which she did with great pleasure. She never forgot how good her people were to her when she compared her stories to the majority of the other girls. In later life, she bought her parents a larger house, but not so large that it would make anyone jealous. When she came back periodically to visit the village, and indeed the island, there was always a celebration.

Hinchcliffe simply did not want to go home. Munro felt she should but sent the ninja with her as he was her favorite companion. It was a disaster. The mother had been told the child was coming but either did not care or, more likely, was simply high on drugs and had forgotten. When the ninja and the child turned up at her mother's small semidetached state-owned house, it was early afternoon. The front door was open. They went in. Three men were sitting in the living room, drinking beer. The ninja asked where the mother was. The men sniggered and indicated the stairs up to the second floor. As they mounted the stairs, the ninja heard noises he recognized. He tried to stop the child, but she evaded him, ran up the stairs, and went in.

Her mother was naked and on her hands and knees on the bed. One man was thrusting into her doggy style, and she had another man deep in her mouth. Maybe she saw the child, or maybe she did not, but the men did. The man in her mouth pulled his organ out, waved it at the girl, and, pulling her mother's head back by the hair, buried himself in her again. The man in her from the rear also pulled out and showed the child his penis, which he pumped with his hand. He motioned the girl to come closer. The ninja pulled her back, and they went down the stairs.

At the bottom of the stairs, the other three men were waiting, grinning. Two of them grabbed the girl's arms.

"Come on, little girl. We fuck you now," and they pulled her back toward the living room, one of them opening his fly and taking out his erect penis. The other confronted the ninja.

"Go home now, old man. We keep the girl."

The ninja, whose shoes were actually steel-toed, said nothing but kicked him very hard in the testicles. The man screamed, seized himself with both hands, and fell on the floor. As the second man turned to look,

the ninja broke his nose with a straight right karate punch to the face. He let go of the girl, who, with one arm freed, twisted away from the third man. The ninja, in one smooth motion, took the third man's exposed arm, brought it round against the joint into full extension, and broke the elbow with his knee. Doubled over, the man screamed. Holding the broken arm in one hand and the back of the man's head in the other, the ninja jerked him upright and ran him face-first into the doorjamb. He collapsed. The broken-nosed man faced the ninja with his fists up, but a roundhouse kick to the side of the head knocked him down. The ninja then kicked him a couple of times in the face, producing massive facial fractures. The first man was still on the floor, moaning, holding his groin with both hands. The ninja kicked him in the ribs so hard he almost lifted him off the ground. They heard the ribs break, and the man screamed again. His face was turned toward him, so the ninja kicked him in the mouth, breaking and dislocating his jaw and spraying out several teeth.

He took the girl by the hand, and they walked quietly out the door. Hinchcliffe never went back to Britain. She asked Munro to stop giving her mother any money. If any money was to be given to anyone, it should be the ninja.

Given the number of girls that they were accumulating at the chateau, Munro thought that if sex was to be discussed with the girls, then it should be Manon who should do it. Munro had fallen in love with Manon when he first met her years before and had never fallen out. He had only married other women because Manon refused to marry him. He continued to have a liaison with her when he was between wives, as he was at that time. He knew that Manon, who had started off in life as a working girl, only valued virginity if it had some value to some man. He vaguely thought that that might not be exactly correct but could not think of a reasonable explanation in the face of Manon's indifference. He felt that a girl should keep her virginity until at least age of sixteen, as it was in Luxembourg. But after that, it was up to her. Every country seemed to have different laws, and Munro, who had no interest in young girls, had no firm belief one way or another.

It was Manon who broached the topic of men when she was in her office discussing other issues with Munro.

"If the girls are going to run businesses or maybe countries, they will have to learn how to handle men."

"You can teach them that."