Collapse of Knowledge - Davo test

**Chapter 1

My upbringing in certainty**

(Part One: The man who believed in facts)

I grew up in the warm, unquestioned glow of certainty. A warm glow that, in hindsight, was less ‘sunlight on the kitchen tiles’ and more ‘fluorescent light in a 1970s school corridor’, but still—comforting, familiar, and very, very straight.

The world was ordered. Facts were solid. Science was the scaffolding beneath the universe, and if you climbed it correctly you could peer into the machinery of reality, confident that it wouldn’t suddenly turn into a YouTube comment section.

No one ever said this outright, of course. Australians don’t declare philosophy; we absorb it osmotically. We learn that cricket makes sense, politicians rarely do, and the universe—if approached with the proper seriousness and a lab coat—will behave.

My childhood was a quiet apprenticeship in *knowing*.

Not believing.

Not wondering.

Knowing.

It was the era where teachers still said things like ‘the science is settled’, without irony, which is funny now because science, by definition, hates the idea of being settled. Science prefers being permanently unsettled, like an old dog that refuses to lie down because it suspects you’ve hidden the treats.

But as a kid, I didn’t know that.

I thought the adults had it sorted.

Science told me the truth.

Or rather, it told me there *was* such a thing as truth, and that truth was available to anyone with:

- a method
- a hypothesis

- enough stubbornness to repeat something thirty-seven times to see if it still happened

This was the catechism of my youth. A secular liturgy. While other families argued about religion, mine implicitly believed in *replication*—that if something was real, you could poke it repeatedly and it would stay put.

This gave the universe a reassuring predictability.

Unlike adults. Or feelings. Or adolescence.

But the universe? Solid. Dependable. A big cosmic Bunnings Warehouse where everything had a labelled aisle and the gravitational constant never mysteriously moved to aisle 12B.

I trusted that.

The moral architecture of science was the part that seduced me most.

Even as a young bloke, I understood there was something noble in the idea that you could be proven wrong and not spontaneously combust. You could test a hypothesis, have it torn apart by colleagues, and instead of sulking you were meant to say ‘cheers, mate’, take the data, and refine your thinking.

It was intellectual sport without the shorts.

Science, at its best, wasn’t about ego.

Science was about reality—cold, unbothered, majestic reality—revealing herself only when approached with humility and decent footnotes.

That was the promise.

A promise I clung to through school, adolescence, RAAF service, and my early psychological training. A promise that said:

If you follow the method

If you respect evidence over feeling

If you place replication above reputation

If you challenge everything, including yourself

—you will earn the right to know.

No one warns you that promises like this expire quietly in midlife, like old passports or milk left too long in the Adelaide heat.

My early scientific identity was delightfully naïve.

I believed peer review was a noble gauntlet, not an academic version of Mortal Kombat where reviewers sometimes forgot they were critiquing ideas, not performing ritual disembowelment.

I believed publication meant something profound, not simply ‘your paper survived the reviewer who hates this topic’.

I believed fields of knowledge progressed like neat geological layers—orderly, cumulative, sedimentary. One fact laid respectfully atop another, forming the bedrock of civilisation.

I genuinely thought that if humanity kept at it long enough, we could construct a sturdy enough tower of facts to climb out of ignorance entirely.

A sort of epistemological Jenga, but without the collapsing tower.

This version of science was pure Mary Poppins—firm, sensible, gently magical. A teaspoon of logic makes the universe go down.

It was also, to use the scientific term, bollocks.

But I didn’t know that yet.

My training as a psychologist deepened this love affair with certainty.

I adored research design the way some men adore classic cars—running my hands intellectually over the clean lines of randomised trials, stroking the engine of falsifiability, admiring the chrome of controlled variables.

When I wrote papers, I wrote them with the earnest belief that I was contributing to human knowledge. Which, technically, I was. The problem was that everyone else was also contributing, and not always with the same solemn respect for reality’s boundaries. Some researchers slipped in their biases the way bakers slip in raisins—quietly, shamefully, hoping no one notices until it’s too late.

Still, I held to the creed.

Science was reliable.

Scientists were cautious.

Facts were sturdy things.

It was a beautiful worldview, constructed with the confidence of a man who had not yet lived long enough for the cracks to show.

Looking back now, I can see that my certainty wasn't just intellectual—it was emotional refuge. Certainty held me steady through moments when life felt feral. It gave me a way to interpret the world when my own brain was beginning its long campaign of misdiagnosis, misunderstanding, and occasionally trying to kill me.

Facts didn't waver.

Facts didn't melt under stress.

Facts didn't take offence or ask for emotional labour.

Facts just sat there, quietly correct.

In a life shaped by masking, misattuned clinicians, institutional betrayals, and the slow suffocation of being a neurodivergent man in systems designed by and for someone else entirely, *certainty became my survival strategy.*

Where other people turned to religion or philosophy, I turned to reproducible data sets. Which is a less popular spiritual path, but surprisingly effective at dinner parties if you want to be left alone.

It's only in hindsight—now, living in Vietnam, writing this book at sixty-seven, surrounded by contradictions that would make the younger scientist version of me explode into a fine mist—that I can see how brittle my certainty always was.

Because beneath the confidence, beneath the elegant scaffolding of empirical method, beneath the textbooks and the training and the well-rehearsed academic swagger, was a quiet assumption I never examined:

That truth was *findable*.

That truth was *stable*.

That truth didn't wriggle.

But truth wriggles.

Oh, how it wriggles.

Especially in a world where algorithms feed us customised realities, pharmaceutical companies curate their own definitions of evidence, wellness influencers weaponise personal anecdotes, and AI has made eloquence cheap enough to buy in bulk.

But that realisation belongs to later chapters.

For now, we're still in the part of the story where I believed reality was tameable.

There is a particular feeling—warm, solid, deeply satisfying—that comes from believing you are aligned with truth. I wore that feeling like a favourite jumper through most of my early life. It sat comfortably across the shoulders. It stretched when needed. It never itched.

Certainty is a seductive companion.

She whispers:

'You are safe.'

'You are right.'

'You understand.'

'There is an order, and you are on the correct side of it.'

Nothing in childhood prepared me for how heartbreaking it would be to lose that relationship decades later.

Because the collapse of certainty doesn't feel intellectual at first.

It feels personal.

Like betrayal.

Like heartbreak.

Like waking one morning to discover the laws of physics have decided to go backpacking in Laos and left you a note saying 'back soon xo'.

But again—that's later.

This chapter belongs to the years before the fall.

University solidified the whole edifice.

I inhaled Popper.

I revered Kuhn.

I tolerated Feyerabend in the same way one tolerates the naughty kid at school who might, at any moment, set something on fire.

I believed in falsifiability like Catholics believe in the resurrection—devoutly, unquestioningly, and with the quiet assumption that it would save my soul.

There was elegance in it.

Test a thing.

Try to break it.

If it still stands, keep it.

If it doesn't, let it go.

Simple. Robust. Clean.

I never noticed that this method required a world where actors behave honestly, incentives aren't corrupted, publishers aren't addicted to novelty, and human psychology is less fragile than wet cardboard.

In other words, a world that has never existed.

But young Lee didn't know that.

Young Lee still lived inside the certainty bubble, blissfully unaware that bubbles only remain invisible while you're inside them.

Even the RAAF reinforced my belief in order. Military life is many things—rigid, absurd, profoundly human—but it does have rules. Clear rules. Follow them and you survive. Break them and someone shouts at you while you stand very still.

It suited my autistic brain beautifully, long before I knew it *was* an autistic brain. Clarity. Structure. Predictability. These were comforting, not constraining.

My inner scientist flourished in that environment.

If depression was stalking me, if masking was draining me, I didn't yet understand those mechanisms. But I understood rules. I understood systems. I understood the seductive safety of a universe that played fair.

Or pretended to.

By the time I entered psychology proper—veterans, trauma, depression, systems—I carried with me the quiet arrogance of a man who believed he could locate truth the way other people locate their keys. If you just look properly, truth reveals itself.

This arrogance was not malicious. It was… inherited.

The way some people inherit religion or recipes or football loyalties.

Certainty was my birthright.

Science was my compass.

And I assumed—wrongly—that this compass would continue pointing north for the rest of my life.

I had no idea that the magnetic field beneath it was already shifting.

That the world was quietly rearranging itself.

That information was about to become infinite, weaponised, contradictory, monetised, algorithmic, and synthetically eloquent.

I had no idea that my beloved bullshit radar—once so dependable—would one day short-circuit under the sheer voltage of modernity.

But that is the story of this entire book.

And this chapter is only the prologue to the fall.

If I try to describe my young self now, the affection I feel is tinged with embarrassment. He was earnest. He was hopeful. He believed in systems because he needed to. He believed in truth because the alternative—ambiguity, contradiction, epistemic fog—would have been unbearable.

He believed the world was knowable.

He believed knowing was the highest human act.

He believed evidence was a kind of moral force.

And he had absolutely no idea what was coming.

The internet.

The East.

The slow erosion of authority.

The monetisation of truth.

Conspiracy culture.

Pharmaceutical politics.

The collapse of gatekeeping.

Artificial intelligence that writes like an angel and reasons like a drunk uncle.

And the horrifying realisation that even *I*—trained mind, rational creature, scientist—could be fooled, seduced, misled, overwhelmed.

But that is not this chapter.

This chapter is about the innocence before the storm.

The quiet belief that the world could be placed in order if only we were diligent enough.

It is, in its own way, a love story.

A love story between a young man and the idea of truth—pure, singular, obedient truth.

It was a good romance while it lasted.

And like all first loves, it shaped me long after it ended.

If you want me to expand this into 4,000–5,000 words, deepen the childhood scenes, add more Mary Poppins absurdity, or lace in more foreshadowing of the collapse, I can do that.