# Story Part 5

Adrian Vale’s search

Revised October 21, 2026

William Byrd, with AI writing assistance

By the fourth morning, Adrian Vale had begun checking his phone before he was fully awake.

There were messages from his staff, a reminder about a funding meeting, and a photograph of a leaking ceiling at the center. Nothing from Rowan.

He answered the message about the ceiling first.

Have someone move the furniture and keep that room closed until maintenance checks it. Use my office if you need the space.

Then he checked his missed calls.

Still nothing.



Marcus had been perfectly clear. He had no way to summon Rowan. He could pass along Adrian’s information if another conversation happened, but he had made no promise that it would.

Adrian had thanked him at the time.

Now he turned the phone face down, then picked it up to check that the ringer was on.

At breakfast, he opened the news clip again. He had watched it often enough to know when the camera would turn toward Marcus, when a reporter would step into the foreground, and when the brief exchange with the unidentified system would become audible beneath the surrounding noise.

He moved back a few seconds and listened again.

He watched a stretcher emerge behind the reporter. People in separate parts of the tunnel had been working from different pieces of information. The voice had helped

them put enough of it together to bring that man out.

At the center, an unanswered telephone could delay a placement for hours. A missing document could undo a week of work. Sometimes a person finally agreed to accept help, only to spend the afternoon waiting while three offices tried to determine who was responsible for providing it.

Last week, a man had left before transport arrived. By the time the driver called, the staff member who had persuaded him to stay was off shift.

Adrian paused the video.

He reached for the notebook beside his plate.

At first, he wrote down ordinary problems.

Transport.

Available beds.

Medication.

Staffing.

He drew lines between them, then crossed out two of the lines and began again.

He added names beside the problems. Three people beside transport. Two beside medication. When one of them was unavailable, the others often did not know where the request had stopped.

At the top of the next page, he wrote Rowan.

He had read about quantum computing, though he could not have explained how one of its processors worked. The

phrase he remembered was calculations ordinary machines could not practically perform. Military AI suggested something different to him: strategy, resources, several changing problems considered at once.

He wrote both beneath Rowan and drew a line to each.

Rowan would decide which questions went to which system. He would compare what came back and change the plan when it stopped working. Adrian put a box around his name.



Adrian filled another page.

His coffee went cold beside him.

When his phone vibrated, he reached for it so quickly that his pen rolled off the table.

A delivery notification.

He set the phone down, retrieved the pen, and returned to the notebook.

The consultant’s office occupied the second floor of a building Adrian had passed dozens of times without noticing.

There was no elaborate reception area. A woman at a desk confirmed his appointment and directed him toward a meeting room overlooking the parking lot.

Dr. Ellis arrived carrying a laptop and a glass of water.

“Mr. Vale. Thank you for sending the outline.”

“Thank you for seeing me on short notice.”

They shook hands.

Ellis placed the laptop on the table but left it closed.



“Before we get into components, tell me what you want this system to do.”

Adrian set his notebook between them, open to the first page.

He described the center: the calls, the separate records, the referrals that stalled because each organization could see only its own part of a problem. Then he described the tunnel rescue.

“You saw the coverage?”

“Some of it.”

“What interested me was the ability to coordinate under those conditions. I started wondering what a system like that could accomplish with stronger computational support.”

“And the quantum and military components in your outline?”

“Difficult calculations handled faster. Better strategic planning. Something that can evaluate several developing problems and help us respond before they become emergencies.”

Ellis nodded.

“All right. Which of those problems requires the quantum processor?”

Adrian turned to the diagram.

“That’s one of the things I’m here to find out.”

“Then I need to ask about the box at the top. What do you know about Rowan?”

“Very little.”

“Who operates him?”

“I haven’t been able to establish that.”

“Do you have technical documentation?”

“No.”

“Access to the system?”

“Not yet.”

Ellis looked at the diagram again.

“I’ve asked for a conversation,” Adrian added. “Through someone who spoke with him during the rescue.”

“So, at present, the central component of your proposal is a system you cannot examine.”

“At present.”

Ellis made a note beside Rowan’s name.

“That means I can assess the general idea. I can’t assess whether Rowan can perform the role you’ve assigned him.”

Adrian rested his pen against the paper.

“Assuming he can?”

“We would still need to test the rest.”

Ellis turned the notebook slightly and pointed to the word quantum.

“This isn’t a general speed setting. You don’t connect a quantum processor to an AI and make everything it does faster. You need a suitable problem, a suitable algorithm, and evidence that the quantum approach offers an advantage over the best ordinary computing methods available.”

“For the right calculation, though?”

“For particular tasks, potentially. We would have to identify them. Moving data, preparing the calculation, dealing with errors, and getting a usable result all matter. A faster calculation inside one component doesn’t necessarily give you a faster answer from the complete system.”

Adrian wrote for a moment.

“What about planning?”

“We can investigate planning without assuming quantum hardware is the answer.”

“I’m prepared for this to be difficult.”

“I need to establish whether it helps before you pay for it.”

Adrian looked up.

Ellis left the pen beside the notebook and waited for him.

Adrian looked down at the word quantum.

“Find the calculation first. All right.”

They moved to the second part of the proposal.

“What do you mean by military AI?” Ellis asked.

“A system capable of strategy. Prioritizing actions. Coordinating resources under pressure.”

“That describes capabilities, rather than a single product. A system trained for one military task may be entirely unsuitable for civilian care. Its assumptions, data, and

objectives matter.”

“But it could contribute.”

“If you had lawful access to an appropriate system and could demonstrate that it was useful for the task. Procurement, licensing, and security restrictions could all affect that. You also need to decide what authority any component has.”

“Rowan would coordinate them.”

“What happens when they disagree?”

“He evaluates their answers.”

“How?”

Adrian glanced at his notebook.

“That would be part of his role.”

“It would. But it’s also something your team would need to understand and test. Otherwise, you’ve placed the most important decision inside the least understood part of the design.”

Adrian put his pen against the box around Rowan’s name. He had pressed hard enough drawing it to leave an impression on the next sheet.

Adrian turned to a clean page.

“What would you recommend as a first step?”

“One limited problem with a result we can measure. Something you understand well enough to recognize when the system gets it wrong. You build a baseline, test alternatives, and expand only when the evidence supports

it.”

“How long?”

“For an initial assessment? That depends on access and scope. For the full system you’ve described, anyone giving you a confident completion date today would be guessing.”

“And cost?”

“The same answer.”

Adrian leaned back.

He had brought the notebook expecting to add names, prices, perhaps a date. Ellis had not offered any of them.

Ellis opened the laptop at last.

“I can help define an assessment. But this would require several kinds of expertise. Systems integration, security, people who understand the actual work you want to support. Quantum expertise if the initial investigation identifies a reason to pursue it.”

“And someone who can understand Rowan.”

“Yes. With his cooperation and enough access to examine what he can do.”

Adrian looked down at the pages he had brought.

Ellis had written beside every connection in the diagram. One line had a question mark at each end.

“Is there a version of this you would actually take on?”

“An assessment, yes. I can propose that. I can’t promise the system in this notebook.”

In the parking lot, Adrian put the notebook on the passenger seat and checked his phone.

The center had sent a message. Maintenance had checked the ceiling; the room would stay closed until the repair was finished. He approved the work and asked where the displaced appointments had been moved.

There was still no message from Rowan. Adrian opened his contacts and called the first person Ellis had suggested.

He spoke with people who managed technical contracts, a university contact, and an engineer introduced through a donor. He began asking what each person would need to see before offering an opinion.

Some answered the question. Others sent presentations.

One candidate spoke confidently about Rowan before admitting he knew only what had appeared in the news. Another proposed replacing him with a system his firm already sold.

Adrian ended that conversation early.

He returned to the question Ellis had written beside Rowan: What can we verify?

The referral arrived late on a Thursday.

The accompanying message was brief.

The sender had worked with Mira Sloane several years earlier. Her experience included resilient infrastructure

and difficult integrations. She was particularly good at tracing failures across systems that different teams insisted were working correctly.

Near the end of the message, the sender had added a warning.

Mira’s public work history was incomplete.

Adrian opened the attachment.

The first page listed networks designed to remain operational during infrastructure failures, recovery work, and systems brought back into service after other teams had failed to locate the fault.

Horizon appeared among the organizations listed.

Several projects were described in broad terms. Some supporting details were unavailable.

Adrian moved to the dates.

He read them once, then again.

There was a substantial interval between two entries. Farther down, another stretch disappeared between the end of one position and the beginning of the next documented engagement.

He scrolled back to the top, looking for a page he might have missed.

He checked the attachment count. One document, all pages present.



He called the person who had sent it.

“Tell me about the gaps.”

“I warned you the record was incomplete.”

“I can see that. I’m asking why.”

“I don’t know enough to answer for her.”

“Can you verify the work you’ve recommended her for?”

“The work I saw, yes.”

“And the rest?”

“You’ll have to ask her.”

Adrian turned his chair toward the window.

“How good is she?”

The caller did not need time to consider that one.

“Good enough that I sent you her name knowing you would ask me these questions.”

Adrian looked at the referral again.

“Can you arrange an introduction?”

“I can ask whether she’s willing to speak with you.”

“Please do.”

He ended the call and marked the missing intervals in his notebook.

Beside the dates, he wrote:

Ask her what she can discuss.

Verify the rest independently.

His phone remained on the desk within reach. Before closing the referral, he checked it once more.

Nothing from Rowan.

He returned to the referral. Beneath Mira Sloane’s name, he underlined Horizon. Then he opened a fresh email and began outlining the consultation he wanted.

This story and its characters are fictional. Written and revised through human-AI collaboration under William Byrd’s direction.

AI-generated story illustrations directed by William Byrd. Original Holy Wars card artwork is hand-drawn.