

The Cult

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Part 1

Chapter 1

The whole world was in my hands. Without stopping I said the things they would fear most. The fantasy of the alien was hers and I shared it with my girlfriend Anne, my boss Daniel, and eventually, the entire world. None were ready for the truth except her, because she had discovered the truth and she was the real messenger, not I.

There wasn't anything about me that grouped me into a pack or helped me stand out as having leadership ability. Before school was over and I met her, my interests were useless. I could fold nice cigarettes into slinky fingers and smoke them by the lake. Another task I endeavored upon was intoxicating myself (illegally) in purposeful increments one beer at a time. The period of joy and happiness I had slipped into was that way because I was lazy and I didn't go to college. Precisely this description of a boy was what she had needed. My birthday was right-on, and after I guess four years of planning she introduced her sexual life to me.

But this was after I had broken my early curfew and driven to the lake and saw a man get arrested. I heard shouting, watched the man as the officer pulled him to the back of the police car and handcuffed him. By the time he was taken to the backseat, I felt the empty silence again. The lighted vehicle exited. My first thought was that the man had been vacuumed into space.

The next time I would remember the incident and think of it as an intense and relevant memory was a few months later. She was jumping into the backseat of a different cruiser, passing under my arms and out of the scene. That was her totally paranoid exit from the situation she had created at the casino.

I never felt safe. When I was eighteen and going to different lakes around the city for fun at night, I was located by her and taken into a scenario out of Star Trek, or maybe instead Blade Runner. To survive, anything I had discovered about myself that summer would need to be remembered. The test was if I had truly enjoyed myself at lakes and on bike rides to the library. I only had to know the meaning of pleasure and not really figure anything out intellectually. That wasn't known to me beforehand and it feels a little ironic that everything would have been over if it had been.

I was still in high school but had reached the point of apathy where smoking drugs before class seemed acceptable enough. School was almost over. I took special classes for students with a higher aptitude. I didn't enroll completely in advanced classes because I thought the work load would be too much. Instead, I took a basic credit Biology class in the morning which seemed like the main motivation for getting high before school. The class itself was extremely boring. The teacher's daughter was mentally handicapped after a traumatic brain injury sustained in gymnastics. He was a Christian and tried spiritedly to raise awareness for both creationism and traumatic brain injury (TBI) accidents. He tied it into biology. Our trek through this comedy drama of life could jump the shark at any moment, he said. Later he won twenty thousand dollars on a gay morning talk show. I could see his wife's discomfort when I saw her online. It must have been a terror for them to be on television with an openly gay host. In his lecture about personal health he actually drew a shark on the board, and explained what jumping the shark means.

It was ridiculous, yet I would remember the class with a strong attachment after I met her. Any sense of comedy or drama would be better than the nightmare of her acquaintanceship.

In the case of my own television appearance, that was explained by the way I was hooked into a brainwashing scandal. It amounted to me becoming a famous celebrity. In the commercial,

I was like any actor you see in a Disney movie or on a stupidly popular miniseries. I guess I looked most like Matt Damon but didn't have his stomach.

The organization which targeted me was not owned or subsidiary to anything of her status. She was an agent of that group. She had specified who she wanted and when she wanted him. She wanted me. My Mom had gotten the idea to move to the city during her doctorate studies. She called her move "action research," which is a form of social maneuvering to help change communities.

Mom met Macy and other addicts at the shelter where she volunteered. She told me Macy and I were a good match. Mom had told Macy everything about me. The information was processed quickly by Macy and related to me in the way that superficial facts can be used to arrest one's attention. An illusionist tricks someone with the simplest of distractions. She distracted me with a new version of myself. She mentioned she knew me well. Her idea of who I was needed to *feel* compete although it was, I see now, only partial in its understanding of me.

I felt like I had found a companion who could see into my soul. I thought she was the person I had prayed for the summer before. We seemed an identical match and of course she showed me her astrology companion which confirmed that our relationship would be "written in the stars." Her tarot interpretation was fantastic in its matching of us as lovers. The cards for a queen and the four swords were drawn. They represented her, and me.

Finally, the sex rendered me helpless. For months, I was a victim of her devices. I was her lapdog, or her sex monkey. She was forward with her disease, which I felt sorry for. I felt pity that she was an addict and a user. She said she was disappointed that she had hit the pipe again this weekend. She didn't want it to get in the way of us.

Mom was working all the time and Dad had no time for me being divorced. Macy's set-up was so effective that we slept together for four months before I lost interest for my own mental health. Being with her was dangerous. I imagine that someone had written down a law hidden by the court and the lawmakers. It could have been made by an officer or other agent, who could have writ our relationship in a few secret sentences. The purpose of this law was for her to reference should anyone of similar status to her be suspicious.

The law would say that we must have been illegal; but to keep us out of danger, we would be overlooked by the police. We must be combatants on a war on drugs, a battle of the mind, and by calling attention to ourselves we could free people from use. And she must do drugs, and I must do drugs. Perhaps even, the law would say, that we were allowed to manipulate the media to help us in our endeavor. All of this must have been written somewhere, because according to her organization the rule was that she didn't exist as a person. She was merely a legal cable or instrument of change.

It was inescapable, our time together. Eight months I spent in her sights, until now, aboard this aircraft typing it all out. It is in the nature of my own devices that I write this with nervous hands. I am honest company, and perhaps that shows why I have no friends. The story must be gotten out of the way before I feel safe with anyone else.

Chapter 2

She had previous boyfriends and at least one of them dressed very nicely. I was fortunate to be marrying my future with hers. She was 31.

Our first physical connection was through a bauble she gave me the first night. I wore it around my neck and showed a few people before I lost it. Next came the hand job, and then coitus on my childhood bed in a green bedroom. The walls were adorned with printouts of her favorite drawings and a hanging corset, which I found so remarkable with awe I asked her if she made them. Her clothier had made it. My attraction to her was overpowering until that moment of first coitus. I broke into her by lying sideways. I was surprised by the sensation of penetration and I tumbled to the foot of the bed immediately and almost fell off. She thought it was hilarious. Unbelievably, I had found a woman of a culture so mysterious that it seemed I had manifested her out of the insanity of my own thoughts. These thoughts confused me because I knew it was wrong to date her as an eighteen year old the summer after I graduated high school. My own fears were both quelled and kindled by her overt kindness. The last blog post I made up until then mentioned my wariness in a short, cryptic update. I had forgotten about it until this moment, because I feel less overwhelmed now.

Then she was my girlfriend. I lost my job immediately. I was so obsessive about her I couldn't show up on time.

It was naive when I expected to be able to move out of my Mom's and get an apartment with her. Expertly she managed the landlord to do her bidding. However, I was two days too late when I delivered the remnants of my check to that landlord, and we didn't get the duplex. I planned to use it as a place for us to have sex. Missing the lease was a mistake which I told her in arguments was the last time on earth when I had any hope for a good future. I wasn't exaggerating. I believed everything would have been different if we had gotten the place. She said it didn't matter then and it most certainly did not.

Instead we moved in with her mother and Macy's four children. And she introduced me to the men and the drugs; and I took showers with cameras; and I saw backyard death cellars surrounded by metal fences for perching photographers. The house was characterized by large windows, drug traffic, and school buses created of solid bulletproof titanium from the inside out to protect them from explosions.

I was the fourth one she had introduced to the stimulant which is called by most people Chem 1. She was a Chem 1 dependent. I live now with a prescription to another drug, debaran.

The only time I felt jealousy was with her, when she was having sex with Mika in the other room. The conversation between her and him was an unconnected dialogue I could hear while lying in a bed adjacent the garage. They were using Chem 1 by smoking it, and I'm sure they were so extra-human themselves. That's what the Chem 1 does.

"He's been taking a lot of weed," she said. I couldn't hear very well. "Don't carouse him. All the people make him afraid. It's been like this for a few days. If he does nothing, then try talking to him about music. I like him. I love him."

I was on the stuff myself. Chem 1 wasn't a good drug for me.

"He thinks he's already dead," she told Mika.

I also talked with Jed at the house. Who is to say how long I talked with Jed? On Chem 1, time would pass in intervals that feel the same, but are different lengths. Two hours could feel

like thirty minutes. He said it was the same with a lot of drugs, but it was most noticeable on Chem 1.

I asked him how they had all gotten together. He said "similar interests," then answered more existentially. "We were brought together by an idea that the truth is there, and you have to work terribly hard to find that out yourself." He picked up a coin from the desk where we smoked.

"What truth?" I said.

"We don't know that, do we? You and me haven't found it yet. We look inside, and outside for answers to these basic questions like, how will we survive?" He rolled the coin across the table. "And where do we get more Chem 1?" he added. "That's a biggie. The addiction is like being mentally sick. If we don't have our medicine, we start, well, obviously seeing stuff and our thinking changes. But I guess it's more like a pain we feel."

"So it does hurt?" I asked.

"Hell yes, it hurts. Your body feels dead," he said. "Cold and lifeless, and your mind perceives it that way. You could do almost anything for a re-up."

I thought about how the body and mind could feel dead. I had always thought that I would die when I lost willpower, and when I didn't want to live anymore that's when the clock would start ticking. I occasionally worried about this and it made me very nervous sometimes. I would try to reinvigorate myself, or heal whatever life essence gave me the power to survive. By managing my perception of myself and trying to get a grip on what risks I was taking at any given moment, things felt safer. The thoughts of being in danger were what confused me. Right then the risk felt pretty high.

"We're all going to die," he said. "The fact is you can preview death with Chem 1. It is a dead drug. We still all do it, but maybe something in the air or water makes us not feel as happy with it as we once did."

I wanted to say his tolerance was responsible for that, but he seemed to have the conviction that the drug itself was dying. We were both intoxicated with Chem 1 and I sat there and entertained the idea. Maybe Chem 1 had no more resources to survive. Maybe it had been alive once, and was dying. I thought, wouldn't that be a good thing? It was a horrible drug.

In the days leading up to then, I had been hallucinating sounds, the noises of men on the roof. I also felt like I was in danger although there was no apparent reason to be afraid. The stimulant effect made me feel like the superhero Batman, especially in the car where my power over myself seemed total and inhuman. When we would nearly crash the car into the carport upon returning to the house, the carport seemed like it was taking the full brunt of my power. The structure was strong, but could it withstand the missiles which followed us?

The kids went to school in the morning, apparently unaffected by our use. I wondered if they felt like superheroes. I used to when I was a kid. Our relationship, by the time fall had ended, was entirely life-long in my mind, as if I could die at any moment and the thing that would have defined me was my girlfriend Macy and Chem 1.

Chapter 3

When I awoke she gave me oatmeal, the perfect gesture. I was scared and stressed out because of the drugs. I thought her offering to cook for me was very kind.

The marriage was tonight. She said Smith and Angie would be anointed by the archetype Iris after she fitted Angie's dress. I was completely interested and gave her my enthralled look but could not say much.

I discovered that night by listening to their conversations that a marriage was a special thing which linked two souls together when they were wed properly. Her children already seemed to know this. The scary part was that two people could be married or linked without them knowing. While this marriage would be unofficial it was special because Macy and her posse knew the correct ritual. And it was extra special because someone called Iris was coming.

I waited all day for her to finish the dress so that I could get attention from her. She was extremely distracted. Maybe I was her toy, I thought. She was much older than I was and I certainly couldn't be a father. I waited that day for a confirmation that we should continue dating, even though I did love her. The occasion of the marriage eventually bored me even with the mysterious promise of Iris. I asked her who was Iris.

She said I might find out if I paid attention. That was a little disappointing considering we hadn't had sex for days and I felt intimidated by Smith and Angie. The children were making fun of me. I felt like one of her kids.

I've never been a religious person but these two certainly practiced a form of worship. They seemed extremely devoted to the ritual and completely serious about their marriage even though it wasn't legal. Macy explained that it was an act, for all of them and I understood because of the Chem 1. In fact this entire household seemed like a bizarre carnival because of that drug. It made us child-like and weird, especially the veterans who needed it apparently to survive. Several hours before the scheduled wedding, a visitor came who appeared to be extremely strong and I was afraid again.

He said he had heard that Mika was here. Macy said that he didn't live here. I thought; 'why not tell him where he lives?' But that was the nature of Chem 1. It made us paranoid. Everyone was a potential threat. She saw the man out and I learned later that he was a good guy, but didn't do the same drugs as us. In fact he was a captain. His name was Jerry and he was on a different team.

Smith and Angie were bonded in marital ceremony at around 7:00. I sat and watched with the kids. I respected the newlyweds' fervor but was somewhat alarmed when Macy asked me to come forward before they said their vows. I lurched upward, being high, and tried to pretend to hurt myself. I was having a tough time with all my doubt. However, she asked me to anoint their marriage myself by wishing them well with all my heart for I was blessed by Iris and could do his bidding.

I stepped forward and said nothing. Their laser eyes waited for me and I twisted my body away from them. My head turned towards the ceiling for a few seconds until I finally uttered, "I bless your marriage with all of my heart. I hope you find happiness in your partnership." Macy was extremely pleased.

During the after party which made me feel small and rodent-like I started watching her for clues about what had happened and also for cameras. It must have been a symptom of the

intoxication. I really wanted out of this situation but couldn't tell Macy because I still was attracted to her. Did she like this drawing? Yes, very much. But I was one of her kids, not her lover. I became curious about the huge man asking for our captain and planned to go see him sometime. It had seemed like he was riding on a missile, the energy he carried was so strong. When I fell asleep, I dreamed of robots because that's what the children were watching on television. I really was just one of them.

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Chapter 4

There was a time when I was away from her due to stress or morbid fear and stayed with my Mom across the city. I cooked food for her children once she moved closer to me with her entire family. She wasn't trying to get closer to me, however. There were a few people I visited with during this time and a couple of men I even invited into my Mom's house on the weekends which she was gone. The first man was Jerry, the captain. He was from California and had AIDS. He knew all about weed. Unfortunately I must report that he was not on the proper medicine and treatment for his disease. It wasn't irresponsible as far as anyone else is concerned. I would have hated to see his life shortened on account of a homegrown remedy.

The other two were black men who I felt needed respite from the cold and danger. I supplied it to them by allowing them to nap on the couch where I had spent my high school years sleeping after class. The couch now had been utilized as a detox center for Chem 1. I knew they wouldn't steal anything, and even let them stay there unattended while I busied myself with Macy's chores. I did try to watch some television with them but Mika seemed to have a problem with them and arrived in his huge black truck to demand money. Macy told us they were very shallow for not paying him earlier, and in order to get the cash I drove them to an abandoned apartment complex to steal the heating elements off air conditioners for scrap metal. I was listening to The Pens in my car. I didn't have a problem with it, because I felt so useless it was a service I was glad to get credit from Macy for doing. The music and the colder atmosphere were exceptionally depressing. Now, the smell of cigarettes reminds me of this time when I was forcing my limbs to move the heating elements into my trunk despite being stiff. I am reminded of the fear. I was afraid of Mika. I thought he might shoot me.

I was trying to figure out how much the men owed him. "Do you owe him for meth?" I asked.

The bigger man, curiously named Brown, responded patronizingly. "You think all we do is do meth, don't you?"

"I can't think of anything you would owe Mika for." Mika had a codename I couldn't remember. My imagination swelled at the idea they might have some other kind of trade going on.

"It's for tweak, what the hell do you think it was for?"

I shrugged though I couldn't be satisfied by that explanation. Being Macy's boyfriend I didn't have to pay for any drugs, although I did have my own weed which had lasted the entire time I had known her. I was pretty sure there was something else going on with the handling of the drugs.

The real story was much more fantastic than I even could have thought. The captain for the other team, Jerry, had a deal with Mika. He was telling me about it when I visited to see his weed, or kind bud. His friends in California were artists. Their company and time was their product, besides the Chem 2, or marijuana. They were "large-scale" media entrepreneurs. Any Internet video with them in it was guaranteed to get tons of hits, and you could pay a price to get into the films and market your own services. The videos were hypnotic, the captain was explaining. His friends were highly influential.

They knew how to control people's perception.

He began to get a little suspicious of me I thought. I was chain-smoking in the trashy fashion which I handled such magnanimous company and that's probably what started the questions.

"I heard that Macy thinks you've got the potential to be her Iris archetype. Don't you know what that means?" He asked.

I stumbled over the word archetype when I said I wasn't all that interested in it.

He explained that Macy herself was highly influential as well. "The archetype can be thought of like mental software. The ego is programmed and then downloaded to the collective unconscious, where others live and think as the archetype does."

"That doesn't make any sense," I said.

The captain told me I was worse than he had suspected. "The archetypes serve special purposes. The role they play is specified by the individuals who play those roles. You program yourself. The story is written by their character and personality. Do you know who you are? You're going to shape what her archetype for Iris means so you better get ready, and you better not be stupid when shit gets heavy. I'm telling you this as your bro. Right? The archetypes are based on the theory of the Tree of Life. The angels live at the topmost part of the Tree of Life, and archetypes below them, and regular people near the bottom. Inside each of us is the potential to be the archetype for the angels. Anyone could be an archetype," he said, then smiled. "But it's very expensive to get the attention a true archetype deserves. Macy has competitors on her own team. She needs you to be the strongest version of Iris out there. You can't choke at the last moment and rat her out." He blew into his pipe to clear an airway through the resin. "That's really what's trashy."

I didn't know what to say. These weird stories I had only pretended to believe up to this point, out of fear of rejection or insecurity.

"Your name, Adam, means something too. It means you're the archetypal 'man.' It's truly perfect. You're like a light saber, Adam."

I lost my speech. I went for another cigarette but dropped it and apologized and thought, 'this could get me killed.' I could get killed trying to make my girlfriend's insane plan happen, this nonsense about archetypes and angels, and whatever the Tree of Life could be. How complicated it all felt. She wouldn't tell me about anything, yet I didn't want her to anyway. The idea made me anxious. How much had I invested of myself into this relationship? I couldn't even fuck her. I thought I was losing it, and wanted to leave the captain there in his pad but knew that would be rude. He was a socialite and would have been offended and not invited me over again if I left then. I lifted myself with my legs to a halfway point and realized this at the last second and collapsed back onto the floor with crossed legs.

So why hadn't I kept my job and gotten the duplex? He was loading his weed pipe with kind. She was still doing Chem 1 and I wondered, Jesus, could I really help her? I could stand there with my conviction of my love for her and this other person would tell me things she had never even mentioned and I couldn't understand it anyway. I had been devoted before but now I felt like a harsh schism had bent itself between us. It was overwhelming and the room seemed to shrink from the contact high I was getting off the smoke he was trying to blow in my face. "Stop it," I said.

"My apologies," he said. "I'm here for you, if you ever have questions. Part of being the archetype fortunately is that you mustn't try too hard."

Jerry was my friend, where Macy was my girlfriend and nothing else. I felt like such a bitch. I finally asked, "so she wants me to be famous?" It seemed like a good question although I was barely paying attention to his company at this point. He laughed loudly.

"You're already famous. You're dating Macy."

"Famous how?"

"That's what you'll have to figure out for yourself."

"Oh."

I took some kind with me and ran a stoplight. The speeding traffic crashed headlong into my vehicle. The first car that was ever mine had been crushed from the driver's side. I regained consciousness at my Mom's after two days' hospitalization. The concussion was serious.

Chapter 5

It took two weeks to figure out something wasn't right and I went to a psychologist. I told him I was irritable and scatterbrained and having a really emotional time trying to get my life back on track. I had recently broken up with my (I didn't say criminal) girlfriend and still felt like I was going to die all the time, despite being completely out of danger. I cried nonstop and I also told him I was upset because my high school friends weren't there for me. He said he couldn't do anything about that but told me I had probably suffered a serious and life-changing traumatic brain injury.

He gave me medication for depression and irritability. We were all going to watch me very closely for any more changes or even improvement. I had decided my life was over. But after a few days, I did feel better. I got a job.

I wasn't a waiter exactly but I did get tip-outs and had a lot of extra cash. Everyone who worked at the restaurant was exceptional and most of them were even in college, which I tempestuously envied and made large plans to enroll myself. The work was easy but I was really good at it, especially the details. The nights were intense and late, and I worked up and down the stairs attempting to hide the racket of dirty dishes. I could lean backwards and hold my hands outwards to keep the dishes in the bus tub. Fine dining has a special effect on someone that can be envisioned only if you meet the people themselves. Those people, who like to bill really extravagant checks on dinner and wine, have characters that are almost as magnanimous as the captains I had all but forgotten.

I was glad to be away from the Chem 1 and medication improved my mood so far beyond what I had felt before that I can say now I was definitely manic for the first few weeks on the job. The mania brought sadness but it was a healing type, where I could regain perspective on how traumatic my relationships had been for so long. I could talk to these people about music and other things I loved, and they liked me for that.

Whenever I would take medication in the mornings, I thought my imagination was somehow improved. The clarity with which I could perceive things now made me a newer person. I thought constantly of little scenarios where fantastic people came and went. The restaurant was the perfect environment for that. I wrote a story about a local dancer I met named Geronima. Actually, I wrote four stories but each one improved on the last and I considered my last story to be the only important one.

I had changed completely, but had issues focusing on conversation and communicating. That was the scariest part, and I began to feel like I was like my biology teacher's daughter. Was I retarded now? With horror I could recall conversations and my memory seemed to warp my image of myself. I felt convinced that I had become more handicapped than my family had thought. I began to get extremely anxious before and during work. But I still could assure myself that I was okay, because I really liked myself, and that was how I could function. I liked the stories I wrote, and my coworkers, and wanted to eventually start a huge, purposeful life. 'I am an adult now and,' I thought with humor, 'as soon as I could have sex I'd feel much much better.'

The one thing holding me back from either enrolling in college or becoming a full-time waiter, was the lingering idea that I was still in love with her. It was stupid, I knew. I was torn by one emotion, which felt almost confused but happy; and another which longed for my ex-girlfriend and even the thrill of her company. My Mom was still working at the shelter and that

would ultimately be the end to my life at the restaurant after the TBI, and a new introduction to my next life as a pedestrian of the pill I could call my own shelter, debian.

I met Anne at my Mom's house when I came home from work one night. I avoided her at first by going into my old room which was socially acceptable even to me who was insecure, and when I overheard her I felt that first attraction to her when she took my virginity. She approached me in my room and gave me her number. I asked her how she was. She said she was having a hard time taking care of her new boyfriend who was nothing like me. Curiosity would execute me mercilessly that night. I woke up in her new place. I felt much much better.

Chapter 6

Macy wouldn't have me share this depiction of her, and would prefer I make a long letter about her other boyfriend, the captain. But as I sit in first class drinking short Cokes I think of how her ex-boyfriend Mika almost died in a shooting, which is how I met Macy at Mom's.

The path which led me to her was one I followed through weakness not courage and that must make her feel enraged. But she shall never read this, I suppose. No fire could take her but it was fire which consumed me when we were together. Although the way I see her all the time gives me wonder: will leaving help? Nor validation finds me, flying to my new home, nor comfort nor satisfaction. It is truly the outlaw of my conscience who could make me be so at unease for such a period of time. Exact matches we may be, we cannot say to each other that as lovers we made any kind of real progress. That is her loss. So I will continue about her.

At long last, I had been initiated into the cult of personality surrounding her family and personal life. I had hit the pipe and smoked enough cigarettes for her and her mother to design a short mission I could help execute at the casino. My girlfriend had arranged for us to meet the man who had shot the recently appointed captain.

I didn't know why the captain was so important, but apparently a man named Roger Ethan had shot him because of Chem 2, the substance which was going to be legalized very soon by our government.

That was the reason we were at the casino: to search him out. The captain had been hired by the government as a survivor on a war on drugs and did whatever Macy told him. He was simply a very strong man that Macy had dated. She use him in an important purpose to give Chem 2 a touch of legitimacy. Instead of being an uncontrollable cultural mythos, she wanted to create a plethora of realities that the organization imagined. It was the honor and courage of the captain Mika which allowed him to skip out on attendance.

He said I was going to get myself into to some crazy shit.

He was once a low-level drug lord and had been shot and survived. When Macy recruited him to comfort civilians who knew very little of the pathology of drug use, he began working towards the wake-up call about the reality of Chem 2 legalization. He focused especially on the strong stuff called "kind bud." It was tough for me with my high school diploma to understand, and I did a miserable job being of use which of course caused me intense anxiety and nearly got them all in real trouble.

The captain, who had with her thought he was above the law and now worked for peace, or civilians, was the player in a CIA effort to comfort us about the legalization of weed. The captain was a man with street experience who could lead us to a better understanding of Chem 2 by getting us the good, valuable "kind." Chem 2 was safer than Chem 1.

I was the newbie and the focus of everybody's attention who knew the mission at the casino: her, her mother, me, and Jed.

By the final hour I had without care accused her of stealing my car, although it was parked where I left it. That is enough detail to see the whole story. I thought the second half of the casino was too scary to approach at first. I imagined it was a place of dissection and torture where Mika would find me to execute eventually. By now you get the gist. I couldn't find Roger Ethan, and called Jed who was trying to help us stay organized from the parking lot. He said I was doing well, laughing. I told him I needed Macy.

*

The objective of the mission was to trade cell phones for the benefit of Roger Ethan's gross rage and envy of our skirmishing ability. I would give her mother my cell phone in the casino in front of Roger Ethan who was at the lotto machines pushing away at buttons. It took me hours to find her mother, but I knew through odd hints on the drive with her to the place that was the plan and I had nothing else but to stick to it.

The bet-masters were watching me very closely, including security, as I trekked through the hallways into each room, scanning the crowd. I had lost her mother quickly because I thought she intended to hide from me. When I did find her, I realized she had gone off in search of Roger Ethan who had been tricked into coming by a phone call or weird suggestion from Mika.

My awkward, towering body approached her figure which had formed a vulnerable position right next to the huge man Roger Ethan. I was so intoxicated from the drug Chem 1 that when I reached her, my arm was outstretched, holding the phone. My hands opened without volition as I was shaking to drop it next to her and Roger Ethan. That was the closest I felt to death that night. Before I could tell if she picked up the phone, or if Roger Ethan saw my attempt to hand it over, I ambled off without trying to fetch either the phone or attention. I already felt I had enough from the people who worked there and yet the other gamblers barely noticed. My next goal was to find Macy and go home.

*

Circling the blackjack tables, I heard my own voice speaking to me for the first time. It was hers. The influence of Chem 1 is ephemeral and memorable, like a cold version of hell. I regret that I was so intoxicated I went from one end of the huge complex to the other in search of her.

My quest led me to the parking lot, where I gathered she was sitting in a vehicle from another call to Jed. I couldn't find my car, though.

Eventually I panicked. I found a security guard who could have even been a police officer and desperately asked for help. Being strung out, it is surprising I wasn't arrested. He interrogated me in good humor, probably suspecting I was on not worth jailing.

"Who are you with?" he asked.

I told him about Macy and her Mom. I said I couldn't find my car, which is where Macy probably was. We walked to where I thought I had parked and I said she had stolen it.

I found the car soon after the cop wrote his report and ramped up on the highway to leave but a trucker on the wrong side of the road tried to crash head-long into me. Reality was definitely taking a turn for the worst, because I imagined Mika had arranged a hit on me. She tolerated this in her patient way when I told her afterwards. But, should I have been the one who felt ratted out?

I skidded to the side of the road and turned around and re-entered the casino parking lot. Itself was like an ashtray of cars which burned like cigarette butts. I saw a police vehicle.

I wasn't sure if she was being arrested. However, I did know that this was from where she monitored me. She shouted from the window I had lasted several hours and the car rolled away. That was an unreal yet calming vision. And I did think I was dead the entire time. She already knew me so well.

I finally left, leaving her mother and her, and went back to Macy's friend Anne's apartment. Macy had given me Anne's number beforehand in case the mission failed. Macy with her flip of red hair and her mother wearing a cowgirl jacket didn't show up at all or even call me. Did I get her arrested? It was their plan after all. If it failed, it could not possibly be my fault, right? I was a newbie.

Anne went restlessly to sleep. I passed out on her couch.

Part 2

Chapter 1

I lived now with a nineteen year old woman (my age!) named Anne. I would never take Chem 1 again. It would interfere with debian and I made that very upfront. She was proud of me. She was going to AA and was off it too. Great. Her mother was young and caring and this was totally acceptable and cool to me. I tried to act suave for my new housemate. She was had just been hired by a marketing firm downtown called Cat Lady Marketing. She said she was very excited and that I should apply there because I was a writer and she was the only one there besides her boss. It was tempting to me and I was losing my willpower to say no. I could give my two-week's notice and move in with her. I would have a higher paying job which utilized my skills better. I said I wasn't ready for an important career, especially with my psychological issues at the time.

"They love creative people," she said. It was owned by local artists who were trying to make it big and they accepted anything new and anyone out of the ordinary.

Would this be a repeat of what happened last time? I was terrified living with Macy before. Could I really do that to myself again? The new apartment was so nice and I think I truly loved Anne but did we have to be together? I remembered Macy was so much older than me.

I applied for the job. When I got the call, my female friend screamed. I had to stay with her, for sure. I needed to show up in just three days with khakis and tie. The place had a large splash of paint on the back wall because it was a very creative environment. Thankfully, I was only tasked with filing at first.

I was overwhelmed by my new job so I asked Anne out. She said yes but didn't want a physical relationship. I guess I didn't really either. Things were really looking up.

The first day of work I lost track of several files. I would have gotten fired if I wasn't a newbie. They said to pay more attention to where they put things which made me wonder if they knew about my injury. It shouldn't have mattered. I could have even had a better chance at doing well if I told her but I decided not to.

The company created online movies to market bands, artists, and even small businesses in the downtown area. It was expertly managed by a man named Daniel. He was the kind of boss that was open to anything being a creativity leader. He even said that I could try my hand at marketing, after I showed him my stories. But for now, we would stick to filing.

Anne was especially interested in his offer. She said with our skills, we could totally reshape the marketing firm's strategies. Of this I was more than skeptical. Daniel intimidated me.

"Anne, tell me what you know our boss. We can work based on that."

She showed her patience again and said it was none of my business.

My boss Daniel was overly excited at work the next day. He was telling Anne that he had landed a great new client. It was a pharmaceutical house. A small branch of the pharmaceutical house, sure, but they were looking for experimental advertising proposals for their new medicine.

Anne thought this was a huge deal. She screamed again, and then again when she saw the contract. Daniel's firm was being paid over \$25,000 in advance for proposals for the medicine debian.

It was the medication I took. It was the medication that changed my life, or that heralded a new period in my life at the least. I asked why debian and not something more everyday like aspirin. He said it was a very successful drug pharmacologically but the public stigmatized anti-psychotics. It was their job to improve its image as an answer for schizophrenics, bi-polar types, and depression sufferers. It was a great job for them and I was happy, too. But it seemed odd to

me that the firm would be working on this medication. I thought secretly that I was going to brainstorm my own ideas about the project. After a week I showed Anne the idea.

"Sex, huh? I thought you didn't want to have sex."

"Well, it's a start right?" I said.

I had written 3 pages out and printed them as a proposal for Daniel. The idea was to illustrate the drug as a sexual icon. In the commercial, fashion and sex appeal was intended to persuade the public that debian led to an improved sex life. I believed in the idea. I thought that, although I wasn't having sex, it was by choice and in fact I had grown out of childhood and into adulthood because of my prescription. It may have had something to do with the TBI, but without debian I wouldn't have felt whole, and my confidence would not have been there.

Sex, the commercial displayed in large text with funny music (in the script) could be a good or a bad thing depending on the behavior related to it. Without debian to help, the behavior could be negative. debian was how to play hard to get and score the partner you were looking for. And sex was a healthy activity, the actor said, which cleansed the mind and body. Are you getting any sex? Are you expressing yourself in the most beautiful of ways with a partner? Call your doctor today.

It was my innocence and upfront attitude that always made the older adults laugh when I was involved in any kind of sexual activity or discussion, and that's why Daniel thought my idea was so hilarious. I should have expected the dismissal, but I think he was impressed and encouraged me to try again.

Anne's idea was less popular but overall of better quality.

Two workdays later I made a second attempt, this time of a more complex variety. I labelled the folder "Article 2" and put it on Daniel's desk.

"What's this?" he asked.

I became very nervous and started to grab it back as if I had accidentally placed it there. Ever since the accident I was more socially insecure. But I gave it a shot, and thought ironically of the medicine, and said "Article 2 is the answer to your pharma contract."

"Really now?" He was getting a little impatient. I thought he might not have liked my first idea as well as he had said.

This script was all about inspiration. The actor tells a personal story about perseverance and how debian helped him remain strong until the last moments of a problem he had with his social anxiety. On debian, he could exercise his willpower in a new way that gave him more stamina and his problems were slowly but surely going away, because he could outlast them. Are you in for the fight? Talk to your doctor about your prescription to debian.

Although Anne helped me with this one, too, it was quickly unapproved. Daniel told me to try again. This attempt was missing something important. I would have Article 3 ready in a week.

Chapter 2

The apartment ceiling, between lofts, protected us from rain and leaves, although the wind was funneled through it making us cold when we would smoke cigarettes. The apartment itself was clean and grey-walled like caulking stick. Anne and I composed lengthy conversations about our lives, our ideas, and the world we lived in which was so different from what we thought when we were children. Anne recalled childhood better than I did. She said she was very lucky for her education which was the private school type. She thought most of all that by asking questions to herself inside her head was what helped her intellect.

I would tell them that I remembered very little of my past, broken into codes like weathered cuneiform tablets. Each place I lived growing up was like its own lost civilization to me. I could remember that the people I knew always changed. Even my parents changed, or my dad at least. Anne said, "So your life was like playing musical chairs?"

"I'd say that, yes. Or Guess Who. In the game you knock down faces through the process of elimination." I said, "My Mom's face never disappeared, and that's the only face which I remember always being there."

If I quit fidgeting and sat there, my head filled with memories and ideas. I think it was debian. I could see new things, and actually visualize them and make judgments and connections. The conversations were long and fruitful when I paused like this. I could walk through my past and record new memories which were the same but from a different, adult perspective. I was nervous that maybe I was coding my brain. I told Anne that idea and she said, "Code for success. You code for inner peace and happiness. Sometimes I feel like I'm programming myself, too, when I'm going to face a very important challenge." Although she contributed to that idea, I think she was thinking about something else. Maybe she thought it was too weird.

Anne had been brought up by amazing parents, and I envied her. But it was the jealousy which motivates friendships and keeps us close together. I was lucky that she had a support system in case mine failed. She tried to brush her classiness off by mentioning her difficulty in school, but led herself into a trap where she had to elaborate. Anne didn't want to talk about how she met Macy after high school, and what they had done together. I guess I wouldn't have either if I were a girl. Anne was very masculine and her obvious pride in her achievements like sobriety weren't typical of girls.

Anne wanted to visit Italy. I promised I'd take her there when I had saved up enough.

I had been promoted in my position at the firm to illustrator of promotional ads for the company on account of my drawing ability. Daniel said I was doing great, and when he was in an upbeat mood after lunch I showed him Article 3. I crossed my fingers in my head and said a sweet prayer to whatever deity oversaw marketing campaigns in heaven.

Anne and I had worked on this one very closely together. In fact, I told her I would have to work out a way to give her credit for her help but she was entirely disinterested in that. She said that although the contract was large, it wasn't that big of a deal because the firm itself was very small. Anne and I essentially worked for a think tank. The ad would probably never be run, anyway. The firm was a content farm.

The idea was more simple and direct than the others. In 30 seconds, an actor related the psychological histories of various famous people and their portrayal in the media. Despite their

problems, they were on television and in magazines and in our lives. It was with the help of doctors and medication like debaran that enabled them to succeed. Find your potential to be famous. Ask your doctor about debaran.

Daniel said it was indeed better than the rest. He asked why I focused so much on the pharm contract. I hadn't done anything else of this quality for the firm since I started. What was it?

Should I tell him I'm on debaran? I thought. Instead I told him that I was trying to be the exemplification of someone who is non-judgmental. I was so interested in the project because I felt bad for people on debaran. He told me that after one more try, he would send my next idea to the client. He wanted two ideas at once this time. Each one was better than the last, so I should give it two tries. I liked the strategy. When I got home gave Anne a big hug for thanks. I was also desperate for her help. I felt it so important that I get it right this time. For another week, I tried to put my personal life with Anne on halt to develop two scripts to show my boss.

Anne I think around this time was thinking about ending the relationship. She was jealous. I sincerely didn't want that to happen so I took her to a concert. She was a pretty girl who had been through a lot of the same stuff as me. I was lucky to be her boyfriend. She asked me if I wanted to have sex when we were kissing before the show. I said, after I finish Articles 4 and 5. She started crying.

I couldn't take my mind off the proposals for the entire concert. When we got home, Anne and I went straight to her room and she asked what was wrong. She thought I had been ignoring her.

"I'm so obsessive, I can't help it," I reluctantly explained. "Maybe it's a problem with debaran. I need to go comfort her but you remember how sex messes up relationships. I want to devote more time to finish the proposals, and then we can talk about it."

Anne said my work was important, too. I gave her another hug. I doubt we could have made it much longer after that if it wasn't for our job. Her friend Dana came over some nights.

When I finished Article 4, I told them both I wanted their help in imagining the video. Did they want to be actresses for a night? Anne was willing. She had basically written the script herself. Dana was pretending to be excited to play their role. I gave them the scripts and started recording from a handheld camcorder I borrowed from the firm. I was going to record the two talking to each other and then add my own voice over from behind the cam. Instead of showing Daniel a folder, he would get to watch Article 4.

ANNE

Who am I? What am I doing here? What is my purpose in life?

DANA

You are in my head. You are a creation of mine. My goal is to help you help yourself.

ADAM (VOICEOVER)

Reality is perception. Reality is like a dream. Reality is (...)

ANNE

Reality is the self. I am myself. But you are you.

DANA

Correction: from my perspective, you are someone different than from your perspective. You are only how I perceive you. Reality is a dream.

ANNE

Reality.

ADAM (VOICEOVER)

Reality can be tough to understand. Sometimes we forget who we are and wonder what other people think of ourselves. It's going to be okay with the help of DEBIAN. Soon, you'll feel that ...

ANNE

I am in control of my own self, and my own reality. I am awake.

ADAM (VOICEOVER)

Talk to your doctor about DEBIAN today.

We watched the video together and each one of us thought it to be perfect. I eagerly wanted to show Daniel Article 4 before finishing Article 5 but he had asked me to send both at once so I had to wait.

When Article 5 was painstakingly edited and neatly printed into a folder, I went to bed and waited until morning.

Chapter 3

Daniel liked the final one best.

It was about the other. The people in the world, your city, your friends, and your family, they are the other. Others are the people you pray for and try to be nice to. Others include all living things like animals and plants. So much of the other will die, and you must aspire to feel compassion and empathy for them. The only thing a person must care for besides the other is the self. The commercial asks the question, do you care for yourself and others? Maybe your personality disorder is getting in the way of relationships. debian can help. Ask your doctor today.

The main purpose of the commercial was to wake people up about stigma about psychological disorders. Daniel said it tastefully worked to inspire individuals with those disorders to seek help. He told me he would submit each proposal to the pharmaceutical house and see what they thought while commending me for going above and beyond the call of duty. I said I was obliged to contribute something. After all, I was hired on account of my own creativity.

"The pattern of your proposals reminds me of something I learned when I was studying religion in college," he said. "Have you ever heard the word, Mettā?"

I said no. "The word," he said, "means peace-loving kindness." He told me that in order to achieve Mettā consciousness, a person must first love oneself. When he has loving kindness for himself, and only then, he must love an outer entity. The person starts with close friends, and moves on to having loving kindness for someone who is just an acquaintance, and then an enemy. Eventually, the follower can find love for all life and then the entire universe, and then he has achieved a state called Mettā consciousness.

I said it was very interesting. I wanted to tell him about archetypes and Iris but it felt wrong. Macy had wanted me to keep it a secret, or she would have revealed more. I told him I would look it up online.

"Such concepts are only for the spiritually curious. You seem to be a very intelligent person," he said. "You could get a lot out of it." I thanked him. The rest of the day was full of thoughts of the universe and its hugeness. The environment was perfect for that.

I drew circles within circles, as practice. They seemed to be like my mind. And the outer circles were everyone around me. They were not perfect. But the first circle I drew, which represented me, was clearly the closest to being a real circle. Why the outer circles were so oddly shaped, I could only guess. Maybe I could never achieve Mettā consciousness. Maybe I didn't love Anne or Macy enough. But the thoughts were too confused to keep in my head, so I dropped it and went over my proposals. I thought it was very Mettā.

When Anne and I returned home, all lazy and happy, Macy wasn't there. Anne and I were heavy petting and I had to stop. But, she said, you've finished your articles. And I had.

Afterwards, the excitement of the occasion made me, instead of glowingly satisfied, a little paranoid. Where was Macy? I was in denial that I could have gotten her into trouble.

The call came around seven from detective Morrissey. He said Macy was in custody. Did we have any information about the man named Mika? We said no and stared at each other's faces frozen in terror. It was partially true because I didn't know if Mika's real name was Mika or not.

I was trying to act very busy to end the conversation by talking to Anne about nonsense. He asked who I was talking to.

"It is my girlfriend. We're doing homework," I said. He told me he would need to ask me some questions in person. This was absolute horror, but at least he didn't ask to see Anne. She knew secret things about Macy, too, but wouldn't be able to handle the pressure of lying. He asked for my address.

Anne was sleeping when he came to take me for interrogation. I tried to get out of it but he said he had evidence of me using Chem 1 and if I didn't cooperate I could get in a lot of trouble. Also by cooperating I could lessen Macy's punishment. The situation was getting out of control very fast. I told him I needed to take my medication. This was partly because I wanted to use my condition as some sort of advantage over the police, and partly because I was having a panic attack already. I didn't know how long they would keep me and I didn't want to go through this without debian.

When we arrived I couldn't see Macy but assumed she was at this police station. Morrissey worked at this department which was closest to our apartment.

I was at his desk, like at the doctor, and although he was intimidating it didn't appear he was trying to be so. The first question was how I knew Macy.

"She is my ex-girlfriend. We live together. She's been clean for four months and she—" I was interrupted by a snort.

"I know she does drugs, Adam. All I want to know is how you know her and why you were living together," he said.

"I haven't lived with her since the arrest," I said.

"Does she talk about her ideas with you? Does she ever seem to hold odd opinions or beliefs?" he asked. "I need to know how she has influenced you."

"No, she doesn't have any odd ideas. In fact she's saner than I am. See, I take debian and I've been—" he interrupted me again.

"I also know you're on debian. We've," he paused, "intercepted your proposals. They were very creative." His eyes bore straight into mine for the first time. "Do you have any other proposals?"

"Well, no. I was only supposed to send two," I said. "Anne helped me with them, not Macy."

"We have all five proposals," he said. "I think you were motivated by the felon Macy to create these ideas. If that were true, we would need to investigate the nature of your work. Anne is also close to Macy. She will not be excluded from the investigation."

I was confused. "How did you get the Articles? Did someone give them to you? Have you talked to Daniel? What do you care about the proposals so much for?" I asked.

"I'm the one asking the questions, young man," he said. He stopped his recorder. "And the questions are over. Stay available for the next couple of weeks. I may have more in a few days."

"Where the hell is Macy?" I asked loudly.

"I've already told you. She is in custody for the time being. I will take you back to your apartment now."

Chapter 4

I called Jerry before I even told Anne what had happened. She was following me around and asking me the same question over and over, 'where's Macy?'

Jerry was very cryptic over the phone. He said Macy had legal troubles before and she was safe and we shouldn't be worried. He added that I should remember his advice.

"What advice?" I said.

"You'll do better if you don't try too hard," he said. "I mean with coping with this whole thing. And by the way, I'm sorry about your wreck. I heard that fucked you up."

"It's not a big deal. Thanks for trying to help," I said and explained to Anne that it appeared we wouldn't be seeing Macy for a little while. Work was intensely stressful for both of us. I couldn't tell Daniel what happened but I asked to go home early.

"If you want to get fired you can go home early," he said. Damn. He was merciless.

The next day we received the news that the pharmaceutical house was very excited about my proposal, which had been the only two since Daniel had not approved or sent any of Anne's work to them. They were so pleased that they wanted to buy Articles 1 through 3 to use in case they wanted to continue the advertisement series.

I heard Daniel say, "Advertisement series?" over the phone. They told him they had written Article 6 which they wanted us to film. It would be broadcast on national channels and if they were successful, future commercials would be filmed by their in-house team. However, our contract had been fulfilled for twenty-five thousand dollars and another twenty-five thousand was ours if we filmed Article 6 for them. "What is Article 6?" said Daniel, but Anne and I didn't get an explanation.

The day was a little overwhelming. My very first thought was that I could free Macy by telling Morrissey that our work had earned us a national television commercial, and that he shouldn't be worried about our work on the Articles because that was our job. But I thought, that doesn't make any sense because she could get in even more trouble because our work had become popular. If he thinks her ideas are illegal, then what would happen to Macy if the ideas were featured in a commercial for debian?

I hoped most of all that Morrissey had asked questions about the Articles only so that I would slip up and give him more information. All of this was going through my head but I was pretending to be happy. Daniel was elated and I think he wondered if I was some kind of genius. Anne had immediately gotten over her jealousy and suddenly became flirtatious. The email came with Article 6. It was written by the client. It was based on my proposals, they said. Since we were the only people who worked at the firm, we would have to be the actors. The realization that I was going to be on television gave me a strong conviction that debian was from heaven and I might end up killing myself from stress if I hadn't been prescribed.

We had a week to film, the first part of which I spent with my mother. I tried off and on to tell her exactly what happened but it felt unbelievable and scary. She noticed something was wrong. Anne was there a lot. We were off for the weekend but Daniel kept calling, asking if we were ready. What could we do? The anxiety made us like Roger and Anne Rabbit. The sex was an amazing relief.

We didn't tell my Mom we were filming for a commercial. Daniel was getting all his guys ready for the spot to help him. With the advance, he could afford a very good camera crew. Jerry,

coincidentally, was one of the people he hired. That made me nervous, too. But the morning of the filming, I forgot about everything (except Macy) and took a shower and showed up to work with Anne on time. We were going to the park.

There were probably fifteen people, all from the local art scene, who were there. Girls were talking about how they loved the message of the advertisement and giving me all sorts of flirty attention. Anne tried to ignore it and eventually snapped at one of the women about the woman's age. It was ironic given Macy's age but I kept shut. It was hard to talk, anyway.

It was a sunny day but we still needed lights. I didn't understand that but makeup told me it was for the flesh tones. I said, I'm wearing a mask. Why do I need to have my flesh tones highlighted? Then I saw the mask and it only covered the outside portion of my face. The nose, eyes, lips and cheeks were still visible. They knew what they were doing so I quit complaining. I was agitated from thinking of what would happen when Macy found out we were filming a commercial based on her work, and the fear that she might be in real trouble for something.

We were ready to film after three hours. I didn't have time to read the script. I was going to be the only actor and they had brought a teleprompter. I would play the part of an alien named Arthesces. I heard the script was weird but all commercials were weird and it was supposed to be funny. Jerry was talking about how we had won a great deal of respect in the creative community because of my work. I promised myself that afterwards, I would tell him of Macy's involvement.

Then I remembered what he said just before the wreck. I was already famous because I dated Macy Fad. What did he mean by that? Could he have predicted I was going to be on television? I got sick just before the cameras started rolling and the team took a break.

Why was I going to be the actor? It just hit me that I hadn't even considered that. Jerry seemed to be in his element. I finally saw the two black men in the camera crew who I had invited to my Mom's house. Why was this happening? Could this be one of Macy's secrets? I didn't have much time to wonder anymore. I was standing in front of the camera and needed my best radio voice. During filming, everything was automatic.

Article 6

EXT. AFTERNOON. PARK.

An ALIEN is directly in front of the camera.

ARTHESCES (ADAM)

My name is Arthesces. You have found me, at last.

You may know of my ship, DEBIAN. That is also the brand of medication you have heard about on television.

Cut to:

The ALIEN SHIP hovers over a mountain range.

ARTHESCES (VOICEOVER)

I float above the mountains in this region. I know everyone who takes the medication called DEBIAN. They're being controlled by the supercomputer that runs my ship. DEBIAN guides them to lead fruitful lives. DEBIAN users are sexy, persevering individuals who deserve praise. Reality is just different to them. They love you.

Cut to:

Alien.

ARTHESCES

Anyone who doesn't take the medication is target for me. You may know me by my other name. It is Chem 1.

Cut to:

Hovering ship.

ARTHESCES (VOICEOVER)

DEBIAN is a super-computer which designed the medication you have seen on television. Although DEBIAN is my home, I live at odds with it. Do you want to live inside DEBIAN's cellular processor?

Cut to:

Close up of alien.

ARTHESCES

Or do you want me to meet you personally?

Cut to:

Hovering ship.

ARTHESCES (VOICEOVER)

Talk to your doctor today.

Chapter 5

I could barely remember even filming the commercial. We went back to my Mom's. Without Macy I felt like we had no reason to be at our apartment. We were all concerned about her. Jerry knew my Mom and came over a lot while we waited for the editing to finish. He said the commercial was going to be huge. Anne and I speculated about what had happened to Macy when she was detained, and Jerry didn't seem comfortable talking about it. I understood because he was both trying to protect her as drug user and personally. It wasn't his place to talk about things.

When the weekend at Mom's was over, we went to work like any other day but filing was exceedingly boring. Daniel said he was very pleased with what he had seen so far and that Anne and I should be prepared for agents storming the firm after the broadcast of our work. We were getting raises, and hiring extra artists. But that wouldn't happen until the next calendar month, so we had two weeks for a client search. If we landed another good contract, we would have to lead the new employees responsibly. Were we up to the task? He added that the biggest challenge would be mine in managing the attention from the commercial. He asked if I was ready.

I thought of what Jerry had said. "I shouldn't try so hard, or get nervous, and I'll be okay," I said.

The media storm hadn't hit yet, but the video was edited. Jerry gave us the call and said his team had finished the effects on the spaceship and encoded the video for television broadcasting. I was putting the pieces together about the archetypes. I realized Jerry, Macy, and Mika's efforts to make me famous were as successful as they could have hoped.. I was still confused about exactly what they had done. Two months ago, I thought I might never see Macy again. Now, I thought, I almost didn't want to. I hoped she was okay but everything was a fog. What was in store?

We were at the firm when the commercial ran. My face looked entirely different from what I expected. The sound was edited to make my voice like an actual alien. Trippy. The spaceship was like a neon swirl in daylight. It was ephemeral and levitating over a beautiful mountain range. Jerry's team had also enhanced my costume to be more colorful and vibrant. They were masters at this sort of thing, and we received a congratulatory call from the pharmaceutical representative soon after the spot was over. That wasn't the only call we received that day.

The first one came about an hour after the commercial ran, which I suppose is the amount of time it took for a person to track us down.

"Cat Lady Marketing, this is Daniel," he said. "Who is this? Slow down. You've seen the commercial. Yes, if you want to speak with the distributors of debian I can give you their number. You do very much? Just give me a moment," he mumbled and put his hand over the mouthpiece. He told us he was flabbergasted. "Weird guy wants to talk to the client."

Anne and I shook our heads and stared at each other.

"Alright, did you get that number? Thank you and if you have any questions you can," he said but was interrupted. He waited. "You know Arthesces?" He gave us the same odd look we were giving each other. "You're what now?"

Another call was on the line. "Hold for just a moment," he said. "Can you do that for me? It will be just one moment. Cat Lady Marketing, this is Daniel?"

It was another weird guy. He was shouting. We could hear it over the phone speaker. Anne walked over to her desk phone and opened the first line. She told him we were very busy and that he could call back later in the afternoon. He was shouting also. She hung up on him and Daniel managed to get off the phone with his caller.

"I guess so far the commercial is getting attention at least," Daniel mumbled. He wasn't as alarmed as I was. Was I going to have to deal with people who didn't like the commercial? "He said he was an, ah, abductee," he struggled with the words. "We had to know something that he already knew. Something about debian being a real ship."

I thought, 'this could be some kind of scandal. Maybe the pharmaceutical house had written the script as a strange way to harass people who were against medication. Maybe I was caught up in something much bigger than I had even imagined, with all my doubts.' I remembered what Macy said about the firm being a think tank. 'Had we been taken advantage of to further a scheme to ruin peoples' lives?' But I rested my faith on Daniel and Jerry's team. I certainly didn't understand marketing.

I stepped outside to smoke and call Jerry. "Do you know what's happening at the firm right now?" I asked. He told me I should take off early and come speak with him at the house. Daniel wouldn't mind, he insisted.

He had Chem 2 in the form of kind bud and insisted I take some, but he meant right now. I told him I could only do the strong stuff by myself otherwise I would shut down socially. He told me immediately that the whole team expected a lot of backlash from the commercial. Had I actually thought about the contents of the commercial?

"I guess not. I was happy that it was based off of mine and Anne's work," I said.

He said he had something very important to tell me and I should take some kind. I said no again. "I don't really like that stuff." He seemed a little offended.

"You are Iris after all," he said, then added, "Arthesces' archetype." He brushed the comment off by looking in the kitchen for his weed.

"You mean I play an alien in the commercial? Is that important somehow?" I said. He returned to the living room with his pipe.

"No, I mean you represent the angel Arthesces as Iris, his archetype. Your role is pretty huge." He smiled. "You're probably one of the strongest archetypes I've ever seen," then he stopped. "I'll only tell you more if you hit it."

I was disconcerted. This was hardly the time for his kind. I actually missed Macy more than ever at this moment. I said I'd take one puff if he told me what the hell was going on. The weed hit me like a deep sorrow, and I thought immediately that I had no idea what was going on or why I was there. He waited for me to regain composure.

"You and Macy are partners. Macy works for the, ahem," he said, "Government, you could say. Did you at least know that?"

I said it wasn't surprising. I had seen her in the police car after all. "Is she an officer? Why is she in custody if she is an officer?"

"She isn't. She never has been. And that's all I'll tell you tonight but I must insist you stay here. I wouldn't want you to get another injury," he smiled again. "Which, I don't think would be so lucky for us this time."

I tried to get him to explain but could barely speak because of the high. He turned on some relaxing music and I gave up trying to figure anything out. A woman came over and I don't remember the conversation, but for a split second I thought I was actually enjoying myself, despite all that was going on. I awoke in the middle of the night more sober, and left. Anne was

at the apartment but asleep. I laid down next to her and went to sleep again. The grim memory of what Jerry had told me the night before persuaded me to stay in bed long after Anne went to work. When she woke up at the normal time, I told her I was sick and to tell Daniel I would be missing work. I didn't care if he wanted to fire me.

Chapter 6

Macy showed up while I was sleeping. I was so happy I started crying. She hugged me and I told her what Jerry had said and asked if it was true.

"Why do they always go to Jerry?" she asked as if I wasn't there. She was picking up the house manically, as if she was happy but nervous. "Don't listen to him."

She told me she was just checking up on me. I think she had spoken to Jerry and knew I learned she wasn't at the police station. When she left, I wished I had more kind. Who was Macy, really? Why did she tell me she loved me when she couldn't possibly? She had lied. I left the apartment. I decided to go to work and tell Daniel I was quitting, but I worried what Anne would think. What if Anne was just like Macy?

The firm was locked. I had no idea where anyone could be. So, for the last time, I drove across town again to my Mom's, and found Macy, Anne, Daniel, Jerry, Mom, and Mika. Daniel spoke first after I entered the doorway.

"Cat Lady Marketing has officially closed down," he said. He sounded very intoxicated. "It has achieved its purpose thanks to you, Adam, and we will be forever in your debt. Morrissey is on his way."

I couldn't speak, once again. Morrissey was coming? I ignored Daniel and went into my room. Macy came in after less than a minute. "Adam, do you remember when you got the job after the wreck?"

I started shouting. "What the fuck is going on, Macy? Why are all these people at my mother's?"

"Your Mom was worried about you and eventually found Morrissey who found me," she said. "We have something to tell you. After the wreck, your friends at the restaurant noticed something very worrisome about you. You were seriously mentally handicapped. You were getting better after a couple of days, but they were worried you might get in a dangerous situation and get yourself killed.

"What? I feel exactly the same! I was just weird because of debian."

"Adam, debian is a spaceship piloted by the alien named Arthesces. The medicine was given to the organization I worked for, but was created inside the ship. It has helped a lot of people. But the truth has to be told. That was your job."

"My job was to help Daniel with the Articles," I said. "I worked for Cat Lady Marketing to help the client."

She explained that Mika had rented a building during the time I worked at the restaurant. The firm was a cover. Also, she explained that the client was in fact a part of her organization, and that I was a front man for a very important mission for that organization. Or, if I preferred to think of it that way, I was on a mission for the "client."

"What mission?" I asked.

"You'll find out later. We simply can't tell you everything right now. For now, Morrissey is going to take you to the airport." Stunned, I agreed only on account of the trauma of the discovery that Daniel and Macy and possibly Anne were all lying to me about who they were and what they wanted me to do. Morrissey was in a jacket and told me I'd be alright.

"It's a little unsafe for you right now in the city. There's going to be a big impact on the public, and you might be a target. The flight leaves in three hours. I'm going to take you there

and fly with you to Oregon. If you could do one thing for me, please. Pretend I'm your father once we get to Oregon, and we'll have a much easier time. I don't think anyone will ask too many questions especially if we lie low. I want you to know you're safe with me. I'm trained at this sort of thing. Just think of how important it is that you stay with me. Your friends will be leaving, too, but you're going to Oregon." I thought, my friends?

I tried to think of Anne and wanted to ask if she was lying too. Instead, I followed Morrissey out of house with the obedience of a child.

I pretended Morrissey was my father.

I boarded the plane without saying a word.

I thought, realities are playthings to Macy and her captains.

I felt struck with utter loss.

Finally, the thought occurred to me that Macy was an anarchist, and that she wanted to cause mass panic. But why would she want to do that? Could she be a spy from another country? Or, what was the truth?

I thought maybe I had created something which would hurt a lot of people. Would people take the ad seriously? If they did, then what would happen? Had I really been the person to announce to the world the presence of aliens?

In the carry-on Morrissey gave me, I finally found the mp3 player with the Pens album I liked so much. Before I listened to the album, I noticed one mp3 file which stood out at the end of the list. It was titled, "To Adam." It was a recording of Macy's voice.

"Adam, I just want to say that you have done an amazing job. I'm with Jerry and he agrees. I'm so sorry we all had to lie to you and I know how you must feel. Trust me. Anne really loves you, even though she does know about the plan. She told me you were one of the deepest, most lovable young men on the planet. Your part of the mission is over. You won't have to live like a famous person, or anything, if that's what you're wondering. I'm going to take credit for the commercials. I will tell the world I met you through your Mom's job at the shelter originally. I am actually a government agent.

"Remember what you learned in school about the war on drugs? Remember DARE? Well, that's sort of my job. And one of the most devastating weapons the enemy has is Chem 1. I've struggled with it for years to try to understand it and there's nothing I can tell you right now that can confirm we have any chance in overcoming it, the killer that it is. It's taken many lives and hopefully will take fewer lives now because of what you've done. The drug itself has an occult importance among certain very important people who control the economy, the media, you name it. They are all under the influence of Chem 1, which they secretly take in pill form. The reality is much worse than you think. My agency completed an assignment on the origins of the drug and what we found was very scary, Adam. That's why your job is so important.

"Chem 1 was brought on earth to destroy humanity. It is the spirit of a being known as Arthesces, king of lies. He has lived on earth for as long as humanity had evolved. The only thing in this solar system that Arthesces fears is his ship, that has an artificial intelligence on board which interferes with his tinkering with the human population. As far we know, he is a criminal to his own kind. That's how we won, Adam. That's how you won.

"His ship, called debian, is the key to fighting Arthesces. He himself is invisible but his ship we have found. By scanning the ship we learned how to create the medicine which, I must say, is a very technologically advanced little pill. It's how you survived after the TBI. And that wreck you got into possibly saved the mission from total failure. You see, without telling someone of

Arthesces, it was nearly impossible to show the world what we had learned. The alien's puppets would make us out to be lunatics.

"Of course, there's also the possibility that any person could be killed immediately upon contact with us. That's why we had to break up the first time. But when you injured your brain, we made the decision to move forward with Article 6. We got very lucky. It could have been years before we had another chance like that, and our medication was doing well in the media at that time.

"Article 6 may never have happened if we hadn't done this to you. We're so very sorry but your Mom will be joining you soon." I was sick from crying. "Don't worry; you'll regain your short term memory and cognitive ability by a very large degree someday soon. Just keep persevering, Adam. You taught me that. I love you."

The plane arrived in Oregon in just five hours. Morrissey said, "The flight attendant will take care of your cans. Let's just get to the apartment and go to sleep."

I followed him across the walkway which eventually curved into the terminal, out of the airport and into a car which was parked under the garage. When we got out, I could see the whole sky. We weren't near any city, and after driving a little ways out of the airport parking lot I could see every single star in the entire sky. And I thought maybe debian had followed me. And I wondered if Macy would die from taking Chem 1. Then I thought, what is this medicine that's inside me? Orion itself was my comfort on the drive home.

Epilogue

Hello,

Thank you for the chance to compete! I worked really hard on the novelette and thought this was a great competition. I don't know what I'm going to do with all of the prize money if I win anything, but some will go to the editor of "The Cult."

I have a modest proposal for you all. I've been having a hard time moving out because of health issues, and it's something I want to do very much. I have always wanted to live somewhere that fits my interests and personality better than where I am now. One possibility is to live in the Paseo Arts District in Oklahoma City. However, although I receive a disability check, I don't currently have any contacts there or even any chance of being able to afford renting my own house or apartment there by myself. So here's what I'm asking of this community.

Does anyone have any suggestions for how I can get to the Paseo Arts District? Specifically, I want to stay there for a summer with no computers or television or anything, to absorb the culture of the community and to grow as a person, and also to determine if I'm capable of living on my own. What would help is if anyone lives in Paseo and has suggestions for someone willing to have a paying roommate for the summer.

Thanks for any information regarding this! And thanks to the mods of /r/writingprompts for the competition.

Since living here in the country, I've picked up a few stories to tell. Here's one of them.

Jerry was responsible for my Mom's relocation to rural Oregon. I think they may have had an affair. Jerry wasn't legally married so I can't blame Mom, whose social awareness doesn't go much beyond lists and laws. When Mom came I became afraid she had HIV, and opted to be tested myself.

I passed the test and so did she. We had somehow avoided yet another consequence of our addiction to Chem 1. The psychological dependence was easy to control with debian.

I wanted to go back to Oklahoma City, but new Articles on television had revealed a few things that made it exceptionally difficult to travel. Most humans were clones. There was an uproar across the country. Unbelievably, this had zero effect on my outlook: despite being an archetype myself, I fully believed in the uniqueness of even the clones. The entire population of my town in Oregon had been cold-pressed into Chem 1 dependents; we could only hope the mutations caused by Chem 2 would improve co-morbidity rates.

The organization began research on a kind of cure in which I was especially interested. It was the process of brain imaging. They discovered that one day, through brain imaging, we could understand addiction more completely. I volunteered immediately for tests.

The images came back after two weeks with analysis: schizophrenic, depressed, damage from Chem 1 to frontal lobe, some additional brain trauma, and one very curious patch of activity in the right hemisphere. It seemed that the creative part of my brain was hyperactive because of debian. They said I shouldn't even have any cognitive problems and that my anxiety was simply because I could obviously see the world much, much differently than other people. This revelation was the only encouragement I needed to finish writing the memoir of my transformation into an archetype. Its title was THE CULT.

THE END

Interview with Jordan Jones

What book marketing techniques have been most effective for you?

The most effective technique was personal inquiries for beta readers and editors. I paid one editor I met in IRC and that person gave me the most help. I also paid one beta reader and found a bunch of free beta readers in IRC.

Any success I may have with my current book, "The Cult," is due to attention garnered from the contest which I've entered the story into. That contest was hosted by /r/writingprompts on reddit.com

When did you first start writing?

I started writing when I was 7 or 8. My first story was a Mario fanfic

Where did you grow up, and how did this influence your writing?

I grew up in Oklahoma City and went to a private school for the first years of schooling. I suppose this gave me a unique interest in books and space. I was in Space Club and went to Space Camp at 11 years of age.

What motivated you to become an indie author?

Reddit.com re-jump-started my hobby by providing great info on self-publishing, and a place to share my work

How has Smashwords contributed to your success?

I haven't had much success yet

What is the greatest joy of writing for you?

The duality of a motif, symbol, plot, character, or setting: if something can be both right and wrong, the answers become easier to accept

What do your fans mean to you?

I truly hope I inspire them to create great stories--non-fiction or otherwise

What are you working on next?

I'm working on a television series called Slow Meta. It's about drugs, surveillance, psychic powers and national politics.

Who are your favorite authors?

Check out my author bio/information on smashwords.com for a few influences. One I didn't include in that is Victor Pelevin.

What inspires you to get out of bed each day?

Narcissism.

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