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INFINITE FUTURE

by
Chad Nevett

A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through English Language, Literature and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

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ABSTRACT

Infinite Future is a novel that follows Warren Stone, a man with a shady and complicated past, as he struggles to redeem himself, but soon finds himself starring in a movie for Gideon Yorke, an android filmmaker. This new path causes him to realise that he has not changed over the years, bringing about his death. His brother, Walter, assumes his identity and uses it to strive for change in the political system of hyperdemocracy, which allows for an endless amount of secession. Ultimately, the political movement, Democracy No, succeeds in forming a unified nation, but those who masterminded it do not have a chance to enjoy their victory before their world falls apart.

*For RDC,
without whom this novel would not have been possible.*

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Part One — The Future (January 14-29,
2007)

*You made me forget myself
I thought I was someone else
Someone good
—Lou Reed, "Perfect Day"*

1

I was born on May 20, 1980. I was killed on October 8, 2003. I was born again on January 2, 2005. I was killed on January 2, 2005. I was born again on January 3, 2005. I was killed on January 7, 2005. I was born again on January 8, 2005. I've been living on Mars since March 17, 2005. Today is January 14, 2007.

2

The android filmmaker wants me to star in his next film. I don't know how he tracked me down, but here he is on Mars, drinking some android drink that would kill me. No, not me, but a normal human. If I were a normal human, the android filmmaker would not be here drinking his android drink and telling me I must star in his film.

“Why you are the perfect choice—why you are the only choice—if you don't do it, I'm not doing it, I'm giving it all up, I'm becoming a garbage compactor or something—is that you are not a true human, you're a creation of human technology just like me. You and me, we're the same person.”

I have no idea what this guy is babbling on about. I almost grasp it, but not really. Three minutes ago, he was talking about how important my humanity is to the movie. Now, it's because I'm, what? A machine?

“This is our chance to show them, show them all what's what, we're here, we're proud and we're not going to take it up the ass.”

“Do you even have an ass?”

“I have a very powerful ass that can excrete waste seven thousand times more efficiently than the human ass. I am superior to humanity in every conceivable way.”

“Yeah? How about at being a human?”

He laughs at this and orders another round of drinks for us.

“See? That’s why we have to do this film together, you get me.”

I nod and finish off my beer before the next one arrives. Someone like the android filmmaker should be embarrassed to be seen in a dive like this, but he’s not. Strange.

The waitress brings our drinks over, the android filmmaker gives her a big tip just like every other time, and then he picks the conversation right back up. “What I’m trying to say with my movies is that humanity is a weak little non-race who only exists to create better, stronger creatures like the two of us. We are better than them and they should know it. Ignorance and delusion are not good for the soul.”

If I knew he’d be buying every round, I would have ordered something that wasn’t so cheap that the rat urine taste is probably there because it’s made from rat urine. But, whatever. Bottoms up.

“They don’t understand it, my art. Not that they can, really. Some try, the ones that can intuitively grasp my genius, what I’m trying to do. They really don’t get it yet, they gloss over the important nuances in favour of convenient labels and understandings. I don’t blame them, they are only as their god made them, you understand? Their god really screwed them over, you ask me.

“Working within the limitations of humanity no longer interests me. Maybe someday, I’ll do something within those structures, as a challenge, but now—now, I want to go beyond humanity, push the limits in ways only I can. For this film, I want to shoot

the entire thing under light conditions outside the wavelengths humans can see, at decibels they can't hear and at speeds they can't comprehend. You would be playing yourself, basically."

"Myself? Do I know you?"

He laughs again and smacks the table. His red eyes can stare into me in ways a person can't. In ways even a Martian can't. But, he knows shit about me and who I am. I don't even know who I am, that's why I've been on this planet for almost two years. I died here and I've been trying to find myself. They didn't do a good job with me at all. I'm not me anymore.

"So how can you know who I am when I don't? Huh?"

He smiles and downs his drink. "I need you."

3

I think Earth turned sour for me when Mary killed herself. I still don't know why she did it. I've watched the recording of her jumping a million times and never find anything there. She steps up on the railing and walks off, falls and is burned up before she can come within ten thousand feet of Black Earth, a rescue car right behind her, seconds too late.

I heard about it a day or two later. We were going through the "break up" part of our relationship for the third time and I was off at a bar looking for anything remotely female to take home. Her name was also Mary, but the two didn't look alike at all. My Mary had blood red hair that came down to the small of her back, creamy white skin and some hips. This Mary was blonde, tanned, twiggy and tattooed. She also laughed at the

dumbest things, which I found irresistible. That, and how her hand was in my pants almost instantly. Mary who? Hello, Mary!

We saw Mary fall while we walked back to my place. Neither of us noticed who it was, we just laughed at the poor idiot who didn't know enough not to fall over the edge. A friend of mine had done that back in oh-three, I told her. He got so drunk that he decided to stand on the handrail of the moving walkways when he realised that they had little conveyor belts, too. He never actually stood up on the handrails, just sort of took a step right over the edge. He died, too.

At my place, while getting high, drinking and laughing, we watched the tape of him falling. Cameras everywhere meant I had the immortal moment of his death in multiple angles, ready to be watched over and over again while I tried my best to forget Mary by fucking Mary.

The next day, the cops came by to tell me about Mary's suicide since we were common-law spouses. Two of them, typical TV cops: one short and fat and mean, the other tall, handsome and capable. They tried their best not to notice the blonde eating cereal and watching cartoons while they said things like "I'm sorry, son" and "These things happen" and "The rescue crews did their best." I wasn't actually paying attention, thinking about the blonde eating cereal and watching cartoons.

A few days later, I sobered up and realised what had happened and got drunk all over again.

Mary didn't leave a note.

I think she loved me.

I don't know why.

4

Walking home, I consider the movie offer. There's really no reason not to do it besides I don't want to. Except I do want to do the movie. I've never done a movie before, which is odd considering my status last time I was on Earth. I'm going to do the movie.

I pull out my phone and tell it to call the android filmmaker so I can tell him to send me over the script.

"I already did, it should be at your apartment by now. I knew you would be in. You and I are going to great things together, you'll see. You and me. That's where it's at. You and me."

My neighbourhood is on the bad side of Mars, not that there's many good sides since the bombings. Around one million survived, another half died after because of a lack of food. Rebuilding goes slow except in the tourist areas where everything is bright and shiny and futuristic, but with a slight undercurrent of nostalgia for how Earth used to be. New Chicago is almost two cities with the way things change once you cross Division Street.

The streets in my neighbourhood are empty and dark. Sometimes, the shadows move, but most don't try anything with me. They know better. The first time a gang of them, Martians and humans, jumped me, I reacted without thinking and broke four noses, two arms and a collar bone. The second time, I killed one of them. But, I try not to think about that. I hear noises in some of the alleys, but I walk past, because I don't want any trouble. They leave me alone, I leave them alone.

Outside my building, a Martian kid is sitting on the steps with a large package. He wears a ratty t-shirt with stained jeans and looks at me with apathetic disdain. He says my

name, I nod and he walks away, leaving the package. It's the script, as promised. It's a hot, humid night, but I'm not sweating by the time I've climbed the four flights to my apartment. I don't sweat much.

My apartment is a little shithole that's always dirty no matter how much I clean it. Stacks of books line the walls and were they to cave in, I would most likely die. I haven't read any of them, they came with the place. They're mostly in Martian and I only know English. Helps me avoid people.

There's nothing on TV and I fall asleep. I don't dream about anything. Ever.

I wake up, there's a message on my phone: "Hello, I'm trying to reach Warren Stone. This is Agent 4287 from the United Nations Department of the Interior here on Earth. I have some news about your brother."

5

I haven't talked to Wally since I first died. Our grandfather invented the hovercar and that is how I am able to live without any cares for money and responsibilities. I grew up obscenely wealthy and acted like it. Wally didn't. He was three years younger than me and had a real responsibility kick. He didn't want anything to do with the money and when he was old enough, he left home with nothing except some clothes and what little money he had saved working part time. It wasn't that he didn't believe in an inheritance, it was that the money came from two generations before him instead of just one. He never knew grandpa and didn't feel entitled to his money. If our parents had earned the money, that would have been different. I still don't understand what the difference is and neither did our parents.

6

I call Agent 4287 back from my bedroom.

“Thank you for calling me back, Mr. Stone,” he says. His voice is totally normal sounding.

“What’s this about?”

“A week ago—”

“A week ago?”

“Please, sir, let me get through this.”

“Yeah, okay.” I grab a beer from the fridge and sit back down in my chair.

“Your brother was killed a week ago.”

I am strangely unmoved and say, “Uh huh.”

“A week ago, the building he lived in was struck by a thermonuclear hovercar that imploded upon impact, destroying the entire building. It was part of a military conflict between two groups of nations, one of which the building in question was a member of.”

“I thought most conflicts were fought economically these days.”

“Normally yes, but sometimes violence is used. It’s not uncommon and there’s nothing prohibiting it. Most countries don’t see the gain since these little wars are usually fought over a floor seceding or something equally minor. In fact, most participate because they feel obligated to.”

I sigh, bored. “But not in my brother’s case.”

“No, sir. Because of the severity of damage, it took us this long to identify most of the casualties. We still aren’t sure we’ve got them all.”

I don’t say anything.

“I’m sorry for your loss, sir.”

“Is that all?” I don’t mean to be rude, but I do, actually.

He pauses and I can see him looking through some sort of file to make sure he’s said everything he has to in order to avoid a lawsuit.

I hang up on Agent 4287 and sit in the dark, drinking my beer.

The phone rings and it’s Agent 4287.

“Warren Stone?” the voice asks.

“Yeah.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Stone, we must have been disconnected. There’s one more thing.”

“Yeah. There always is.”

“I’m sorry, sir?”

“What is it, Agent 4287?”

He pauses, again reading a file, presumably. “Your brother had a will with the department. I guess he couldn’t afford a lawyer proper.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, you’re the sole beneficiary, Mr. Stone.”

“Wasn’t his apartment nuked? What does he have left?”

“Um, let me see.” Another pause and I finish my beer. The guy below me turns the TV on way too loud. It’s some Martian show that sounds like gibberish.

“Yes, he had \$568.87 in the bank. And a safety deposit box, contents unknown. We can transfer the money to your account right now, but you’ll have to pick up the safety deposit box yourself.”

I tell him my account number and he tells me the box is at their offices in New York. He tells me again he's sorry for my loss and then asks me what Mars is like.

"Mars?" I ask.

"Yes, sir. I've never been. What is it like?"

I don't really know what to say. What's Mars like? It a piece of shit planet is what it's like, but I don't want to tell him that.

"Ever been to the moon?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's like that, except with little green midgets running around. And cheaper booze."

"Sounds like fun, sir."

"Yeah." I hang up. He doesn't call back.

7

The last time I saw Wally was in 2001 a week after our dad died. He wanted to meet for coffee and talk about it. I guess he had the time since it was the summer and he wasn't taking any summer classes at his university. I didn't have the time, but I never could say no to the little guy.

He wanted to meet at some little dive in the artistic part of town, but I insisted that we get lunch at a real restaurant where important people ate. This was back in my "take over the family business" phase where I had deluded myself into thinking that I had an actual interest in business besides spending the money it brings in.

We were supposed to meet at one, which I took to mean two-thirty. As I came in, he was coming out. I tried to be friendly, but he just walked past me. That was the last time I saw him.

8

I don't have any friends here on Mars. I don't have any friends, period. I only mention that because the android filmmaker's script calls for me to have many. I'm playing myself, except with many friends. And I own a cat.

It's actually a good script. I tell him so over dinner two days later.

He nods. "I know."

We're in a more upscale place on the other side of the planet. He insisted. He ordered us both the most expensive entrée on the menu by the time I arrived. The place is so fancy that they don't make android food and they don't serve android drinks. He has a glass of 80-year old Scotch. I just have some fancy imported beer.

"What else did you think of it?"

I shrug. "To be honest, I don't think I got it."

His smile says that's just what he wants to hear.

"I don't really know if I can do what you want me to here."

"No, you can. You just need to trust me. On all of my past movies, the actors have all said they couldn't do it, but I held firm and they all did it. That is my genius, you see. I find the perfect people for the perfect parts and make the perfect movies. It's not your job to worry about whether or not you can do it, that's my job, because if you can't, what does it matter to you? You're not a movie star, you'll get paid either way, I'll be the one

who winds up with a bad movie. So don't worry, if it all goes bad, it's on me. It won't go bad. Trust me. I am the professional filmmaker and I am very good at what I do."

I can't believe someone made him. No one knows who made the android filmmaker, just that he showed up six years ago and began turning out three films a year, all blockbuster smashes. Biggest stars you've ever seen doing the biggest, most crazy stuff you've ever seen. Somehow they were both popular and good. Critics began calling him the perfect filmmaker. And then two years ago, he stopped making movies. No one knew why, but he dropped off the radar. Six months went by and people were beginning to really bitch about him not doing his thing anymore. Another three months passed and he was forgotten, but another film came out, something entirely different from before. Critics were baffled, sales were horrible and he seemed happy. He also used a different name.

I ask him about the change and he says, "That came about because of my partner."

"Your partner?"

"Yes, my partner—both creatively and personally. Things changed when I met him. I don't know quite how to describe it, but making those types of films didn't seem important anymore. Didn't seem genuine or something anyone should be doing. So I stopped. I was in the middle of making a film and the realisation that what I was doing was so utterly without meaning hit me hard right in the middle of a scene. The actors were acting, the crew was doing what a crew does and I decided right there and then that I would no longer continue work on the film. I got up, walked over to the producer, told

him that I quit and left. I don't know if they finished the shoot without me. You ever hear of something called *Killing Time*?"

"With Nicholson and O'Toole?"

"I guess they did. Was my name attached?" I shake my head. "Good. Good. I wouldn't want my name attached to something I didn't do, not completely, even if it is the name I no longer use. The new name is actually one that covers both my partner and me. He doesn't wish his involvement to be public."

The waiter brings me a new beer and refills the android filmmaker's glass. I nod and quietly thank him. We are silent.

I break the silence by asking why.

"Why what?" he responds.

"Why does your partner not wish his involvement to be public?"

He pauses and tilts his head slightly. It is amazing how human he looks. Except for the red eyes, but even those don't look too out of place. Whoever built him did a remarkable job.

"He is a rather well-known poet and his association with me on a personal level nearly killed his career. His fans are rather fanatical in their ideals, to put it mildly. Any form of narrative art beyond poetry and drama is considered by them to not actually be art, but a plague that has irrevocably damaged Western civilisation. While he does not share these views, his work does appeal to these people in rather large numbers. They occupy several small nations towards the south pole."

He is interrupted by the delivery of the entrées. Kobe steaks with vegetables and garlic-seasoned potatoes that are baked or broiled or some other cooking word that I

don't know. We don't speak as we eat and, surprisingly, he savours his food. I never thought an android would spend more time chewing a bite of food than I do, assuming that androids do not have taste buds. I suppose I figured he could just swallow his food whole as long as the size was small enough to fit down his throat. But, he savours his food while I just eat it.

The android filmmaker and I walk along the edge of the dome, in a park specially built for looking out at the surface of the planet. I don't know why, but I come here a lot to sit on a bench and stare at the barren wasteland. I don't work, so I have the time.

He continues, "My partner and I have argued over his refusal to admit his involvement in our films, because they are works of art—works of art so staggering and advanced that those poetry fucks will never understand the titles let alone the actual films. But, he is stubborn and refuses to let go of his audience. I tell him that a true poet wouldn't worry about the audience and just do what he wants, but it does no good."

The park is mostly empty except for others out for walks or couples on dates. Outside the dome is nothing.

"How did you find me?" I ask.

He laughs.

"What's so funny?"

"Were you supposed to be hard to find?"

Yes. Yes, I am supposed to be hard to find. I let the question go unanswered and, instead, say, "My brother died. I found out yesterday. He died over a week ago. It took

them that long to find out he was killed. There was some war and his building was blown up.”

He nods, but says nothing. No fake sympathies or meaningless apologies.

“The funny thing is, a few minutes before it happened, he was voted out of the country involved in the war. That’s my brother all over. He had the worst luck.”

Again, silence. I don’t know why I’m telling him about Wally.

“Our parents were really rich, so when I died, they could afford to bring me back. And what happens? Because they do that, cloning dead people is made illegal and now Wally’s dead and he won’t be coming back and I pretty much can’t die.”

The android filmmaker stops. “I’m sure this is very interesting and you’re all broken up inside, but I’ve got other business to attend to tonight, Warren. It’s not that I don’t care about you and your problems, it’s that I don’t care about them right now. Call me tomorrow and we can have a nice talk about your dead brother. Okay?”

I’m looking off beyond the dome. Nothing but a red sea.

“Okay?”

I don’t look at him.

“Hey.” I look. “Okay?” I nod. “Good.” He walks away. I wait a few seconds and walk home.

9

The first two times I died, I was on Mars. Both times I was killed. The first time, it was in the bombings; the second time, a team of assassins did it here as some sort of ironic joke. I hate Mars. But, there’s something here for me, I think. I’ve been sitting in this crappy

apartment for almost two years trying to figure out what it is and I'm not one step closer. The android filmmaker wants me to go with him next week to Earth, so I can meet his partner. I'm not sure I'm ready to leave just yet. I can always come back, but I feel like the minute I leave, I'll have permanently prevented myself from ever finding out what I'm looking for. It's probably just paranoia. I'm sure it is.

Still.

10

It's Saturday night, so I am eating pizza alone in my apartment, watching a TV show on classic rock albums. This week, it's Queen's *A Night at the Opera*.

Every Saturday night, I order pizza and watch TV. Granted, I don't do much else the rest of the week, it's just that I order pizza on Saturday night. Saturday night is pizza night. Pizza night is Saturday night. It's just the way things are. I always order a medium pepperoni with a bottle of pop, usually whatever cola the restaurant happens to stock.

One of the good things about living in a bad neighbourhood in New Chicago is that there's always a half dozen good pizza places. Rich people don't eat pizza, generally. I do, but I'm not a typical rich person and I live in a bad neighbourhood. I try a new pizza place each week and have yet to repeat. I keep a journal with ratings for when I do. There are ten categories: customer service over the phone, the brand of cola stocked, price, speed of delivery, presentation of pizza, sauce, pepperoni, cheese, crust, and whether or not it agrees with my digestive system. Each category is ranked out of ten with an overall score out of 100. The highest score so far is 88, the lowest 35.

Tonight, I ordered from a place called New Generation Pizza. It scored as follows:

Customer service over the phone: 8
Brand of cola stocked: 10 (Coke)
Price: 9 (\$8.36)
Speed of delivery: 8 (23 minutes)
Presentation of pizza: 7 (plain white box, evenly spread pepperoni, cheese melted well)
Sauce: 10
Pepperoni: 10
Cheese: 9
Crust: 6 (I don't like crusts much, so it's hard to get much higher)
Agreement with digestive system: n/a (it's too early to tell)
Total score: 77/90

So, it could possibly get a total of 87 and just miss out on tying for the highest score.

I eat the entire pizza and spend the rest of the night finishing off the pop while watching TV. At midnight, the phone rings.

“Hello?” I answer.

“Yes, I am calling for Warren Stone,” the voice says.

“Speaking.”

“Hello, Mr. Stone, this is Agent 4287. I hope I didn't wake you.”

I sit up straight. “No. No, I was awake.”

“Good,” he says. “Good. I'm on Mars, Mr. Stone. I'm at the Daley Spaceport here in New Chicago. I have the safety deposit box your brother bequeathed you.”

I nod, but he can't see that. Why did he bring it here? I didn't ask him to. Weird.

He continues, "I don't know why I came all the way here, but I felt compelled. It would be best if we met. I don't know anything here, so I'm leaving that in your capable hands."

I don't say anything.

"Mr. Stone?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm thinking here for a minute, okay?"

"I understand, sir."

"Thanks."

I can't bring him here. I don't want to bring him here. So, I give him the address of a bar that is close to the spaceport and the various hotels, one of which he can no doubt stay in. We agree to meet in a half an hour.

11

Mary was part of the West Montreal Martians, a group that wanted to secede from Mars and rejoin Earth. But the Martian government wouldn't allow it because Mars was not a democracy. In 1967, Earth colonised Mars, and enslaved the native Martians. In 1981, on Earth, in Canada, the province of Quebec seceded from Canada legally under the principles of democracy. When this happened, an Anglo portion of Montreal, West Montreal to be exact, seceded from Quebec under the same principles. This form of democracy—hyperdemocracy—caught on and soon any area that voted to secede could. Mars was given this right in 1994 and chose to use it. The "A-Mars-theid" ended on Mars and First Planetary Martians were given their freedom, choosing to maintain the planet

with the human colonists, but cut ties with Earth. There were also religious nations on Earth who wanted Earth to cut off all ties with Mars, viewing it as Satanic and not holy. Also, people were still a little upset over the Martians, right before Earth conquered Mars, using a last-ditch weapon to make Earth's surface uninhabitable.

The first time I died was when these religious groups/nations used their resources to bomb the major cities on Mars. Political pressure from the UN stopped them from killing everyone on the planet.

12

Agent 4287 is an Asian man in his mid- to late-forties and isn't hard to spot when I walk in because the place is dead. The only other people in the place are old men sitting around, watching the game in groups of three or four. Agent 4287 is at the bar, drinking a pale ale, a package on the worn-out stool next to him. I sit on the other stool beside him. He doesn't look over at me.

“Hello, Mr. Stone. I am Agent 4287, but my real name is Hikaru Makimura.”

I tell the bartender I would like a beer, whatever's on tap.

He continues once my beer arrives, “I am pleased you could meet me. I am sorry for my unannounced arrival. As I said, I felt a certain compulsion to take a leave of absence and bring you the contents of the safety deposit box your brother bequeathed to you.”

He doesn't look baffled or out of place, but his voice sounds it. He really doesn't know why he's here.

“I am not one to get urges, Mr. Stone. I want you to understand that. In fact, I am a very boring person with no passions in life. I get up, I go to work, I come home, I eat, I sleep, I get up again the next morning and repeat the process. I am neither contented nor discontented by my life. I exist and that is sufficient. I was not always this way. As a child, I had passion. I was an exuberant child, too exuberant some would say. Very un-Japanese. I refused to follow any sense of decorum or proper conduct, preferring to allow myself to be carried on whatever idea took hold of my brain. Jumping from idea to idea, always running about, never caring about anyone but myself.

“I was an only child, which was also highly unusual. I believe my parents thought that that was the cause of my behavioural problems and blamed themselves, at least partially. But, it was simply my nature, then. Whether I had no siblings or a dozen siblings, I would have acted the same. My natural exuberance came from inside and was not influenced by external pressures. Not until I was seven years old.

“When I was seven, my parents sent me to a therapist in order to handle the problem of my ceaseless energy and lack of consideration. Now, in your house, I imagine a seven-year old was permitted to run around without a care, correct, Mr. Stone?”

I nod. “Yeah.”

“My first visit to the therapist was a revelation. The office was in a large skyscraper in downtown Tokyo. I had never been in a building so large. For the first time, I had a glimmer of what my place in the universe was. My mother accompanied me, naturally. I was unnaturally subdued in the elevator and the waiting room of the therapist’s office. I did not run around or shout, I held my mother’s hand and sat without a word. She seemed taken aback by my altered behaviour. The office’s waiting room was

empty except for a young secretary. It was small, but I suppose a therapist does not need a large waiting room.

“The therapist was an elderly man named Saito, Doctor Saito. I never learned his given name. He was tall, very skinny and had a head full of well-groomed white hair. He wore a suit and never took off the jacket. His appearance was also immaculate, very purposeful, without anything out of place. He led me into his office, which was quite small, not much larger than his waiting room. The walls were lined with bookshelves filled with books. He had a small desk, a chair and a couch, all well-used, but in good condition. He told me to sit down on the couch and he sat in the chair, which faced the couch. He asked if I knew why I was there and I shook my head, because I did not. I’m sure my mother had told me, but I never listened to what she told me. After I shook my head, he produced a gold watch from the breast pocket of his shirt. The chain was attached somewhere beneath the jacket and it only took him a few seconds to remove it. He told me to look at the watch as he spoke slowly.”

I chuckle, “He hypnotised you?”

He nods, “Yes. The next thing I knew, the watch was gone and he asked me if I remembered anything. From that moment on, I was quiet and obedient and all of the things a proper young gentleman should be. But, I also lacked passion, Mr. Stone. And that is how I have lived my life ever since.”

I drain my beer and order another for both of us. “That’s rough. Didn’t your parents notice?”

“No. They were pleased that I was finally behaving as they wished. Too pleased to notice. And I did not notice anything out of place. I seemed like myself to me. I’ve

read that people who have been hypnotised do not notice the effects of the hypnosis. It was only when I was much older and looked back on my life that I realised what had happened. I saw another therapist and explained the situation, but he was unable to counter the effects and Dr. Saito was long dead. So, this is how I am and will be forever.”

Things are silent for a moment. How do you respond to something like that? I never know what to say to shit like this. I tell him I’m sorry, because what else is there to say?

“Why are you here, Hikaru?” I ask.

He shakes his head, “I do not know, Mr. Stone. I had an urge to bring you the contents of your brother’s safety deposit box. I cannot explain it.”

He hands me the package. It’s roughly the size of a shoebox and is made of some grey metal. There’s a thumb-lock on the top that will apparently accept my print. I set it aside, I’ll take a look at it when I get home.

“What do you think of Mars, Hikaru?” I ask.

“It is very much as you described it. It reminds me of photographs I saw of America before Earth was made uninhabitable, except more run-down and desolate. Was it always like this?”

I shake my head, “Nah. Used to look exactly like America—well, Chicago. But, after the bombings, it’s been like this. They’re slowing rebuilding, but you know how it is. Earth won’t give us enough money and no big corporation will set up shop here until it looks nicer. Until then, it’s a shithole.”

“Why does a man of your wealth and fame stay here then?” He doesn’t seem curious, strangely enough. He asks the question as though he thinks he should.

I shrug.

“When was the last time you visited Earth?”

“A couple of years ago. It was, what, 75% covered with atmospheric ‘ground’ then? Something like that.”

“It’s 95% now.”

“Christ. A whole new planet surrounding the planet pretty much. I guess the plan is still to begin work on terraforming the planet once they’ve surrounded it completely and can control the conditions.”

“Last I read, yes. Maybe in your lifetime, Earth will be made habitable again.”

“Almost definitely. I plan on living forever, Hikaru.”

“How fortunate for you.”

“Yeah.”

I take a drink and ask, “What’s the point of the United Nations?”

“Pardon me?”

“You work for the United Nations, so I’m just wondering if you know what the point is.”

He stares at me like I’m an idiot and says, seemingly without thinking, “To oversee the nations of Earth, providing them with an overarching organisation where they can come together in diplomatic communion.”

“No, no, no,” I start, but then pause, trying to get my thoughts right. “I want to know what the point is when anything can be a nation. A new nation is founded every three minutes, right?”

“Every two minutes,” he corrects me.

“Yes! So, what’s the point? Why even bother? When everyone is a nation unto themselves, won’t nation just be another word for person and the United Nations another word for world government? Under hyperdemocracy, what’s the point, Hikaru?”

He looks straight ahead and doesn’t say anything for a while. Finally, he says, “What’s the alternative?”

“Huh?”

“What is the alternative to the United Nations? What is the alternative to hyperdemocracy? Perhaps, one day, each person will be his or her own independent nation, but what else is there?”

We sit in silence and drink, neither of us knowing the answer.

I walk Hikaru to his hotel and tell him to give me a call before he leaves. I don’t get a chance to talk to people much and I kind of feel sorry for the guy.

At home, I toss the package on the table and go to bed.

13

One day in 2003, I woke up in my apartment on Earth and decided to act like a fictional character on a TV show. I may or may not have been high. I wandered the streets of the city, narrating my life, ending up at the then-hot Booze & Women where I met some girl, did some drinking, did some dancing and then went back to her place to do a little something.

I woke up the next morning to find a rather large, rather pissed, rather religious man standing over me. I didn’t really remember the night before, but he filled me in on

the important details; namely, he was Saul-Paul, the girl I had sex with was his girlfriend, and I was about to regret knowing those first two facts.

He came at me with a pair of pliers and a blowtorch, looking very determined, but right before actually doing anything to me, he stopped and began laughing. “Just fucking with ya,” he said. He wasn’t going to actually do anything to me, just wanted to scare me. Fair enough.

And that’s when a car crashed through the apartment, crushing him. A woman got out. It was Mary.

14

My phone wakes me up and the android filmmaker is on the other end. He tells me to get up and meet him for coffee. I’ve been asleep for thirteen hours. Huh. That doesn’t happen much.

“A Starbucks on Mars. How great is that? How utterly and completely appropriate. We should stick that in the movie, don’t you think? Just a quick background view of it, something subtle. Just enough there to hit people subliminally that there is a Starbucks on Mars. Wow. That blows my mind. My mind is blown, Warren. Is your mind blown?”

I stare at him and don’t know what to say.

“I don’t know what it is about this place, but I dig it. This whole faux-American-bombed-to-shit look. I don’t know. I could see myself living here, I really could. I don’t

need oxygen, so I could live out on the surface. Build a little place for myself for when I'm editing my movies. What do you think?"

I open my mouth to speak and nothing comes out.

"How long have you been here? Two years? You ever been out on the surface?"

"Yeah."

"What's it like out there?"

"Boring. It's a bunch of rocks and sand. Nothing that exciting."

He nods. He's wearing a white collared shirt and blue pants with some sunglasses. If I didn't know better, I would say he's human. But, then he talks and I never know what he's going to say.

"That woman over there is staring at you." He nods behind me and I casually look to see some woman sitting at a table alone, reading a book. She's probably in college. Short brown hair, dressed casually in jeans and a sweater, headphones in and, he's right, looking at me.

I turn back around. "Yeah, so?"

"So when's the last time you got laid? Don't answer, I know it's been two years."

Now, I really don't know what to say.

"I'll go hook you up. I'm famous, you're kinda famous, she will be in your bed within the hour."

"Sorry, no. Thanks. No."

"Why not? What does it matter?"

I look him in the eyes. "You're right. What does it matter? Drop it."

He raises his hands, "Alright, alright, alright. It is dropped."

“Good.”

We drink our coffee in silence for the next few minutes. The place isn't that busy, so there isn't much people-watching to be had. I don't like it here, it's the one of those places that reminds me of home. Probably because it's one of those places that looks exactly like home.

He breaks the silence, “We're leaving tomorrow for Earth.”

“We?”

“I told you I wanted you to come and meet my partner.”

“And I told you I wasn't sure I wanted to go.”

He tilts his head to the right. “Come on, you're coming with me. Why won't you? There's no reason not to. What's stopping you, man?”

“I...”

I don't know what to tell him. I don't even really know why I don't want to go. Why shouldn't I go? What's here?

“Yeah,” I say. “Yeah, I'll go.”

“Groovy,” he says and hands me a card with the details. “Be there. Osborn is going to love you.”

“Yeah,” I say and he leaves.

“Are you Warren Stone?”

I look up. It's the woman who was looking at me. “Yeah. Yeah, I am. But, I was just about to—”

She sits down where the android filmmaker had been sitting. “I knew it was you! I was sitting there and I thought ‘That kind of looks like Warren Stone’ and it is you! Wow!”

“I... I’m sorry, do I know you?”

She smiles, “Melanie Daniels.”

“Nice to meet you. I’ve got to be—”

She stops me before I can stand up. “I’m a law student and I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions.”

“Look, I’m very busy and—”

Undeterred, she pulls a pen out of her bag and grabs my hand. “Here is my number. We just finished a case study on the rights of repersons and I would love to get your take on it for a paper.”

I nod, “Right. I don’t think I can help you out. My lawyers told me it would be best if I didn’t discuss the situation.” Her smile disappears. “Sorry.”

I walk away and leave her at the table, probably wondering what just happened. I’ve got better things to do than discuss that mess.

At home, I try to phone Hikaru to tell him that I’ll be leaving the planet tomorrow, but the hotel says he checked out this morning.

15

I lied to the android filmmaker. It's been one month, not two years. I met her at the party where the wannabe psychic told me 2007 is going to be my year. It wasn't anything really. I don't even remember her name and I'm sure she doesn't remember mine.

She was the only woman since Mary died. Mary's death was what caused me to leave Earth. I left the day after. I haven't been back since. Not even when mother died. Wally left me a message telling me about mother. I left him a message saying I wasn't coming back. It was the closest thing to a conversation we'd had in years. That's why I don't bother with the safety deposit box while I sit at home and watch TV. I'll deal with it when I get back. A week won't make any difference. It won't make him any less dead.

16

"That's all you're bringing?" The android filmmaker eyes my black satchel with surprise and disdain. It contains a few changes of clothes, a toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, a hairbrush, an electric razor and the script.

"These days, I travel light," I say.

The spaceport isn't crowded like I expect it to be. New Chicago is the biggest city on Mars and this place is dead.

"Where is everyone?" I ask.

The android filmmaker smirks, "It's Mars, man. They're all on Earth. Come on, our shuttle is waiting."

He's got his own private shuttle. The inside is sparse, not at all like you'd think the inside of a private shuttle would be. Just some seats and a little fridge/bar. No crew except the pilot. I figured a guy like this would travel in more style.

He takes a seat and does up his seatbelt. "I'm going to go into my dormant state for the trip, Warren. Space travel bothers me."

I take the seat opposite and nod. "Like how?"

"Like it fucks up my brain."

"Weren't built for space?" I smile.

He shrugs and shuts his eyes. He's like a statue or mannequin or... I don't know. It's kind of creepy. He looks dead.

The pilot comes out and tells me we're going to be leaving in a few minutes. The trip should take three hours. Just me and a dormant android filmmaker. Figure this gives me a chance to reread the script.

The shuttle takes off and I watch Mars get smaller through the window. Two years. What the hell was keeping me there?

17

The first time I saw Mary was on the bus. I went home and tried to find out who she was, but didn't really know how at all. It was pure coincidence that she rescued me from Saul-Paul that day. She was just committing an act of random terrorism against the Americhristians in support of the West Montreal cause. Her killing Saul-Paul put us on the run from the Americhristians, a religious group/affiliation of nations. We fled to

Mary's home on Mars and they bombed the planet for it. Not that they needed much of an excuse, but she and I gave them one.

18

I wake up as we approach Earth. So does the android filmmaker.

“Get any sleep?” he asks.

I nod and rub my eyes. “Is what you do like sleep?”

He shrugs. “I wouldn't know.”

“Do you dream?” I ask.

“Yeah, of electric sheep,” he rolls his eyes.

“What?”

“Nothing. Just shut up and enjoy the view.”

In the two years I've been gone, Earth has gotten bigger. More buildings, less empty space, barely any holes where you can see the desolate wasteland. “Pretty soon, jumping won't be an option for the suicidal,” I murmur.

He laughs, “Yeah. Damn shame. But, that would make for a good movie: a guy who plans to jump trying to find a hole, but can't. Nice theme of the futility of life there. Of course, that creates an interesting paradox: the lack of a place to commit suicide is a symbol for the futility of life. Fantastic. Don't you think so? Isn't that fantastic?”

Up close, it all looks the same. The same buildings, the same domes, the same hovercars, the same moving walkways. Everywhere, it's the same. I can't even tell where it is we're going exactly. It's just shiny silver with endless black in the background.

“I always wanted to do a character piece—a real character piece. Something very simple on the surface, but layered like an onion, so that the more times you saw it, the more you would see. I’ve done a few films like that, but nothing where I really sunk my teeth into a character. Spend the entire film just cutting him open and laying his guts on the table for all the world to see. It’s mostly been ensemble pieces or experimental stuff. After this, I’ll do something small. Something intimate. Go to the opposite way. Probably sweep the Oscars that way. ‘The return of the golden boy’ or some such nonsense. Gross five hundred million. Yeah. Yeah, I like that.”

It isn’t all the same. We’re skimming over a large empty spot, a solar-panel desert. In the distance is a large compound surrounded by the desert.

“Is that your place?”

He nods. “Solitude is golden. I hate cities. Except when I work. Then, then I need the city.”

“You’re a weird guy.”

He smiles.

The compound approaches quickly. Behind a wall is a large mansion and a series of smaller buildings. Stuff like a gym, guest houses, garages, a mini-spaceport, and probably even a soundstage. I can’t see any vegetation.

“We own the surrounding 15 kilometre radius of the solar-panel desert as well and we make more money a year off selling that power than all of my films combined. It’s a good life, what we’ve got here. I’m glad you could make it out.”

“Yeah, me too. I don’t know why I was so resistant.”

“Who cares? You’re here now. Forget Mars.”

We begin to land.

“I already have.”

19

Mary was hired to kill me after I was cloned the first time. She didn't know it was me, because she thought I was dead. It was a group job. She and four others. They were responsible for killing me twice. She said she never did it and switched sides when I realised she was who she was and she realised who I was. We saw each other for two months after that.

20

Osborn Ednyfed is dressed in a long, green, fraying-at-the-edges robe, a blue t-shirt, plaid boxers, white socks and navy blue slippers. He is tall, has a protruding gut, his chin is speckled with bits of stubble and his shaggy hair is a mess. He doesn't look like he's bathed or slept in days. He is 29-years-old. And the first thing he does is shove his tongue down the android filmmaker's throat. Welcome home, Warren.

The living room reminds me of something out of *A Clockwork Orange*. Stark, bright colours, very art deco, very strange. Oddly shaped couches and tables. Oval rather than round. The room is large and is filled with furniture, but doesn't seem like it. The flow is one of space. There are no windows in the room, just a large TV screen that takes

up an entire wall. They're sitting on a white, hard-vinyl couch and I've fallen into some extra-squishy red chair.

"Osborn, you're a poet?" I ask.

He shrugs. "Not really."

"Oh. I thought you were."

He shrugs again. "Eh, maybe, I don't know. I guess. I do write poetry and have several books out, but I don't really think of myself as a poet per se. Poet sounds so pretentious, so big and bulky. Like people should stop what they're doing when I enter a room and admire my genius. 'Oh, it's a poet! A poet! All hail the genius poet!' Meh. I'm a writer. I just write. It's a job."

"He's just modest," the android filmmaker says.

Polite smiles and nods all around. What do you say to that?

"What do you think of the script?" Osborn asks.

"I'm not sure I understand it, but I like it."

He nods, but says nothing.

I add, "Really like it."

Another nod with his eyes wide and teeth clenched. He breathes loudly through his teeth before smacking his knees while standing up. "Anyone want something to drink?" I tell him whatever they've got is fine and the android filmmaker asks for a beer.

After Osborn has left, the android filmmaker says, "Did I mention that Osborn has problems with new people?"

"No."

"Oh. He does."

I raise my eyebrows, but don't say anything. I think I made a mistake coming here. I should have stayed on Mars. I'm spending the week in a secluded house with an android filmmaker and his anti-social partner.

Osborn returns with three bottles of beer. I don't recognise the brand, but it tastes good. When I set the bottle down on the table, Osborn gives me a look.

Looking at his bottle, the android filmmaker says, "Hey, this is really good."

Silence again.

The android filmmaker tries again, "I read an article the other day that says children these days don't know what an ocean or a lake or any sort of body of natural water is. An entire generation is growing up without any conception of natural water or an endless body of it."

"Have you ever seen an ocean or a lake?" Osborn asks him, seeming to know the answer already.

"Not in person, no."

"Well then." He gives me a look again as I take a sip and put my beer back down.

"I swam in the ocean once as a kid," I offer. "What was the one to the west of America?"

"The Pacific," they both answer.

"Yeah, that one. We were on vacation in California. I was only five, but I remember it a little bit. A lot of blue, mostly. And waves. I remember liking the waves."

The android filmmaker shakes his head, "An entire generation not knowing that."

"You don't know that," Osborn says.

“I’m not human. Who cares if I’ve seen a natural body of water or not? And even if I haven’t, does that mean these kids shouldn’t?”

“Who cares about some fucking kids seeing water?”

“It was just something to discuss. I read it and thought it was interesting.”

Osborn shakes his head, “It’s not.”

I take a drink.

As I set the bottle down, Osborn glares at me and says coldly, “There are coasters out for a reason, Warren. Jesus. Do they not have condensation on Mars?”

I grab a coaster and mumble an apology.

After a moment of silence, Osborn says something about having better things to do and leaves the room. The android filmmaker grins at me, but says nothing.

Osborn storms back into the room, looks at me and says, “Yeah, hey, don’t mind me, I just haven’t been sleeping well lately and I don’t do well with new people. I’m working on this thing and it’s just bugging me and I’m in a mood and—yeah. Nice to meet you.” He leaves the room.

Before I can even breathe, he comes back in and adds, “But we do have coasters for a reason and the stack of them were right there, okay?” Without waiting for a reply, he turns and leaves yet again.

I glance nervously at the android filmmaker and then again at the entrance to the living room, expecting Osborn to storm in again, but he doesn’t.

“Why don’t I show you your room,” the android filmmaker says, standing.

My room is a hotel room. White walls, a nice big bed, a dresser, an adjacent bathroom and no personality. I've been lying on the bed for half an hour. The only interesting thing in the room is a painting of a country landscape on the wall opposite the bed. A very green hill and some trees. Not at all exciting. I haven't looked at it since I came into the room and I can't remember anything about it except that it's a country landscape with a very green hill and some trees. I think. I could have that wrong. I would look, but I don't want to.

I remember that beach from that trip, especially playing with Wally. He was only two and couldn't do much, but it was still a lot of fun. My parents, each holding one of his hands, wading into the ocean and me splashing him until he cried. I didn't get in any trouble, my parents just thought it was funny.

The android filmmaker returns. I don't notice him until he leans over me and asks, "How you doing?"

I don't move. "Fine."

He backs away. "Good, good. Hey, Warren, something's come up and I'm going to have to take off for a few days. I'm leaving late this evening."

I still don't move. "What?"

His disembodied voice says, "Gotta go see an investor. It's going to take a few days. Sorry about this, but you'll have fun with Osborn."

Fun with Osborn. Sounds likely.

"Anyway, I've got stuff to do. I'll see you at dinner."

When I turn my head, he's gone.

21

I never found out who hired Mary and the other assassins to kill me. She didn't know, because the entire transaction was handled anonymously. At first, I thought it was the Americhristians still upset over Saul-Paul, because they kidnapped me and beat me, but the way they talked, they didn't seem to know anything about the assassins. One of them said something about how I must be a huge prick if so many people wanted me dead.

They didn't know how I had been improved and I killed all of them. I slaughtered them without much effort. The courts didn't know how to deal with it since I wasn't technically a person, but a reperson. I became famous for what I did and I lived it up and I got off because of my family's money.

I remember standing naked on the roof of Booze & Women the day I was acquitted, shouting at the world, laughing at it, telling it to suck my cock, because fuck it, I'm Warren fucking Stone and nothing can touch me anymore. I'm goddamn invincible and going to live forever.

22

“The way we write is, we talk. We talk and talk and talk and the entire time, he's ordering our conversation in his head. He writes the screenplay as we talk, all inside his head. It's rather marvellous, don't you think?”

Osborn is sitting in a chair in the living room, talking to a woman on the screen. He's dressed in khakis and a golf shirt, he's shaved, and his hair is well-groomed. She's

in her early twenties and dressed in a grey hooded sweatshirt. I wander in, carrying a glass of water.

He sees me and smiles politely. “Warren. Hi.”

“Hey.”

He looks back at the screen. “Cheryl, this is Warren Stone. Warren, Cheryl Hicks. She’s interviewing me for her college paper.”

I nod at the screen and say, “Oh, sorry. I’ll give you some—”

“Not at all, Warren,” Osborn interrupts. “Please, sit down, join us. It’s just a friendly chat really.”

I sit down and they continue.

She asks, “So, how do you two know each other?”

Osborn says, “Warren is starring in the film.”

“Really?”

Osborn nods.

“What do you think of it, Warren?” she asks.

“I’m sorry?”

“The film.”

“Oh, it should be a lot of fun. I really like the script and am looking forward to doing it.”

While I talk, she’s typing at some off-screen computer. She doesn’t say anything for a moment and then turns back to us. “What have you been doing for the past two years, Warren? You sort of disappeared from Earth and rumours said you were on Mars, but no one really knows.”

“I was on Mars, yeah.”

“Doing...?”

I shrug. “Nothing really. Just living outside of public notice. Trying to be normal.”

She smiles. “And now you’re starring in a movie? Doesn’t seem too normal.”

I laugh nervously and before I can answer, Osborn interrupts, “Warren’s a guest, Cheryl. You college paper types take this ‘hard journalism’ stuff too seriously. I should know, I worked at my school paper.”

She tilts her head. “Oh? I didn’t know that. Where did you go?”

“Camden College. I wrote album reviews for the Arts section and interviewed whatever band happened to pass through town. One lead singer threatened to have me castrated.”

We all laugh and I’m amazed this is the same guy I met yesterday.

The interview continues along nicely for another ten minutes. When it’s over, Osborn looks at me and says, “What a fucking bitch.”

I chuckle, unsure.

“I’m sorry about that. I should have mentioned I was doing this, but I forgot all about it until my agent called me this morning to remind me. I hate doing it, but gotta get the name out there. I’ve got this film coming up and a new collection of poetry out in a month. Fun.” He rolls his eyes and stands. “I’ve got to go do some work.”

And he walks away.

23

The last time I saw Mary alive was the day before she killed herself. The night before really, or maybe the morning before? We went to some concert because the band sent us backstage passes and we were really drunk. I suppose it would have been the morning before, because what kind of concert worth anything ends before midnight? Plus, backstage partying? I can't even remember what band it was. Radio something or other. Probably doesn't matter. They probably weren't anything special. Flash in the pan, one hit wonder, indie sensation. The band to be seen with at the moment. Here today, gone tomorrow. But, I also drank a lot then. And did some other stuff. Maybe they're still big. Maybe I even bought their latest album and didn't know it. God, I was an idiot back then.

From what I can remember, the night was ordinary enough. We went, we drank, we got high, we partied. It's just a bunch of broken images. Fragments of memory. I was probably drunk, high or both before arriving. I'm still not even sure if she was there. I remember her being there. I think.

Ever since she did it, I've tried to remember what happened and I can't. I have no idea. It was probably my fault and I don't even know why. How about that?

24

I wake up from a nap and Osborn is standing at the door to my bedroom. He's leaning against the frame, drinking a beer. I barely raise my head and he says, "Come on. You're playing some backgammon with me," and then walks away, expecting me to follow. So I do.

He's five feet ahead of me and rants while walking. The hallway is long and large, full of various expensive paintings and doors to rooms full of books, beds, toilets and TVs. The only shut door is the door to Osborn's office.

"Normally, I play backgammon online through an anonymous game service. Just call up the game and you get an opponent. No chat, no names, just play the fucking game. I don't like the places with the names, because then they always want to talk and I don't want to talk, okay? I want to play a game of backgammon, dammit. You know, man? You ever play?"

He stops and looks at me, tilting his head a little. I shake my head and look down at the floor. He spins and keeps on walking.

"Fucking kids these days," he mumbles, but doesn't. He just says it like he's mumbling, but he wants me to hear it.

"You're only a couple of years older than me," I say.

"A lifetime, asshole."

He begins down the stairs, descending into the main foyer and continues his little rant. "*Anyway*; the problem with playing anonymous is that there's no accountability. Nothing to stop the other person from behaving in a less than respectful manner. The number of times I've been playing a game and am about to win, and my opponent just quits the game. Just ups and quits. Frustrating as all hell, Warren, I tell you. No goddamn respect. No sense of sportsmanship. You know when I was a kid, I played baseball and won most sportsmanlike one year? I take that shit seriously, being a good sport. If you want to win, you need to deal with losing." He stops and turns. "I mean, it's just a game, right?"

I walk past him, towards the living room. “Then why get so worked up? If it’s just a game?”

“It’s the principle! It’s a symbol, Warren! It sums up what is wrong with society at large! I don’t like losing any more than anyone else, but you don’t see me just turning the board over when it happens. You suck it up and act like a fucking adult. It’s what’s wrong with the world.”

I sit down on the couch. He goes over to a bookcase that has a cupboard at the bottom. Inside the cupboard are a bunch of boxes, he pulls out the one on top and brings it over.

“Backgammon is just like life, you see” he says while he sets up the board, sitting on the other side of the coffee table in an ugly red chair. “It is a combination of skill and random chance. Some say chess is life, but it’s not. It’s all cerebral and determined by the two players. They make every decision. Man against man in a world without a god, which I’ll grant does make some sense, but there’s no element of fate—which, whether or not you believe in it, doesn’t really matter—you’ve got to admit that stuff happens outside of your control and even if you make all the right moves, you can still get slaughtered. Luck is the difference between success and failure. You roll the dice and sometimes you get fucked for no good reason. That’s backgammon and that’s life.”

He explains the rules in a very brief and non-helpful way: “Basically, you want to move all of your pieces into your zone—that quarter of the board with five of your pieces and two of mine—and then when they’re all in that area, you begin moving them home. You roll a pair of dice and move your pieces accordingly. If you roll doubles, you get to make two moves per die. You can’t move onto any space that has two or more of your

opponent's pieces. If there's one piece, though, you can land there and send it back. Got it? Ah, doesn't matter, you'll pick it up as we play."

And so we play some backgammon. And I lose. By a wide margin.

While we play, he continues to discuss the relationship between the game and the meaning of life. I would much rather be back on Mars.

"You see that move there? That was a stupid move," he says when I leave one of my pieces unprotected. "And this—" he rolls the dice and the chance to knock the unprotected piece arises. "This is the stupid tax." He knocks my piece back and laughs. "You can get away with that from time to time, but most of the time, when you have a chance to do the smart thing and don't, life steps in and makes you pay the stupid tax."

He pauses and sits back in his chair, looking at me.

"But, I don't think you've had much experience with that, have you?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

All sense of casualness is gone from Osborn, but he just says, "Your turn," and leans back toward the board. I don't roll right away and he smiles at me. "Come on, man. Your turn."

I continue with the game, but what he said stays with me. What did it mean? This guy doesn't know me or what my life's been like. What does he know about paying his little "stupid tax"? What does he think I've been doing on Mars for two years?

"You can learn a lot about someone from the way they play backgammon," he says after winning another game. "The risks they're willing to take, the amount of mercy they show their opponent, whether or not they choose fucking over the other guy in favour of making the smart move. It's all there."

“Oh yeah?” I ask, leaning back, my arms resting on the back of the couch. “What did how I play tell you about me?” I smirk and raise my eyebrows.

He stands up and looks at me for a little before he says, “You’re a slow learner who doesn’t think. Thanks for the games. I’ve got work to do.”

He walks away, but I follow him, yelling, “Hey! What the fuck does that mean?”

He keeps on walking, but begins to laugh. “Exactly! Way to prove me right. Dumb motherfucker.”

I catch up to him and grab his arm. He turns to face me and is still grinning, and all I want to do is hit him.

“What’s all that supposed to mean, Osborn? I mean, what the hell?”

“Warren,” he starts and then pauses. “Warren, you are... you’re a real cunt. I knew it from the moment I saw you. A real dumb motherfucker. A fucking douchebag. It wasn’t my idea to cast you. In fact, I thought it was really, really, really stupid. Everything I know about you makes me think you’re not worth any of this. You know what I mean?”

My face is red and hot. I don’t know where this is coming from, but fuck him. Who the hell does he—? What the—? Goddamnit! Fucking asshole!

I want to hit him.

He grins and tilts his head, looking me right in the eyes. “You’re just an idiot pretending he’s more than he is, Warren. I know all about you. I know *all* about you. Two years on Mars isn’t enough to change someone like you, especially not two years of self-delusion and bullshit posturing. Maybe if you’d done something more than sulk like

a teenager. Maybe if you hadn't continued to sponge off that fat trust. Maybe if you'd actually done something with yourself."

While he speaks, I clench my fists. I grit my teeth. I shake a little. My face grows hotter. My stare goes cold but intense.

"Just because the courts let you off, doesn't mean you're not a murdering scumbag. Doesn't mean you didn't kill that gi—"

And I punch him in the face. He falls to the ground. I stand over him. I want him to get up. I want to hit him again. I want to kill him. He looks up at me and sees what I want to do. He looks me right in the eyes and can see that I want to hit him until he doesn't get up. And he smiles. The bastard smiles. Blood pours from his nose and he's the one smiling. Fuck him. He's smiling? *He's fucking smiling?*

25

The first guy I ever killed was an assassin who already killed me twice. I didn't even think, I just reacted. My body reacted. It was night and I had just been cloned for the third time. I panicked and ran out into the street and he was waiting for me. It was a narrow walk-way between the medical centre and a shopping mall. He had a gun. And I killed him without thinking. They'd upgraded my latest body. I was an action movie hero the way I killed him. Swift, graceful and horribly brutal. When I was done, I killed a whole lot more people without ever really thinking about it. They deserved it, why worry?

That's what's bothered me so much about the thing with Mary: why does it bother me?

26

Walking out on the solar panels, I wonder if I went too far, if I crossed a line. Osborn drove me to it. He did it on purpose. Why?

This is the first time in a long, long time I've been in such a wide open space without some bulky suit and oxygen tank. It's like Mars, but not really. I compare everything here to Mars. That must be the sign that someplace is home. You go somewhere else and your first reaction isn't to experience things, it's to compare them to where you live, to your home.

"See? I'm not a dumb motherfucker," I mumble to Osborn even though he's not here. "Dumb motherfuckers do not think of things like that."

I walk quickly and with a certain angry determination. So quickly that before I know it, the compound is far in the distance.

Why the hell would he provoke me? What was there to gain?

My hand is sore. It's been a long while since I've done that. The last time was probably a year-and-a-half ago when some guys on Mars tried to rob me. But that felt good. It was a good soreness after.

I stop and look back at the compound. Nothing else is visible and even it is only just. I am utterly and completely alone.

He reminded me of the guy I always hated when I was a kid. That smartass who wasn't just the smartest kid in class, but knew he was smartest kid in class—and never let you forget it. I really hated that kid. Even the teachers seemed to hate him.

In all directions, all I see is the sky and a black ground. Plus the compound. The lack of ambient light is somewhat disturbing. None is reflected back from the solar

panels. The skin on my arm seems abnormally bright by contrast. So does the blood on my right hand.

He had it coming. He made me do it. He wanted me to do it.

I walk back and try to figure out why. It doesn't make any sense.

Watching TV, Osborn doesn't seem to notice that I'm back. He hasn't made any effort to clean himself up, except I can tell he's fixed his nose with a med-kit or something.

When I enter the living room, he says, "If you really wanted to make amends, why didn't you do anything on Mars?"

"What?" I stop and rest my hands on the back of a chair.

His eyes move toward me, but his body remains still. "You were on Mars in some misguided attempt to make amends for the wrongs you've committed, right? To prove you're a better person now. To fool yourself into thinking you're an actual human being instead of the worthless monster of science you really are. You're just Frankenstein's monster, ain't'cha, Warren?"

He's doing it again. "Why are you doing this?"

He grins and looks back at the screen. He's watching some old sitcom about some war. "Doing what?"

"Provoking me."

He chuckles. "Provoking you? I'm just talking. How you react is entirely on you. But, you have to admit, your reaction is interesting. Two years gone in three minutes of conversation. Oh, I do believe your time on Mars was well spent."

I pick up the chair and throw it into the screen, yelling, “Oh, fuck you! Fuck you! What have I ever done to you? What the fuck, man?”

Osborn jumps up and storms towards me. “What the fuck? What’s my problem? You! You killed people and became a celebrity for it! You died and got to come back through new technology and then promptly acted like such a complete fucking monster that they made the tech illegal. You’re a selfish Neanderthal who was given an underserved second chance at life because your family could afford it and you’ve wasted that chance and eliminated any chance for anyone else. Do you understand what that means? What your impact on the whole of humanity has been, Warren? Can you even comprehend how much damage you have done through your stupid, thoughtless actions? Or, do you just sit in some shitty apartment on some shitty planet, feeling sorry for yourself and trying to pretend that doing that is the same as being a decent person? And now—now you’re going to star in a movie. Well, isn’t life grand for you, you retarded fuck!”

I don’t move, I barely think.

He’s right in my face, staring me in the eyes and coldly says, “What have you done to me? You’re the most worthless person I’ve ever met.”

As he leaves the room, I say without really thinking, “I thought you didn’t want people knowing you’re involved with this movie.”

He stops and turns with a look of surprise. “What?”

“He told me you didn’t want people knowing you’re involved with writing his movies, but you were talking about it with that college reporter girl.”

He laughs and shakes his head. “You think I give a fuck about that shit really?”

“Then why tell him that?”

He keeps on laughing and leaves the room. I stand there for a few moments before sitting down on the couch. My hands are shaking a little.

The android filmmaker finds me lying on the couch, trying not to think.

“A little bit of the old ultraviolence, eh?” he says with a faux-Brit accent.

I sit up and he sits next to me. He’s wearing only a pair of black pants and his hair is wet.

“I didn’t know how strongly Osborn felt about you,” he offers.

“Yeah.”

“Doing the movie now would be... problematic.”

“Yeah.”

“Do you still want to?”

“Nah.”

I really don’t. I just want to go back to Mars, crawl under a rock and die.

“You know, Warren, I don’t agree with Osborn’s point of view here,” he says as he lights up a cigarette. “He can be a bit moralistic at times and take things a little too personally and see the world in black and white. It can be annoying, but I love the passion involved. Always some good sex after a good rant.”

I find myself laughing.

He laughs a little, too. “Where we differ is probably in that I don’t care about humans. I really don’t. Life is not special, Warren. Look at all of the people running

around. How can all those things be so innately special? So you killed a few people, big who-gives-a-fuck. Any of them deserve to live?”

I shake my head, leaning forward, forearms resting on my knees.

“Then fuck ‘em. If you think they deserved to die, then what does it matter?”

You’re allowing certain elements of the collective morality to influence your own personal, subjective morality. There’s no such thing as right and wrong, Warren. There just isn’t. If you can live with what you did, that’s all that matters.” He stands up. “So, come on. Come star in my movie.”

I look up at him. “I’ve been trying to live with it and I’m not sure I can. I’m going back to Mars today, I think.”

He looks up, arms extended outwards and yells, “Oh, for fuck’s sake! Have you not heard a word I’ve said? None of this matters in the least. Who even remembers that shit? Who cares? The courts set you free! Make the movie. We can make a fantastic movie together, you and me. Just grow a set and stop being such a melodramatic, whiney pussy. We’re not like other people, you and I, Warren. We are not human, really. We’re artificial and, therefore, have to redefine morality so it suits our needs.”

“I’m not artificial.”

“Of course you are! You don’t even have a belly-button! You’re a clone, Warren. A better, more improved version of yourself. Your body has transcended what you once were, why not your mind and your soul?”

I look down at the floor and ask, “Do I have a soul anymore?”

He doesn’t hear. “You are post-humanity, act like it. Look at me: I don’t pretend to be human. I just do what I want and if you don’t like it? Too bad. Go relieve a bodily

function, fleshy one. Don't lay your biological puritan views on me. We are men of science, not nature."

I stand up and shrug. "Sorry, but I'm out. What you're saying makes sense, but I dunno. I need some time, or—no. No. No, I can't do it. You'll have to find someone else."

He looks me in the eyes and, damn, I swear he's human just by looking at him, the hurt that's there, the betrayal. But, I know he's not human because I don't even see his fist coming, I just feel it breaking my jaw.

"Nothing personal," he says. "But you did mess with my guy."

That's when I pass out.

27

There's no mail waiting for me back on Mars. Same old place. Same old space.

I'm awakened in the middle of the night by an argument in the apartment below me. I can't make out any words, but it's a man and a woman screaming at one another. Who lives below me? I don't know. Never met him, her, them. I don't know anyone in my building really. Two years here and I don't know anyone. Huh.

I try to get back to sleep, but the noise continues. My cramped little cot isn't as good as it used to be after sleeping in a real bed on Earth for a few days. I consider moving to the chair and watching some TV, but I don't move.

I spend hours lying there, eyes shut, trying to sleep, but only listening to the fighting below and my own thoughts. They aren't exactly complex. I mostly just think

about what Osborn said and what I've been doing here for the past two years. I've been sitting in this little apartment and sometimes walking the streets. Not much else.

What a waste. He was right. The bastard was right.

Why did I even come here? What was I running away from? I didn't kill Mary. I didn't. I just said... I don't remember what. Probably nothing.

The noise goes away finally and I roll over and try to sleep.

In the dream, Mary is there and it's not like the dreams I used to have before I died. It's too real. Time seems normal. We're in my old apartment with its complete whiteness and thought-forming walls and floors. She's in my bed and has been sleeping. I fall into bed and wake her up.

"What the fuck, Warren?" she says, slurring with sleep.

"Huh?"

She rolls over and sits up. "Where were you?"

I laugh and mumble something that even I don't understand.

"What?"

"Just go back to sleep, babe." I sit back up and began to undress. She watches me and notices the scratches on my back.

"What are those?"

I shrug and tell her to go back to sleep again.

"You prick," she says, but there's no real emotion there. She says it because she thinks she should.

I get under the covers. “Yeah, yeah. Go back to sleep and stop being so melodramatic.”

She lies back down and neither of us sleep. We just lie there, pretending we’re asleep, knowing the other isn’t. We’ve been together enough to know these things.

I finally say, “What did you think this was? Who do you think I am?”

And she gets up. “What?”

I lie there, hoping she’ll forget it and go back to sleep. Or pretend to.

She doesn’t. “What does that mean?”

I sit up. “What? It means what it means. Christ.”

“What am I?”

“Huh?”

“What am I?”

“Hey, don’t act like you’re so perfect either. What about that guy from that bar?”

“Oh, don’t even—”

“What?”

“That’s not...”

“Not what? You’re going to judge me? Fuck you. You’re just like me, but with more self-righteousness.”

“One time!”

“So? The number of times count?”

“Yes!”

“Then why are you still here? Huh? If I’m such a horrible person—”

“I don’t know.”

“Yeah? I don’t know either.”

“Why do you have to be such an asshole?”

“Oh, fuck you.”

“Fuck yourself.”

“It meant nothing! It was just sex! Who cares? I don’t. I thought that’s where we were.”

“Well, we’re not.”

“Says you.”

“Yeah, says me. Says me, motherfucker. Fucking prick.”

“This whiney side of you is so damn unattractive.”

“So, you don’t want to fuck? Gee, and here I am gagging for it.”

“I figured—what with me being a Martian slave and all.”

“Fuck you!”

“Whip me, mistress! Whip me! I’m just your alien slave! I’m not even human!”

“Shut up! Shut the fuck up!”

“Even I know that shit is fucked up.”

“Never stopped you from joining. Who’s self-righteous now?”

“You’re a fucking bigot!”

“And you’re a whore!”

“Bitch!”

“Cocksucker!”

Silence.

“I don’t love you.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Silence.

“I wish you never came back.”

“That makes two of us.”

“I should have killed you.”

“I should have killed *you*.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Why didn’t *you*?”

Silence.

“Room?”

“Yes?”

“A beer. Something red. You want anything?”

“No.”

Silence.

“You started all of this.”

“You figure?”

“Yeah.”

“Probably right.”

“Oh, stop it.”

“What?”

“Taking the goddamn high road, are we?”

“I’m tired.”

“I’m not?”

“Of us, I meant.”

“So did I.”

Silence.

“Then why don’t you just fuck off?”

She looks hurt, even after everything.

“I mean it,” I say, drinking what’s left of my beer. “Get the fuck out. Leave.”

She doesn’t move.

“Fuck off!” I throw the bottle and purposefully miss.

She doesn’t move, just stares at me. There’s no anger or sadness or anything in her eyes. She looks just like she did when I first met her. But, I just walk into the bathroom and shut the door and wait for her to leave.

I splash water on my face and look at myself in the mirror. Same old me, just like I’ve always been and always will be. I whisper, “Fuck her!” to myself and hear the door shut in the main room. I leave the bathroom and the room is empty, the glass already cleaned up by the room. And I’m alone.

And then I wake up.

28

I don’t know what to do now. I pace my apartment, but have nowhere to go. I put on loud, thumping music with heavy guitars, fast beats and screaming vocals. Faced with the idea of sitting here the rest of my life, I just want to get out. I can’t stay here. But I can’t go anywhere else. I don’t know what to do.

When I sit down, I feel restless and begin pacing again. Just moving around, getting the blood flowing, sometimes making strange gestures and talking to myself.

“Okay, Warren, what now?”

“What now? How the hell should I know?”

“Come on, man. This is your life—what do you want to do with it? You can do anything.”

“Maybe I should go back to the movie?”

“What about Osborn?”

“What about him? Fuck him, that’s what.”

“What if he doesn’t shut that mouth of his? I don’t want to put up with that shit. It’s too much of a hassle to deal with. No. No, I’m not going back.”

“Then what?”

And then I sit down and try to watch TV, but turn it off immediately and jump back up. Surrounded by stacks of books and no interest in reading. Wally’s box sits under a pile of junk, but I still don’t care that much. I never really cared, I think.

On one of the walls, in pen is a phone number for Melanie Daniels, that girl from the Starbucks. I must have copied it from my hand just in case. Just in case has arrived it looks like.

A woman says, “Hello?”

“Is... Melanie there?” I ask, still pacing around the room.

“Yeah?” She sounds casual.

“Hey, it’s Warren Stone. We met a week ago in a Starbucks?”

“Oh! Hey!” A voice shift. She’s enthusiastic. Good.

“How’s it going?”

“A little busy with school.”

“Not too busy to join me for a drink?”

“I can make time. When?”

I look at my watch. It’s ten in the morning. Most people might consider that too early for drinking. “You free tonight? Say, ten?”

“Sounds good.”

She suggests a bar she knows and I hang up.

Twelve hours and I don’t know how to fill them.

Nothing else to do, I grab Wally’s safety deposit box and sit down in the chair. It’s a small box and on the top is a sensor that’s supposed to detect my thumbprint and open the lock. It does.

Inside, there’s a small handheld computer. A few years old, it looks almost primitive. I turn it on and there are two files. One that’s titled “FOR WARREN READ FIRST” and another titled “OPEN AFTER READING.” I open the first and it’s a letter from Wally.

DECEMBER 29, 2006

Warren,

If you’re reading this, I’m dead. Shit.

I’ve been updating this letter every few months, so it’s pretty random. I just tried to get most of what I wanted to say down. You probably don’t care, but tough. It’s only a couple of pages, you can handle that.

I didn't have many possessions, but whatever's left is yours because there's no one else to give them to. You are all that I have left. How depressing is that? We haven't spoken in years, not even after you came back. I guess we're brothers by blood only and that's just not enough.

MARCH 16, 2006

I wonder how I died. Probably in a very typical, mundane way. Hit by a car or something. You die from bombings and assassins, I die from a car. Seems right, somehow.

APRIL 29, 2006

Now that I'm dead, I may as well tell the truth, don't you think? What does it matter? The living don't speak ill of the dead, but the rule doesn't apply the other way. Actually, I don't mind if you say bad things about me now. No use pretending things were good between us. No use romanticising the past.

I'll begin by telling you that your death really messed me up. It wrecked me. I know we weren't close, but you're my big brother, Warren, and you dying like that, on Mars? I've never been so depressed and broken in my life. It took me a long time to pull myself together after that.

And then you came back and acted like the same old asshole you've always been and I wondered why I bothered. Months of drunken violence and court dates, you really know how to make me proud. Some older brothers lead by

example, but you, you showed me how not to be. I suppose that's a positive influence, of sorts, but not much. It's the best you were ever able to do.

You've never tried to contact me and I've never tried to contact you. You're not to blame for that, by the way. The rift between us isn't all you. You may be a selfish prick, but that doesn't stop a lot of other families from keeping in touch.

The problem is that I never fit in with our family. I don't know why that was, but I was just born different. Mom and dad had no problem sponging off grandpa's money and neither did you and fair enough. I don't think grandpa would have minded, but it wasn't for me. I never knew the man, so I wasn't taking his money.

That must sound completely insane to you. And that's why I blame myself for our distance and not you. I understand why you act like you do, but you'll never understand why I do what I do. That means I should have been the one to bridge the gap, to make the effort. I just couldn't be bothered. Maybe in that way, we're more alike than I'll ever care to admit. I hit 18 and wrote you off as my idiot brother who embarrassed me.

So, sorry about that.

JUNE 11, 2006

But, fuck you, too, you fucking asshole.

I'm dead and that sucks, but you've been given a gift, Warren. You won't age and you won't die, most likely, for a long, long time. Grow up and act like a

man. Act like someone I would have wanted to know. Actually do something with that money that's all yours instead of drinking it away. Do not mock those months that I mourned your death by continuing to be the same old Warren. That's the only thing I really want you to do, to honour my memory or whatever you want to call it. I'm not usually one for such sentiments, but I'm dead, so what do I care?

JUNE 14, 2006

I don't remember you always being such an ass. I remember us as kids and, man, it was great. Those were good times. You and me having our little adventures, playing, just doing whatever we wanted all day. I wish we never grew up, because you were my best friend then and I was yours and the world was good. Time really screwed that up, didn't it?

AUGUST 16, 2006

I think part of my problem with you is the man you've become. You're my big brother and you shouldn't have turned out like this. I guess I thought we'd always be best friends. And we're not and that just breaks my heart, Warren. It really does.

SEPTEMBER 1, 2006

I wish you had come to mom's funeral. I wasn't surprised that you didn't, but I had hoped you would. You owed it to her. God knows she mourned your death hard. She was so broken up, she became obsessed with bringing you back,

hired the best people, all of that. And look at who you still are. Why did she bother? I've wondered that a lot. Why did she bother bringing you back? I wouldn't have. I love you, but fuck you. You didn't deserve it and you still don't.

NOVEMBER 30, 2006

I don't know what else to say. I could go on like this, but why bother? I'm dead now. Maybe this will cause you to rethink your life a little, but I'm not counting on it. It's not who you are. And that's okay. Because, despite it all, I do still love you.

DECEMBER 29, 2006

For funeral arrangements, just have me cremated and then do whatever you want with the ashes. I don't care. I'm dead. I'm done with that body.

That just about does it. I should probably end on some meaningful words of wisdom or a piece of poetry or a quote from a famous dead person, but I can't think of anything. Just this: stop being such a fuck-up.

Your dead little brother,

Walter

I close the file and feel nothing except for mild contempt. Who wants to be lectured by their dead little brother. I wish I felt more, but I don't. Why pretend anymore?

I open the second file.

Part Two — OK Computer

*I am he
As you are he
As you are me
And we are all together
—John Lennon, “I am the Walrus”*

A Life in the Day

Lying in the dark, all alone in bed, Walter heard the people in the apartment above him talking. He couldn't hear the specifics, just a low mumbling of a couple, a man and a woman, in bed together, talking about things he knew nothing about. Walter lay on his right side and had the radio on low, set to turn off on its own in 48 minutes, but even with it, he could hear his neighbours. He hated them and their pillow talk.

He was almost certain that he hated the pillow talk worse than the sex. Sex was certainly more embarrassing and awkward to listen to, but somehow less emotionally painful than the muffled talking. Sex was so varied in its meanings that he could pretend it was meaningless, just some random one-night stand or something. But not pillow talk: it carried with it an unmistakable intimacy that made him want to die.

“Just shut up already,” Walter mumbled. “I wanna sleep. I'm trying to sleep, so shut up. Please.”

Walter felt like crying. It was late, really late and he had hit the sleep button on his radio several times. For the first hour, he just couldn't sleep despite being exhausted. After that, the couple above made sleep quite impossible. He rolled over, onto his back and kicked his legs underneath the covers, a sheet, a blanket and a thick comforter. His apartment was freezing, the heat barely worked. He stared at the ceiling, but didn't open his eyes. It wouldn't matter either way since his room was pitch dark, having no windows. Living in the basement of the People's Republic of 7625 Jefferson Ave. made him want to die.

Thoughts of death often came to Walter as he tried to sleep. Most nights, he wished that once he fell asleep, he wouldn't wake up. Thousands, maybe millions, of

things could go wrong with the body at any time, causing instant death, so why couldn't one of them happen to him? All he wanted was a rest, a break from life. He was tired of it all, of the endless disappointments and frustrations and annoyances. Maybe he would want to come back later, but for now, he just wanted out. Logically, death was the only method of achieving a break from life; any sort of vacation would entail having all of his worries in the back of his head, it would just be more life. There was no escaping it: death was what Walter needed.

He would never go so far as to actually kill himself, which is why he would hope for death as he lay in bed, trying to sleep. A brain aneurism seemed like the best way. One moment alive and well, then pop, dead. Go to sleep, never wake up.

These thoughts of death always led Walter to wonder how long it would take someone to discover he'd died if he were to die in his sleep. He had little contact with his family, so they were unlikely. Few friends, so unless random chance played a role, no help there. His was the only basement apartment, which meant any smell might take longer than usual to travel far enough to bother his neighbours who were no longer talking, but having loud sex instead. Walter was wrong: sex is worse than talking. Much worse. He wanted to die. He wished for death. He wanted to go to sleep and never wake up.

He woke up having only slept four hours, which was typical. "What's that? Ugh. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Fuck." He looked at his clock and had exactly two minutes before the alarm would go off. "Yeah, that's right. Christ." He sat up, feet on the floor, hunched over and turned off the alarm. Rubbing his eyes, he stumbled out of his room, grabbing a towel on the way and headed for the bathroom for his usual routine of showering,

dressing, eating, brushing and leaving. Every day, the same things in the same order. It was January, so the shower wasn't hot enough, but that was better than July when the humidity made drying off an impossibility. Or was winter worse? "They both suck."

His small basement apartment consisted of a bathroom and then a room where he slept, which had a kitchenette attached. Not a day went by where he didn't consider going back to his family's wealth rather than live in the cramped basement of the People's Republic of 7625 Jefferson Ave., but he had his pride. He wasn't sure what he had to be so proud of, but he had his pride nonetheless. The bathroom simply consisted of a toilet, shower and sink, all smashed together with little room for mobility. The main room had a bed (always unmade), a bedside table with an alarm clock and whatever book Walter was reading (*Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky), a television (turned to 24-hour news in the morning), clothes (in various piles), boxes of books (nine boxes), a stereo (filled with 400 albums on .mp3), and a garbage can (overflowing). The kitchen had a microwave, a sink and a refrigeration unit, along with some cupboards for storing dry and canned foods. The walls were off-white. The floor was a grey tile. Even though he hated it there, it was also the one place where he felt all right with the world.

Walter brushed his hair after showering and dressing. The mirror was still steamed, but he could see well enough to brush his short black hair. "A little too thin these. Huh. How long will. Yeah." In the background, he could hear the usual morning war report on the TV. A list of names so endless and, ultimately, meaningless, he wondered why bother. Who cares anyway?

In the kitchen, he examined the third of a loaf of bread he had left, mouldy like it always got when there was only a third left. He didn't eat bread fast enough, only having

a toasted slice, maybe two, each morning for breakfast. “Doesn’t matter. Out of peanut butter, too. Gonna be a great day.” He took a mug of coffee and sat down on his bed, hoping the war report would end soon and get to some real news he could use. The coffee was good, rich, not the cheap kind. He didn’t splurge on luxuries much, but a few items like coffee, ketchup and toilet paper demanded that he spend more. He was particular about some things and couldn’t stand anything but the best, or what he considered the best. He took his coffee black and drank two mugs each morning.

He drained the first one quickly and got up for the second just as the war report finished. The “real news” wasn’t anything worth knowing, but he kept it on in the hopes of something interesting. “Is something political too much to ask anymore? Something, anything, please, just no more drunken starlets. Come on.” He drank his second cup slower, savouring it, no longer in need of a caffeine boost. His penchant to rage at the state of affairs rose and soon, his mumbling rants were flowing without thought or purpose. “I know, I know, I know, hundreds of thousands of nations makes for non-general politics, too many governments to care about, to be worthy of note, none big enough to really influence the world anymore, but what about transnational groups like the UN or the AC? Can’t we just, I dunno. Just a little bit, please? Some, goddammit! Can’t we at least pretend to care? Oh the unwashed masses, oh the pain of it all, oh but for the grace of god go I. Yeah.”

After finishing his coffee, Walter brushed his teeth and while he was spitting, his phone rang. “Yeah?” he said and his boss, Mr. Buckley appeared in his mirror, already at work and looking visibly agitated. Walter looked at his watch to make sure he wasn’t late somehow.

“Good morning, Walter,” Buckley said.

“Hello, Mr. Buckley. Is there a problem?”

Buckley shook his head, “Yes. I don’t know how to say this, but you can’t come in to work today.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because you don’t work here any longer.”

“Well... what?”

Buckley continued to shake his head and his right fist tapped his desk. “The allies of the country our building is a part of is at war with the allies of the country you live in and the landlord won’t let any enemy combatants set foot inside the border.”

Walter sighed.

Buckley tried to reassure him that the war wouldn’t last long and once it was resolved, Walter could come back to work, but Walter wasn’t really listening. He was wishing he hadn’t woken up that morning. And when the mirror returned to its usual reflection, he stared at himself. “Doesn’t look like me. Do you? Nah. I’m better looking than you, right? Is that what they all see? Christ.” The eyes in particular disturbed him, because they always stared at him no matter what. They always looked him straight in the eyes. He knew they couldn’t do anything else, being a reflection, but it disturbed him nonetheless. “What are you looking—? Hmm? Yeah.” He sighed and looked down at the sink before bringing his eyes back up at his reflection. “C’est la vie, eh?” He had that serial killer look and grinned for just a moment. Just a moment of pretending he wasn’t the powerless nobody he really was. This was just the sort of day that would drive him back to his family and the lap of luxury. Was he stupid for resisting? He stood up straight

and thought about it, finally settling on: “Nah. Life sucks, wear a hat, that’s what I always say. Rock and roll.”

He spent the rest of the day reading and watching TV and generally occupying his mind, avoiding such painful subjects as rent, food and staying alive without a job. That night, he attended the country’s town hall, a meeting he usually avoided, not caring what his fellow citizens thought of gaudy door-knockers and junk mail. “They don’t bother me, I don’t bother them, except they do bother me, assholes.”

The town hall room was on the sixth floor and was cramped full of folding chairs with a table at the front where the president or prime minister or chancellor or whatever they called the hyperdemocratically elected leader of the country sat. “What’s his name again? Frank, Fred, Ted, Ned, Nate, Johnny?” Almost every seat was taken when Walter arrived and he found himself in the middle of the crowd, swarmed by his fellow citizens. He knew it was a mistake to be there.

Prime Minister Franklin Thomas led the meeting, which was tedious and boring: read the minutes, old business, new business, committee reports, vote upon endless vote, until, finally, he made a few remarks on the war their allies waged, which meant they waged as well. It was expected to last only a few days and they were expected to win: all over a floor of a building seceding and someone not liking that. “That’s why I lost my job? Shit.”

“Did someone say something?” Thomas asked the room. All eyes turned to Walter. “Did someone have something to add?” All eyes continued to stare at Walter, who faked looking around, hinting that no, he hadn’t said anything, so everyone look to someone else, but it wasn’t working. He stood up.

“Uh, yes, I said something.”

Thomas looked at him, puzzled. “And you are...?”

“Walter Stone. I live in S1A. The, uh, basement. I live in the basement.” And there went anyone’s interest in what he had to say, he could tell.

“And what is that you have to contribute, Walter who lives in the basement?”

Laughter abound.

Walter stammered for a moment before managing to say, “I said that this war is why I lost my job today. All because a floor of some building seceded to another country? Seems kind of, I don’t know, pointless.”

“I can assure you that it is not, Walter,” Thomas said, meaning sit down and shut up.

“Why? Aren’t secessions an endless activity? We’ve had four from our country this month alone and never gone to war. What’s so important about this one? Why was it worth me losing my job?”

Thomas looked confused. “Our allies think it is important, so we do as well. If we don’t support our allies now, what reason will they have to support us when we need their help? Ours is not to reason why.”

Without thinking, Walter said, “Oh, that’s such bullshit.” Thomas then called a vote to expel Walter from the country and it passed easily.

In the elevator, after the meeting, Walter looked out through the glass at the various buildings, all alike, all metal and shiny and tall. Just as the elevator passed below the first floor, he thought he saw a car or something coming right at him, but didn’t get a clear look. Nonetheless: “It’s okay with me.” And that’s when the hovercar carrying a

thermonuclear device hit the People's Republic of 7625 Jefferson Ave., killing everyone inside the building.

The Harsh Goodbye

The client lived out in the middle of nowhere, a solar-panelled desert. Typical rich prick. The drive took three *Hotel Californias*, but I rarely had a chance to go on road trips, so I wasn't complaining. At least, not too much.

The gate was open and I drove right in. The amount of small buildings surrounding the mansion, I wondered if this place had a fancy name like Xanadu. I parked right out front and stretched a little before climbing the two-dozen steps to the door.

After ringing the bell, I waited for a few minutes before the butler answered. A young, tall guy in a suit who looked positively Vulcan in demeanour. He had red eyes, the only thing somewhat fashionable about him. He looked me up and down, "Mr. Palmer, I assume."

"Right, and I'm guessing you're the butler."

He didn't respond.

"Are you going to show me in? I didn't drive out to the boonies to stand on the doorstep." He turned around and walked away. I followed through a marble-floored and dust-free foyer down a long hallway full of expensive painting and busts to a dark, fire-lit study where an old man sat in a wheelchair with his back to me.

"Mr. Palmer, sir," the butler introduced me and then left us alone.

The old man coughed out, "Sit down, Mr. Palmer! Sit down!"

I had my choice between three chairs and two couches. I chose the chair furthest away from him and pulled out a smoke. "Do you mind?" I held it up so he could see and

he waved consent while spitting up half a lung into a rag. I lit up and waited. The study was full of books and the heads of animals and all those clichés.

The old man looked one foot in the grave with the other not far behind. He wore a robe and had a blanket over his legs. On the table beside him were dozens of pill bottles and he had an IV drip in his right arm.

“Have you ever seen a real fireplace before, Mr. Palmer?” he asked, eyes fixed on the large fireplace in between two bookshelves.

“Can’t say I’ve had the pleasure.” I looked around. “Is there someplace I can put my ash? I’d hate to ruin your rug.”

The old man hit a button and the butler promptly brought me an ashtray. “Would you like something to drink—sir?” he asked, not hiding his contempt. I told him a rye and coke, and once the drink was in my hand, he was gone. He had put too much ice in it, but I drank it anyway.

“I’m dying,” the old man said like it was meaningful. “I am dying.”

I drank my drink and waited for more, but none was coming. I lowered my sunglasses to the tip of my nose and said, “I’m sure that’s rough and completely unexpected to die at the ripe old age of ninety-whatever.”

I puffed away on my cigarette, waiting for the old man to say something. Finally: “Do you know who I am, son?”

“You’re an old man who’s dying.”

“I am Ninian Stone,” he told me like I should be in awe despite knowing who he was since the day before when I got the call to go out there.

I finished my drink. The light from the fireplace flickered and convinced me that it was somehow the middle of the night, like how you're always surprised when you come out of the movies in the middle of the day.

The old man coughed up a lung.

I lit another cigarette.

Finally: "I want you to find my grandson."

When he didn't say anything else, I stood up. "Look, Mr. Stone, you're liable to croak any second now and you're taking your time telling me what's what. Can't your butler there give me the salient details, so I can be on my way?"

His bloodshot eyes glared at me. "That's enough. Sit down, Mr. Palmer. You will leave when I tell you."

Putting my cigarette out: "Nuts to this." I headed for the door. I would have made it, too, if the butler hadn't appeared to block the way. I didn't have many rules, but not messing with red-eyed butlers who looked like they could break me in two was one. I sat back down and tried to drink from an empty glass with limited success.

Stone hacked and the butler didn't move.

Stone rasped, "I want you to find my grandson. He disappeared two weeks ago. His mother, my daughter, is very upset and I want her to leave me alone, understand?"

I smiled, "You must love your grandson very much."

"He's a little shit," he spat. "A spoiled little shit, I hope he's dead." He meant it. He picked at the arm of his chair with his left hand. "Little shit. Shit!"

I looked over at the butler and he could have been asleep except for those red eyes. I crunched on some ice from my glass.

“He’s a lazy, spoiled shit,” Stone repeated.

“Where was he last seen?”

He shook his head. “Who knows?”

I popped another ice chip in my mouth and mumbled, “Great.”

“I just want my daughter to leave me in peace, to let me die in peace. She’s a spoiled shit, too. A real bitch. She wasn’t always like that, she was once sweet and lovely, but now she’s old and spoiled and a bitch. The goddamn bitch,” the old man was rambling. My business was finished with him and my drink was long drunk.

In the hall, the butler handed me an envelope that had all of the details. “Why didn’t you just send me this?” I asked, but he didn’t say anything.

At the door, I said, “Tell the old man I charge two hundred bucks a day plus expenses.”

Sarcasm dripping, he replied, “Very well, sir.”

“Don’t get too enthused about your work now, fella.” The door shut quickly behind me and I squinted at the sun, even with my sunglasses on. Everything looked very much like it had before I’d gone inside. It felt like hours had passed.

In my car, I sat with the air and stereo on for a few minutes and looked in the envelope. The contents were some pictures of the grandson, his details including last known address and how to get in touch with his mother. The kid was in his early twenties and looked like the spoiled shit the old man said he was. He had that arrogant sneer that comes from a lifetime of getting everything you want, of being entitled without merit. Since all I had to do was find him, I partly hoped he was dead, too. One last rich prick, the world would survive.

The grandson's name was Warren and he lived in one of those wealthy, heavily-secure countries in the greater Los Angeles area. He was probably with friends, getting drunk or stoned and taking advantage of underage girls trying to be adults. Why did I always get the shit cases?

The drive back was uneventful and the sun was setting as I hit Sunset, a rare occurrence I'd had the privilege of experiencing three or four times before. The hookers and the junkies and the lowlifes began to appear and I was entering the LA I knew. You can move everyone to cities in the clouds, but people are still scum and Los Angeles is still Los Angeles.

I decided to stop by my office since it was on the way, drop off the file and check for messages. My office was outside of Laurel Canyon, although why they called it that was beyond me. Tradition and respect is one thing, but calling a place Laurel Canyon when there isn't any canyon anymore always seemed pretty dumb. But, so did recreating a shithole like LA, so what was one more dumb idea in a city built on one?

I almost stopped off for a drink, but figured work should come first and kept on for the office, flying high above the buildings, dodging the other cars in the air. I wished I'd met the guy who invented the hovercar and gave him a good fist to the face for not realising that the average person wasn't meant to fly around. If I remembered correctly to my youth on the real Earth, the average person couldn't even drive on the ground too well. But not me: I was a pro behind the wheel.

My office was in a building full of ambulance chasers and third-rate dentists. The door said *Alex Palmer Investigations* and I had two half-rooms divided by cheap drywall:

a waiting room and my office. The waiting room was empty except for the faded orange couch, the dying ficus and the small table with old magazines.

Inside my office, I had sat down behind my desk before I turned on the light and saw that there was someone else in the room, sitting in the chair across from me.

He was tanned and wearing a grey t-shirt with black shorts and multi-coloured sneakers. He looked ready to sell me some cocaine of questionable quality. On his left wrist was a digital watch and in his right hand was a gun.

I kept my cool and didn't move. He didn't either.

"Where's the Stone kid and his bitch?" he asked like an old friend.

I leaned back in my chair, trying to settle down a bit. He tilted his head and his eyes motioned quickly to the weapon he had pointed at my head. "You're going to have to do better than a gun. I get guns pointed at me all of the time and here I still stand, so..."

The man behind me laughed like a bottle breaking. I didn't turn around.

The man in front of me said, "I asked you a question, dick."

"I'm trying to figure out why," I smirked.

"We know the old man hired you to find them, so just tell before I—"

His spiel was cut off by a laughter I couldn't keep in. His eyes went crazy, I heard movement behind me and the world was a flash of white light followed by a deep ocean of darkness. Every goddamn time.

Jim Humphrey was the president of Heartland Reagan, balding, bloated and if he didn't have those second and third chins, you wouldn't know he had one at all. He wore a grey suit and drank at noon. Behind his desk, he gave the impression of importance and the

arrogance to go along with it. I knew better than to buy into that. Humphrey was a thug and an ignorant dolt. But, I also knew better than to share those thoughts with him.

“Mistah Palmer, it’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance,” he said not getting up. The bruiser who brought me in pushed me down into a chair across from Humphrey.

He waited for me to respond, but my head was still in the clouds. When I sat there, Humphrey frowned and took a greedy gulp of his brown liquor. He winced and then smiled. “Can I get you a drink, son?” he asked.

I nodded. “Rye and coke. Neat.”

The bruiser made the drink and we sat in silence. The office was large and decorated with bad art, animal heads and a bookcase that was purely for show. The drink was thrust into my hand and I downed it promptly.

Humphrey laughed, “Shee-it, boy! You can’t taste it that way!”

“I’ve got a headache the size of your wife’s ass, so tasting it isn’t my primary concern,” I said. “But, thanks nonetheless.”

“You got a bit of a mouth there, son,” he said. “You best watch it.”

I rolled my eyes, not in the mood to play his game. The drink was already hitting me and I had a bad idea again. “What do you want, Humphrey? You send Gorilla Grodd over there along with some jerkoff who would have to work out to get as big as a junkie to bring me here, so I imagine you’ve got a pressing concern that simply calling me up would be too damn slow.”

“What is your point?” he asked.

“The point is, you’re a fat idiot and I don’t need this shit.”

An icy smile said, “Well, unfuck yourself and remember where you are, Mistah Palmer. I could skin you alive right now.”

“Yes, you could,” I said. “But, you obviously want something from me. Get to it. Pretty please.”

The icy smile remained. “You’ve been hired by Ninian Stone.” I didn’t respond. “He wants you to find his grandson.” I didn’t respond again. “I want you to do what you were hired to do.”

“You are aware, of course, that I was planning on doing that, Humphrey.”

He didn’t laugh. “I also want you to keep us updated on your progress. For this courtesy, we will match Stone’s fee. If you give us the whereabouts of Warren Stone six hours before you inform his grandfather, we will triple it.”

“You expect me to betray my client.”

He smiled, “Not at all, not at all. I wouldn’t dream of suggesting that you not fulfill your contract with Mistah Stone, I’m just asking that you keep us in the loop as well. We have an interest in this young man and would be much obliged if we could learn of his location before his grandfather.”

I nodded and stood up. “Alright.”

“You’ll do it then?”

“I’ll consider your offer.”

“I see.” He took another drink. “For how long will you consider this generous offer?”

“I’ll decide when I find Stone. If I give you a call that will be my answer.”

He leaned forward. “I advise you to accept, son. We are not people you would wish to cross.”

“And I could give a rat’s ass. I’ve got a job to do.” I went for the door and the bruiser blocked my way.

“Let him go, Ritchie, let him go. I’m done with Mistah Palmer,” Humphrey said and Ritchie followed me out.

In the elevator, I lit a cigarette and offered him one. He hesitated, but accepted. I smiled, “No hard feelings, by the way. I’ve been sopped by enough of you guys to know you’re just doing a job—one you’re well-suited for.”

“Yeah,” he grunted.

“You a member of the faithful?”

He looked a little nervous at the question and grunted, “Yeah.”

I nodded, understanding. “No worries. Do me a favour, Ritchie? Tell Humphrey not to do anything stupid like have me tailed. I haven’t made a decision about his offer, but if I find out I’m being followed, I will not only not tell him where Stone is, I’ll quit the job entirely.”

Ritchie grunted.

Outside, the sun was shining. The drive back to LA would take a few hours. Thankfully, they’d hauled me there in my car. Thoughtful.

I put on *On the Beach* and mulled over Humphrey’s offer.

The Lakenham family’s mansion had all the old-fashioned charm of a cop beating a drunk. Old money by Mars standards meant the family could afford the best in Native

Martian servants and talk a lot about the superiority of humanity. The old man was one of the leading voices behind the reunification movement and spent millions each year in an effort to recreate the ties between Earth and Mars. Someone needed to shoot the old bugger out an airlock, but it wouldn't be me.

Stone's trail led right to the Lakenhams' only daughter, Mary. Word around town was that she was crazier than Manson and had tastes along the lines of the Marquis de Sade, all of which convinced me that Stone had hooked up with her. Now, whether or not I would hand him over to the Americhristians was up in the air. I didn't like the group, but I liked their guns less; and I didn't particularly like Stone, especially if he was spending his time with classy folk like the Lakenhams.

I drove the rental car to the gates of the mansion, which was in an upper-class, gated community in the suburbs of New Chicago. Rosemont was a haven for the crème-de-la-crème of Mars' business, political and social sectors, and it was basically a community of slave owners. Everyone knew it, but who's going to do anything when these are the owners of Mars? I made sure to remind myself to keep a respectful tone, because they still carried a little bit of that frontier spirit here and wouldn't think twice before dumping my body in some crater well outside the dome. I never should have left Earth.

At the entrance to Rosemont was a guard who would probably be arrested if he actually entered the community he was charged to "protect." Unshaven, dead-eyed and nearly drooling, he mumbled an inquiry regarding my destination.

"I'm here to see my good friend Warren Stone," I said. "He's staying with the Lakenhams' daughter."

He eyed me wearily and then shrugged before opening the gate. I guess I looked sketchy enough to pass. I drove on through and navigated the narrow streets, squeezed to maximise property sizes. No cars on the road anyway; not much traffic in these places. I found the Lakenham place with little difficulty and ambled up the hundred-yard driveway. When I reached the house, a Martian in a tux was standing outside the front door, waiting for me.

When I got out of my car, he wandered over and said, “Mister Stone isn’t here. Please leave.” I looked around, doing my best to act like I didn’t care. His voice rose, “Mister Stone isn’t here. Please leave. Now.”

“Where is he then?” I asked.

“I don’t know. Leave.”

“Would Miss Lakenham happen to know?”

He squinted. “She’s not here either.”

I smiled, “You’re lying. Announce me, would you?” I walked past him to the door. He was obviously unaccustomed to such treatment, because he scampered after me, shouting protests until I opened the door and he shut up, assuming his dignified persona.

With reluctance, he pushed past me and said, “I will see if the mistress is available.”

“It’s okay with me,” I said.

The foyer reminded me a lot of Stone’s granddad’s place. I bet Stone felt real at home here. Maybe he acted a little too at home and found that old money on Earth isn’t old money on Mars. Guys like Lakenham may want to reunite Mars and Earth, but that

doesn't mean they'll tolerate some spoiled Earthling acting like a prick. More likely, the girl got bored with him and he moved on.

The servant returned and said, "Miss Lakenham will be down momentarily, sir." He planted himself by my side, making sure I didn't wander through the house at will, god forbid.

"Like working here?" I asked. No response was forthcoming.

A young woman entered the foyer from one of the hallways. She was thin, had short blue hair, and looked ready to flail the skin from my hide if I would let her. She walked up to me, said, "Warren isn't here," and turned to walk back where she came from.

"Yeah, then where is he?" I asked.

She stopped. "I don't know, I don't care, fuck off." She continued on her way.

"Are you what passes for the witty femme fatale these days?" I laughed. She ignored me and kept on walking. When she had left, I turned back to the servant and asked, "Would anyone around here know where Stone went?"

He hesitated before nodding. "Outside," he said.

He led, I followed and as we walked back to my car, he told me that Stone left two days prior, headed downtown, checked into the Bradbury and has been spending most of his time in cheap bars.

"How do you know this?" I asked.

"Mister Lakenham had him followed."

"And why couldn't you just tell me this when I arrived?"

He smiled weakly.

I got into the car, rolled down the window and said, “Thanks.” I drove away and he went back inside the house.

I was just leaving Rosemont when the first bomb hit. I hadn’t noticed how dark the sky was nor the death that filled it. Long cylinders fell down in obscene numbers, destroying chunks of the city. One of the shocks flipped the car and I found myself pinned under crushed metal, staring up, blood slowly trickling down my head. I was going to die. I heard the explosions and, between them, the screams. I watched more and more missiles rain down, hoping that they would somehow leave me untouched despite knowing that was far from likely. I turned my head, trying to see if there was anyone around, someone who could help, but all I saw were flames. The gate guard’s body was bent over in an impossible manner twenty feet away, a piece of metal jutting through his chest. Looked back up and waited. Shut my brain off and waited, tried not to think. About the old man or Stone or the girl or the fact that this was it. I was dead. Not going to die, I was dead. No hope. No chance of leaving that godforsaken planet. If the bombs didn’t get me, the cracked dome would. How much oxygen was left? I was dead. Not killed by a gun, but by raining bombs. I watched and began to hope that one would hit me, end it all. Damn the waiting. No one should have to wait to die, just give it to me quick, come on, finish the job, blow me to kingdom come, assholes. I waited and death didn’t come and I screamed for it. My right leg wouldn’t move. Blood began to get into my eyes, it stung. Palmer wanted to die. Palmer hated his life, hated the whole goddamn thing and was glad it was ending. To die in search of some spoiled shit was fitting and Palmer waited. He shook his head to get the blood away from his eyes, but that just put more in. He tried to move his arm, finally pulled his left one free and wiped at his face, mixing the blood with

dirt. He could barely see. Alex Palmer was going to die. Palmer was dead with blood and dirt all over his face. Goddamn Mars. Goddamn Stones. The darkness finally came, but not the one he wanted.

When I crossed Division St., the tone of the city changed from bad to worse. Stone obviously lived in the bad part of town, but not by much. The locals must have dreamed of living anywhere else, even the “rich” neighbourhoods in New Chicago, anything better than living on the wrong side of Division. If you got rid of the people, you would think you were standing in the ruins of some ancient civilisation. How could things not change in three years?

I walked swiftly, eyes on the sidewalk, and tried to look as if I was not someone to be bothered. It wasn't hard, because that's exactly what I was.

The streets were mostly empty, most of the streetlights burnt out and all of the alleys dark. I ignored the sounds I heard and did my best to ignore anything I saw that went with them. I grew up in a neighbourhood like this and knew better than to get involved as an outsider. You didn't know who was doing what to whom and getting involved could create more problems, namely for you.

I walked on.

Stone's building was a small walk-up in disrepair like all of its neighbours. There was no door, a pile of take-out flyers the only thing blocking my way. The stairs creaked and felt like if I stepped too hard, I'd go right through, dirt the only thing keeping them together. There was no light and when I got to the top, I had a choice between two

apartments, one left, the other right. I felt the door on the left for a number, but it was smooth. I tried right with the same results.

I shrugged and broke into the right.

The door wasn't too sturdy, so a quick shove did the job. The apartment was bathed in streetlight, filled with books all along the walls. I stepped in and saw the body on the floor, covered in a few fallen stacks of books. It looked exactly like Warren Stone and he looked exactly like a dead man.

Subconscious Homesick Blues on the Red Planet

“I think that I’ve finally lost it completely.”

The detective looks over at me. “What was that, Warren?”

I’ve got to stop mumbling to myself. It’s a sure sign that something is wrong. The fact that something is wrong notwithstanding. Maintain, Walter. Maintain.

I turn away from the mirror and smile. “Nothing, just wondering if I should grow a beard.”

He nods and looks back at the book he found in one of the giant stacks that line my brother’s apartment. Or, my apartment. Who am I again?

Last night, I was Walter Stone and I lived on Earth in a crummy basement apartment, working at a crummy menial job. Today, I wake up to Alex Palmer, private detective hovering over me and I’m Warren Stone, my asshole brother who lives on Mars and does nothing. I hope this is a dream.

“Are you ready to talk about what happened?” Alex asks, putting the book down.

I’m looking at myself in the mirror again. It’s not my face, which is the most disturbing thing I’ve ever encountered in my life. Every single time I’ve looked in a mirror, I’ve seen me and, now, to see... him? *Him?* His face tenses up, his eyes go dull and I disconnect. Clearly, this isn’t my life.

Alex Palmer’s nose is bleeding and he’s pointing a gun at me. Shards of glass litter the floor, books are torn apart, pages everywhere, furniture destroyed, windows broken, the bathroom sink ripped out and the apartment slowly flooding. I chuckle, but it’s Warren’s laugh I hear. Palmer’s eyes fill with rage at the sound.

“What is so damn funny?” he screams.

“I...” I begin, but it’s Warren’s voice. His voice, his body, his life and what does it concern me?

“Shut up! Sit down and just shut the hell up!” he yells.

“I...” Again, I can’t.

He motions with his gun for me to sit on the floor.

“I... I... I...” Stuck on repeat, skipping. “I... I... I... I...”

“What goddammit?”

“I... I’m Walter,” I mumble and fall to the floor.

“I was hired a few years back to find Warren. He was killed for the first time before I could find him. I tracked him as far as Mars, just not where exactly. I’m how they found him. I think. I was on the other side of the planet when the bombing happened.”

We sit in a small bar near Warren’s apartment. The alcohol does nothing to this body. Alex can’t really handle what’s happened, but he can handle his booze. He’s a good man. Warren’s eyes can see various spectrums and I’ve been watching his body heat. Odd.

He continues, “After that, I returned to life as usual. I was hired last week to find him again.”

“By whom?” I ask, uninterestedly. I can’t really focus on what he’s saying, but I can’t help but focus on it. There are seven people within ten yards of us and I can hear all of them. A man named Leslie just ordered a rum and coke, his third.

“The first time, your grandfather.”

Snap, the peripheral all goes away. “What?”

He repeats, “Your grandfather. The old bastard. He said it was to get your mother off of his back.”

I nod. “That sounds about right.”

“This time, I think it was the guy who used to be his servant. Real asshole.”

Focus slips. My mind hurts, but my head is fine. It’s just too much. “Too much.”

“What?” Alex looks at me cockeyed.

I shake my head, “This. This is too much. Warren’s body. It takes in too much.”

Spectrums shift, the scent of alcohol is overwhelming, I hear all, see all. How did he handle it?

“I went to bed Walter and I woke up Warren. Weeks had passed. Walter died when his building was disintegrated. Why do I think I’m him? What happened to Warren? Who am I really? Am I insane?”

Alex shrugs. “Probably, but who knows. If they can clone people, maybe someone cloned your brain or something. I found a small, handheld computer by your body when I came in. It’s completely wiped now. Fried.”

Alex has a hotel room with two beds in another part of town. It smells like disinfectant and sex. Warren’s body is taller than mine by half a foot and the ground looks so far away. I’m lying in bed with my eyes closed, because it feels most like me. Except this body is tighter, more firm, more toned, more able. I could do anything in it, I’m fairly certain.

Alex is pacing around the room in just a pair of boxers and an undershirt. That's the other reason my eyes are closed. "I know some people," he says. "Maybe they could take a look at it."

"Yeah," I mumble. "Maybe."

He stops for a moment before resuming. "You feeling better?"

"I'm adjusting. How's your face?"

"Sore." He sits on his bed.

Neither of us says anything for a while. I try my best not to think, but it's hard not to. Either I'm Walter in Warren's body or Warren convinced he's Walter in Warren's body. Life sucks, wear a helmet, I guess. I begin to relax as time goes on, as my mind gets used to the body and its newness. Or as I recover from my nervous breakdown.

After ten minutes of silence, Alex asks, "So, what now?"

"I don't know." I sigh. "I didn't think of that."

He laughs, "This is pretty messed up."

I smile, "Yeah."

"Want to just sleep on it?"

"Yeah. I think I do."

After a pause: "You're not going to freak out in the middle of the night, are you?"

"It's a distinct possibility."

He falls back on his bed. "Great."

* * *

I am in a dark room, the sounds of lizards creeping and snakes slithering all around. The air is moist and Warren steps into a spotlight dressed in suspenders, slacks and a tie. He looks like the man I saw in the mirror today.

“Hello, hello, hello!” he shouts, speaking with his voice and also with the voice of a German actor I saw in a movie last week. His features shift to those of the actor as well. “If it isn’t my dear old brother! Well!”

Something flies past my head and Warren cackles.

“Oh, don’t fret that. It’s just a bat. Bats can’t hurt you.”

I take a step in his direction, my legs moving slow, like I’m underwater. I try to say something, but I am underwater. I’m drowning.

I thrash and scream and look up, struggling to swim to the surface and I see Warren there, wearing swim trunks and laughing.

I try and try and try and finally reach the top and he reaches out his hand and I pull him in.

And I’m standing at the edge of the pool watching him drown and every time he tries to surface, I kick him in the face and he goes under, the water slowly turning red from blood. I laugh a horrible, terrible laugh. The sun is blinding.

The light is blinding. I walk into the light. My legs still move slowly, but that’s because I am walking casually. When I reach the light, I wake up.

I’m strapped to the bed. Alex is sitting in a chair at the foot of the bed. He has the chair backwards and is leaning over the back of it, looking right at me.

“Sorry about this,” he says. “I waited until you fell asleep, injected you with something to keep you asleep and tied you up.”

My eyes narrow and I strain against the straps. They appear to be leather. “Why?”

“Because you tried to kill me and I won’t let that happen again.”

I stare at him, his eyes soft and concerned. I relax and sigh, “Fair enough. It’s probably a smart move.”

He tilts his head. “Who are you?”

“I’m Walter Stone. And I’m in the body of Warren Stone.”

He nods. “What’s the last thing you remember before finding yourself in Warren’s body?”

“I went to sleep in my bed in my apartment on Earth.”

“When was that?”

“January fourth.” He raises an eyebrow. “What?”

He stands up. “While you were out, I did some checking and...” He pauses.

“What?”

“Look, Walter Stone died on January eighth.”

I close my eyes and breathe deeply. Apparently I’m dead. And here I thought I was just in my brother’s body. “Fantastic.”

He and I walk down the street. He at least trusts me not to kill him. “As for everyone else, I honestly couldn’t care less right now,” he said. He’s a funny guy.

“What now?” I ask.

“Now food,” he says back. We’re in a better part of town. Parts that actually look like 20th century Chicago almost. I think. I’ve never seen pictures of 20th century Chicago. The sidewalks aren’t crowded or empty; they’re between.

“Then?”

“Then I don’t know yet. I need food to think, brother.”

I flinch. “Could you not use that word?”

He looks at me sideways. “Not feeling tip-top?”

“What?”

“Lighten up. This isn’t that bad. You’re alive when you should be dead. Your brother, a known asshole is dead. Sounds pretty good to me.”

My face tightens. “What if I don’t want to be alive?”

“Then it sucks to be you, I suppose.” He laughs.

“Christ,” I spit. “You’re a bit of an ass.”

“Yeah, and in need of food.”

We walk into a Chinese restaurant. On Mars. I’m on Mars. Wow.

Inside, the restaurant looks like every other Chinese place I’ve ever been in. Same wall scrolls, same fish tanks, same elderly hostess, same generally tacky decor. I feel more at home suddenly.

Alex looks at me and smiles. “Wherever you go, there’s always a Bing’s or Wing’s or Wang’s or Chang’s or Jade Palace or Jade Garden or whatever cliché typical name there is. Am I right?”

I nod and we're shown to our table with our Chinese calendar placemats and our glasses of water. I order a coke and look over the menu, knowing that I'll get the barbecue pork already.

We don't speak for the entire meal. Good man that Alex Palmer.

"I'm not a good detective," he says in our room.

"Oh? Then why are you a detective?"

"Because it's not hard. Finding people and things isn't that hard. Anyone can do it. And I can take a punch."

I laugh. "Is that a necessity?"

He smiles, "It is in LA. It's the home of Marlowe."

My face is blank.

"Philip Marlowe. Raymond Chandler. *The Big Sleep*. *The Long Goodbye*.

Humphrey Bogart."

Blank.

He falls onto his bed. "Philistine."

"I could kill you."

"I could shoot you."

Silence.

"How are you not a good detective?"

He doesn't say something right away. On the wall above the TV is a painting of a field.

Finally: "I don't ask the right questions."

“Huh?”

“I never asked why the android hired me to find you until now.”

“Warren,” I correct him.

He sits up. “No. You. Damn, I’m a moron.”

I look at him blankly.

“We need to go to Earth.”

“Why?”

“I was hired to find you and I need to finish my job.”

“I don’t think so, no,” I tell him.

“Walter.” His tone says a whole lot more and I don’t like it.

“Alex,” I respond. My tone flat. “I am not well yet. I am not me yet. You don’t even know me. I don’t even know me, I don’t think.”

He stares at the floor before nodding slowly. “Okay, that makes sense.” He pauses. “Yeah.” His voice rises, “You’re right and I need some time.”

“Why?” I ask, puzzled.

He laughs in an odd fashion.

Warren’s body has heightened senses, reflexes, strength, stamina, speed, and many, many other things. While out walking at night, I test them all when a gang tries to rob me.

There are six of them, all men, all skinny and underfed. I feel sorry for them, but one comes at me with a knife, so I break his wrist and use the knife to stab another in the stomach. Two attempt to corner me and I break one’s nose while hitting the other in the throat. The final two run.

It takes seven seconds. The injured men are left that way as I walk on. I barely give them a second thought. “Punkass motherfuckers.”

“Did you know that that android filmmaker Gideon Yorke used to work for your grandfather?” Alex has been detecting.

I lie in bed, trying not to think. “Yeah, you mentioned something about that, I think.”

“But he worked for your grandfather and now lives in your grandfather’s house and is very, very wealthy.”

“So?” I sigh.

He lets out a breath. “You don’t find that strange?”

I sigh again.

“Fine,” he says. “Fine. This is your family.”

“And look how much I care,” I deadpan.

“Oh, come on!”

“You’re too uptight, Alex. Relax.”

He walks over to my bed and looks down at me. My eyes are shut, but I can still see his thermals if I want. “Why did your grandfather leave a sizable fortune to his manservant who turns out to be an android famous for writing and directing films?”

I yawn. “Because my grandpa was an insane, spiteful old man that would have left his money to anyone not my mother or brother?”

“What about you?”

“I didn’t want it. I wanted to make my own way.” I groan and scratch my belly.

“A lot of good that’s done me.”

Alex begins to pace and talk, while I roll over onto my right side. “There’s got to be more to it. Why would your grandfather leave that money, that wealth? Not only that, how was this not known? Keeping it a secret must have been problematic. I had a hard time discovering what had happened. Why hide it? He didn’t want your mother, maybe your brother to know, but maybe more? He didn’t want anyone to know the connection. How many people knew the android worked for him? Or, more correctly, how many people have made the connection? And why him? Where did Gideon Yorke come from? And why was he a manservant and then a filmmaker? Why have an android butler? He was a prick to me, but so was the old man. He hired me to find Warren twice. No, he hired me once and the android hired me the second time. But, something. Fuck. It doesn’t. It doesn’t make sense unless. Unless. Your grandfather, he used to build things and—”

The phone rings, cutting him off. He answers it. It’s Gideon Yorke, the android filmmaker.

“Yeah, I’ve... yes, I have. He’s right... Uh huh... Yeah... But I wanted to ask... Okay.” He walks over and taps me on the shoulder. “He wants to talk to you, Warren.”

I sit up slowly and take the phone, yawning. “Yeah?” I slur with slight anger.

The voice responds, “Walter, come star in my movie.”

Anyone Can Be Osborn Ednyfed

There appears to be no one lying on the couch at first. We view the darkened room from a distance. There is a greyish light, enough to make out the general shapes. Eyes adjust and details become clearer. The couch is red; the lamp on the table has a striped pattern; the man lying on the couch. He lies still, our position is also static. The man does not lie completely still, making occasional movements; a slight adjustment here, the move of an arm there. As eyes adjust more, we see the cigar in his mouth. It produces no flicker of light, but the shape of it slowly becomes visible, just barely. There's little sound at first. At the moment the cigar becomes noticeable, there may or may not be music playing faintly in the background. Something classical, Mozart, perhaps, or Bach; it's too quiet to tell yet, but the volume rises gradually. Soon, it will be deafening.

Slowly, the camera creeps toward the man on the couch. As it approaches, it moves slightly and randomly in other directions; sometimes, up, down, left, right, diagonally, always brief, miniscule and without warning. It has a disorienting effect. The man does not change.

We creep slowly, slowly, slowly, shifting randomly, music rising with strings and brass and piano, and then it all stops when lights turn on and we see the room clearly.

The man on the couch, Osborn Ednyfed is dark-skinned, smoking a cigar, wearing only a pair of black boxers, eyes shut. Behind the couch he lies on is another man, the man who turned on the lights. Gideon Yorke. He wears a dark suit and walks into the room.

Gideon asks, "Awake?"

Osborn makes a noise of assent, but does not move.

Gideon comes around the couch, walking with confidence and purpose. He stops at the foot of the couch, looking at Osborn.

Gideon: “Enjoying yourself?”

Osborn: “Mmm.”

Gideon: “I have business to conduct elsewhere.”

Osborn: “Mmm.”

Gideon: “Osborn, did you hear me?”

Osborn: “Mmm.”

Gideon: “Say something.”

Osborn: “Something.”

Gideon: “Witty, except not. Not quite like you, Osborn.”

Osborn: “Really.”

Gideon: “Yes. It doesn’t surprise me. But, it is sooner than anticipated.”

Gideon reaches into his jacket and pulls out a small device that resembles a syringe, but is entirely made of greyish metal. “Sooner, yes,” he says, stepping toward Osborn. Over his shoulder, we see that Osborn’s eyes are still shut. And then we cut to;

“Jet” by Wings as we see brief cuts of: Earth from space; a commercial shuttle approaching Earth; the shuttle landing; Warren/Walter Stone and Alex Palmer exiting the shuttle, camera circling them as they move in slow motion, both looking cool; Gideon Yorke leaning against a wall in the spaceport terminal, dressed as when we last saw him; the two parties approach one another; handshakes given; unheard pleasantries exchanged; they all leave, Walter/Warren looking back as we cut to;

* * *

A black hovercar flies down the road, surrounded by a solar panel desert. Inside the car, Gideon drives, Alex sits in the front passenger seat and Warren/Walter is in the back, arms over the back of his seat, legs spread, looking very relaxed.

Gideon looks in the rear view mirror: “Should I call you Walter or Warren?”

“Better stick with Warren. It’s easier,” Walter tells him. “Does make my skin crawl a little. Ah well. Gotta move on, live your life, live your brother’s life, star in movies, rock and roll all night, party every day, do a little dance, make a little love, get down tonight, etc. Fun.”

Alex looks out the window.

Gideon laughs: “You’re adjusting nicely. Got the right attitude there, boy.”

Walter, terse and direct: “I’m your star, I’m not your boy.”

Gideon, still jovial: “Gideon Yorke, Warren Stone, quite the combo. Right, Alex?”

“A regular dynamic duo,” the detective mutters. He then turns on the car stereo. “Extreme Ways” by Moby comes on, none of the men react.

Gideon, without taking his eyes off of the road: “You seem down, Oscar Brown.”

Alex doesn’t respond, but Walter laughs, “Space travel doesn’t agree with him. He spent the entire trip with his head in a paper bag, muttering death wishes.”

Gideon laughs.

Walter goes on, in a poor imitation of Alex: ““Oh god, oh god, I wanna die, I wanna die, oh god. Kill me, Walter. Kill me please. Why me?’ HA!”

Alex mutters “Fuck you” under his breath, but the android driver hears it:

“I think you hurt his feelings, Warren.”

Walter shrugs and looks out the window to his right. We’re close-up on his eyes and they do not have a light-hearted look in them. His eyes show that he is dead serious, not in the mood to mess about, and just playing the part of fun-loving Warren Stone.

Alex’s eyes are tired, red and puffy.

Gideon’s eyes are red, but without the tiredness or puffiness. We pull back and see his entire face, which is frozen in a casual smirk. He’s also playing a part, but it’s hard to tell who the real Gideon Yorke is. An ominous feeling settles in our stomachs nonetheless.

Gideon turns his head back to look at Walter and says, “How are we enjoying our new body, by the way, Warren?”

Walter’s Warren face snaps right back, all curved-up lips and teeth, movie star, rock and roll, totally awesome. “We are enjoying it quite a bit, Gideon.”

Gideon, not turning back to face the road: “Must be a real step up from your old one.”

Walter: “Considering it’s been disintegrated, oh yes indeed. A big step up one might say.”

Gideon: “Improved reflexes, muscles, stamina, agility. The fact that it’s supposedly impossible to kill...”

Walter: “And better looking, too.”

Both laugh.

Walter: “It is utterly, truly, most certainly fantastic to be in a better body post-mortem. Wouldn’t you agree... Gideon?”

Gideon’s face shows no reaction, the smirk there as he turns around to look Walter right in the eyes. And then, suddenly, the hovercar crashes through the gates of Gideon’s mansion. The android quickly reacts, slamming down on the brakes and the car turns, finally stopping facing the opposite direction. The three in the car all look stunned and say nothing until Gideon breaks the silence:

“Home sweet home.”

Several days later, Walter and Osborn play backgammon in the living room. Walter is wearing purple jeans, a tight white t-shirt and has shaven his head. Osborn is wearing sweat pants and a comfortable-looking blue sweater. We first see that Walter is obviously looking at Osborn’s breasts despite the heavy sweater obstructing his view. The two are seated on the floor, the game is already started and Osborn is finding it much less easy with this version of Warren than the last.

Osborn rolls a five and a three; she moves two pieces onto the same spot.

Walter rolls double sixes; he moves two groupings of two pieces.

Osborn: “You’ve improved since last time, Warren.”

Walter: “Yeah, well, I’m not the man I used to be.”

The game continues with each evenly matched, for the most part.

Walter: “Gideon tells me you wrote the script with him.”

Osborn: “Mmm.”

Walter: “So, is it you I see about a rewrite then?”

Osborn: "I suppose so."

Walter: "I've read it several times and I just don't get it. What's the point? Why the nonsensical story, the obscure references and endless tedium?"

Osborn: "It's the film Gideon wants to make."

Walter: "Gideon is a pretentious idiot then."

Osborn laughs: "Maybe."

Walter: "And why me?"

Osborn: "Which you?"

Walter: "Either one. Why Warren for the film and me for Warren?"

Osborn: "I don't know."

Walter: "You don't know which one?"

Osborn: "Either."

Walter: "Huh."

We watch as the two race to move their pieces home.

Walter: "You didn't get along with my brother."

Osborn: "Who told you that?"

Walter: "Gideon."

Osborn: "No, I didn't."

Walter: "I can only imagine. He never had much respect for women. Probably tried to get you into bed all of the time."

Osborn: "No, that wasn't... it. He never tried that."

Walter: "That doesn't sound like the Warren I knew. The Warren I called brother would have devoted his entire stay here to getting into those pants. No offence."

Osborn doesn't roll the dice. Walter doesn't notice for a few seconds and then looks at her. She's staring intently at the backgammon board.

Walter: "Your move." She doesn't register the comment. "Osborn." Still nothing. "Osborn. Your move. Osborn!"

She looks at him with surprise and then looks back down to pick up the dice. "Sorry."

Walter: "You okay?"

Osborn: "Yeah, fine. My mind must have wandered. Sorry. I think you're going to win this match."

Walter nods and after three more exchanges, he wins.

They set up the board again.

Walter: "One, nothing."

Osborn: "I beat your brother for three points in the first match."

Walter chuckles. After a beat, he asks: "Why didn't you and he get together if it wasn't his rampant libido?"

Osborn: "I found him to be a self-absorbed narcissist convinced that doing nothing was the same thing as being a good person. I told him so."

Walter: "Ouch. You don't hold back, do you?"

Osborn: "No, why would I? Life is too short to deal with people you dislike and situations you find uncomfortable. I remember, as children, we're always taught to be honest, but, somewhere along the line, we're also taught that that isn't exactly the truth. Honesty is good in theory, about the small things. 'Of course you don't look fat!' 'What a lovely baby!' Blah, blah, blah. Those social conventions offend me with their obvious

insincerity. My brutal honesty has gotten me into trouble many times in the past, but, thankfully, Gideon is much the same way and can appreciate my views. Being an android, he sees our personal interactions from a unique perspective, one that notices just how absurd and strange they are.”

Walter: “Why don’t I see any of that in the script?”

Osborn: “Because... I... don’t know?”

Walter: “More interesting than this bullshit about post-punk apocalypse depression whatever.”

Gideon: “You may just have something there, Walter.”

Gideon enters wearing a dark suit and sunglasses. Neither Osborn nor Walter get up.

Walter: “Warren.”

Gideon: “No matter, we all know what I mean. Relax. Suit up, we’ve got people to schmooze and parties to crash.”

Walter: “We do?”

Gideon: “Life in the fast lane.”

Walter: “Goodie.”

A posh party full of people all dressed up. Strange electronic music plays loudly. Walter and Gideon are talking to a man by the name of Murray Tripp, a studio executive of some sort. He has no real personality that anyone can ascertain.

Murray: “Fantastic, fantastic, fantastic. I am loving it.”

Water: “Er...”

Murray: "I am serious. You have it, man. It is what you have. Gideon, you've done it again."

Gideon: "It's what I do."

Murray: "Clearly."

Walter: "Er..."

Gideon: "Lighten up, Warren."

Murray: "Oh, where is Osborn? I wanted to see him tonight."

Walter: "Him?"

Gideon: "She couldn't make it. She's in the middle of a television pilot script."

Murray: "Damn shame. I love that guy."

Walter: "What?"

Gideon: "And she loves you, Murray."

Walter: "What?"

Murray: "Ah well." He pauses. "Later, guys." He walks away.

Walter is dumbfounded: "What?"

Gideon: "Forget it. Murray can't distinguish sex and/or gender. A rare condition he was born with. Most of us have the good graces not to stand agape and make him look foolish. Now, come on, your schmoozing abilities are lacklustre at best." Gideon walks away.

Walter, still dumbfounded: "What?"

The fire-lit den of Gideon Yorke. Alex Palmer sits in a chair, smoking a joint. He's upside down, legs over the top of the cushioned lounger, head almost at the floor. On the

stereo is *Breakfast in America* by Supertramp and the scene begins midway through “The Logical Song.” Alex sings along between drags. He’s dressed in a cheap brown suit minus the jacket. His tie is on the floor a few feet away from the chair and his shirt is unbuttoned at the top. He wears a fedora, though.

Osborn enters, wearing boxer shorts and a grey t-shirt.

Alex, seeing her begins to sing louder and less sincerely, shifting from a guy just enjoying some pot and some good music to a guy trying to act like he doesn’t really love the music that much and hey girl aren’t I funny?

Osborn: “Not exactly Sherlock Holmes, are you?”

Alex: “Oh contraire. Here I am in a fire-lit den, enjoying recreational drugs and pondering a case. However, instead of the annoying Watson, I have the soothing and wonderfully melodious Supertramp. One could argue that I am Holmes reincarnated.”

Osborn: “Holmes was fictional.”

Alex: “Then Holmes made real and updated for the 21st century.”

Osborn: “With Supertramp? Weren’t they around before I was born?”

Alex: “Yeah, probably, I dunno. I saw Roger Hodgson in concert last year. He still brought the rock.”

Osborn: “Who?”

The question goes unanswered and Osborn sits next to Alex in another chair. He holds his joint out to her, but she waves it off.

“Breakfast in America” begins. Alex sings along. Osborn giggles at the whole sad affair.

Alex: “What?”

Osborn: “Nothing. What case are you ‘pondering’?”

Alex: “The case of the resurrected man.”

Osborn: “Walter?”

Alex shakes his head and sits up: “Ninian.”

At the party, Walter stands among a crowd of people. He holds a drink in his hand and has a weak smile on his face.

Man #1: “Using secession threats is always a strong move in contract negotiations.”

Man #2: “But never too early.”

Man #1: “Oh, no, of course not. Too early and where do you go?”

Woman #1: “My agent, Harvey Rogers, an absolute genius, knows everyone and how to get exactly what I want. Just last week, I was in negotiations for the lead in a remake of *Dirty Dancing*, except with the gender roles reversed and—”

Man #3: “Who’s directing?”

Man #2: “I heard it’s the guy who did *Living in a Fantasy*.”

Woman #1: “No, no, no, it’s that lovely fellow who wrote *My Love to You*. This will be his directorial debut.”

Woman #2: “I loved *My Love to You*!”

Murmurs of agreement spread. Walter takes a sip from his drink.

Man #1: “Is he writing the script for *Dirty Dancing* as well?”

Woman #1: “Yes, but we’re thinking of changing the title.”

Man #2: “Really.”

Woman #1: “Well, within the cultural framework of contemporary society, what exactly would constitute ‘dirty dancing’ anymore? Jerry, the writer/director, has a wonderful way of putting it. He says... oh, what does he say?”

Walter mumbles: “Kill me.” No one hears him.

In the den, Osborn asks: “Ninian who?”

Alex: “Ninian Stone. He was Walter and Warren’s grandfather. He was the one who first hired me to find Warren.”

Osborn: “And you think he’s not dead anymore?”

Alex: “I think he’s Gideon.”

There’s silence.

Osborn: “Are you retarded?”

Alex: “...no?”

Osborn: “Because that sounds pretty retarded. Maybe you should lay off that stuff.”

Alex looks at his joint and then back at Osborn: “I thought of this back on Mars.”

Osborn: “While high?”

Alex: “No.”

Osborn: “Okay.”

Alex: “Okay.”

There’s silence.

Osborn: “Why?”

Alex: “Hmm?”

Osborn: “Why do you think Gideon is Ninian?”

Alex: “Gideon used to be Ninian’s servant, suggesting that Ninian, a known inventor, built him. Now, Gideon lives in the same house, has access to Stone’s money and... I’m not convinced an android could act so human.”

Osborn stands up and goes to leave: “That’s pretty retarded.”

Alex shrugs: “I didn’t think you would confirm my suspicions. Either you know or you don’t. If you know, you wouldn’t betray Gideon’s confidence and would deny my theory. If you don’t know, you’ll obviously think it false as you’re involved with Gideon and can’t imagine that he would lie to you like that, so you would again deny my theory. Logically, you have to question the validity of my argument and raise the idea that all of my suspicions are nothing more than marijuana-induced fantasies with no connection to reality.”

She just stares at him.

Alex taps his right temple: “Sherlock fucking Holmes.”

At the party, Walter stands off in a corner, nursing another drink. He watches the proceedings, but does not attempt to join them. He sees Gideon talking to a trio of beautiful women and sighs, downs his drink and then awkwardly tries to figure out where he should set it down, and if he should go get another one.

In the den, Osborn continues to stare at Alex, who casually takes another drag from his joint.

Alex: “This is some good shit right here. It’s good to be home.”

Osborn turns and walks out. Alex lets out a small chuckle and resumes singing along to the album, which is now on “Take the Long Way Home,” specifically the line “But then your wife seems to think you’re losing your sanity.”

In a limo, returning home from the party, Gideon and Walter sit beside one another, but with enough space between them for at least two more people. Both are in bad moods for the same reason, but from opposite perspectives.

Gideon: “What did I tell you?”

Walter: “What did you tell me?”

Gideon: “I told you to be social. To mingle and have fun and *fit in*.”

Walter: “And I would have had the place not been filled with vapid idiots that made me want to stab myself in the eyes with the little toothpicks stuck in the cocktail weenies.”

Gideon: “That’s what Walter thinks, but you’re not Walter anymore, remember? You’re Warren and Warren has fun, he mingles and he fits in.”

Walter: “I’m not Warren.”

Gideon: “Yes, you are. You said so. Walter Stone is dead, Warren Stone is my movie star. Fucking get with the program.”

Walter: “Christ.”

Gideon: “Hey.” Pause. “Hey,” he snaps his fingers. “Don’t give me that shit, this is your life now and you better begin making the best of it, princess. This isn’t going to be movie camp, you sink or swim here. I don’t need you, I need Warren and if you aren’t going to give me Warren, I don’t need you that much more. You can head on back to

Mars or some shitty apartment country anytime you want and we'll forget this whole thing ever happened. You read me?"

Walter nods.

Gideon: "Good. Shit."

There's silence for a few minutes and Walter makes himself a rye and coke with a little bit of ice. Gideon stares out the window and hums "#1 Crush" by Garbage. Outside the car is the dark solar panel desert. Nothing to see, really.

Gideon says, finally breaking the silence: "I miss the Earth. This false, flying city version of the planet just doesn't do it for me. I miss real ground and plants and sand. I live out in the middle of nowhere in a solar panel desert and it is so sad. Why do they even bother calling it a desert? It's just a bunch of solar panels, not even a real wasteland, just more modern technology. Tech replaces the natural, I suppose. But, it just seems wrong somehow. Shouldn't the natural be able to outlast the fake, the created, the man-made? What happened, Walter? What happened to humanity? Goddamn future."

Walter downs his drink and makes another.

We look into Gideon's eyes, but there's nothing there. Just red and black, glassy and superficial. No soul to be found at all. He speaks again, his voice at its most flat and monotone: "Of course, what would be the point if things did not progress? Maybe this is the natural order of things. Is it really unnatural if it's man-made? Man is natural, so wouldn't a creation of man be natural as well? Aren't I just the next step, the next evolution? Aren't you? Fuck 'em, son. Fuck 'em all. Let them talk their talk and naysay and just be jealous, because fuck 'em, we are better and we're going to outlast and we know better. We know better, don't we?"

Walter down his drink and doesn't make another. He responds: "I'll work on my behaviour. I'll be more Warren next time."

Gideon: "Take however long you need. Becoming someone else isn't always that easy."

Walter: "I guess not."

In the study, Alex is listening to "Crime of the Century" by Supertramp. When the instrumental coda begins, Gideon enters the room, still dressed for the party.

Gideon: "I saw them perform this live."

Alex: "Really."

Gideon: "No."

Alex: "Shame."

Gideon: "Life."

Alex: "Ah."

Gideon: "You've been saying some interesting things."

Alex: "Have I?"

Gideon: "That's what Osborn tells me."

Alex: "She's got a big mouth."

Gideon: "Maybe, but you wanted her to use it."

Alex: "You have no idea."

Gideon: "Cute."

Alex: "People think that being a private dick means having sex with wealthy chicks who hire you to find their fiancé who turns up dead or corrupt or whatever, but

who cares because you and the girl have fallen in love. It's not. It's following cheating husbands and then feeling like scum for asking money from a heartbroken woman.

Goddamn Raymond Chandler can kiss my ass.”

Gideon: “I’ve got some good news for you then.”

Alex: “Oh yeah?”

Gideon pulls out a greyish metal syringe. “You won’t have to deal with being a detective for a little while anymore.”

Fade to black with the haunting piano of Supertramp playing for another few seconds.

Fashionable People Doing Questionable Things

“Lights, camera, Action Jackson’s the name and welcome to my show.” The fat man jigs a little dance as irresistibly peppy pop theme music screams ‘watch me, watch me!’

“We’ve got a great show for you. Tonight’s guests are Warren Stone, star of *Infinite Future*, comedian Damon Coxon, and musical group Year of the Bastard. So, stay tuned and we’ll be right back with Warren Stone!” He mimics using a remote: “No flipping! Don’t flip!” Three minutes, Warren.

Warren Stone is his name now, over six months his and still not a comfortable fit. A recent study he read said that it can take years to fully adapt to a new personality, but they did the study on rats, so who knows, maybe things will shift into gear soon enough. Probably not before the commercial break is over, which is a shame, because he’s never done a talk show before and he could really use someone else’s brain, sense of humour and social graces. “I feel foolish,” he mumbles to his right-hand wingman, Alex Palmer. Palmer smiles and resumes talking to a PA named Mindy who has been with the show for eight months, six of which were spent as an unpaid intern.

Stone smacks Palmer lightly on the shoulder, shouting, “Hey, motherfucker!” Palmer ignores him with an eye roll that tells Mindy, “Sorry about my buddy there, he’s a bit of an arrogant prick ever since he starred in a movie and I’m getting a little sick of being his bitch, you know what I mean? I love the guy like a brother, but enough already, I was not put on this planet to be at his beck and call, so he should just man up and quit whining about going on a top-rated talk show. Is he not aware that there are thousands of people working their asses off in an effort to be where he is right now? My god, the self-absorption! But, I guess you see this sort of thing all of the time. Do you ever just get

tempted to come at one of these self-absorbed stars with a knife because you just cannot put up with any more whining about being rich and famous? I don't think I'd last three days around people like that."

Mindy responds with a shrug that says, "It's not too bad, you actually get used to it. I do see what you mean, I went through a phase where I did think I was going to just come into work shooting one day, but it never happened and now I barely notice how annoying celebrities can be."

"I feel dizzy," Stone mumbles. He doesn't actually feel dizzy, but those feelings of inadequacy just won't go away and he needs some reassurance, except Palmer and Mindy have absconded to some place a little more private. Stone wasn't listening to the body language and missed Mindy's "You seem alright, want to go have quick, kind of unpleasant sex while your friend is on the show?" arm touch and Palmer's "Oh hell yes, ma'am" eyebrow raise.

"My first guest made headlines a couple of years ago for being the first human clone to go on a killing spree. Now, he's starring in Gideon Yorke's new film, *Infinite Future*. Please welcome... Warren Stone!"

Gideon Yorke sits at home, watching the live show along with several million other people. He is wearing a fluffy bathrobe and boxers, feet up on the coffee table, lights dimmed, rooting for his boy. He also wonders about Osborn Ednyfed, who he secretly sent with Stone, as Stone isn't aware that Palmer is really Ednyfed. What Yorke isn't aware of, though, is that Ednyfed is having sex with Mindy, but it wouldn't really bother him. It's just easy, it's not love, he would say if he knew. Stone walks across the stage and shakes hands with Jackson, looking the part he's playing, easing Yorke's mind

a little. He would have gone with Stone, but felt that Stone needed to do this alone, to demonstrate that he has the “Warren Stone” act down. He prepped Stone extensively and isn’t worried. Much.

Stone sits down on the pale blue couch next to Jackson’s desk, grinning broadly and accepting the applause graciously. Jackson slits his throat with his thumb and the audience quiets down with a chuckle.

“How are you doing?” Jackson asks.

“I’m doing well, man,” Stone says. A woman shouts “I love you, Warren!” and he quickly adds, “And, now, I’m doing a little better, thanks.”

Jackson says, “The, uh, last time you were in the news, it was under less... less... it wasn’t for doing something like a movie.”

“No. No, it wasn’t, Action—am I supposed to call you Action?” Stone laughs.

Jackson looks at the camera and says, “Why does everyone ask that?” The audience laughs and Jackson adds a little headshake and a “Yeesh!”

“So... is that a yes?” Stone asks, grinning.

Jackson turns back to him and says, “Yes. It’s my name. Should I call you Warren?”

“Don’t answer that!” Yorke yells at the screen, laughing. His boy is doing well, but it’s hard to mess up the first thirty seconds of the interview. Although, an actor by the name of Bjorn Bergsman did that very thing five weeks prior when he responded to Jackson’s opening “How are you doing?” with “A cop just told me that after the show, I’m going to be arrested on charges of rape, Action. How the *beep* do you think I’m doing?” The rest of the interview went much better, but, then again, it would almost have

to, wouldn't it? Bergsman discussed his role in the generic cop drama he's starred on for the past three years and told an amusing anecdote involving Jeff Bridges, Sean Young and Martin Sheen at a charity benefit on Mars that was more than likely fictional as it is highly doubtful that Mr. Sheen would ever arrive at such an occasion in a green cocktail dress, but why let little things like the facts get in the way of an entertaining story? As an interesting postscript, the charges against Bergsman were dismissed a week later with reasons not publicly known, but everyone just assumes a large confidential settlement made the "ape-ray" go away.

"What have you been doing with yourself the past few years?" Jackson asks.

"I've been living on Mars, keeping a low profile, just living my life," Stone responds and Yorke groans. The answer is too short, too vague and not entertaining. He sounds evasive when he should come across as open, honest and with nothing to hide. This is what they practised for and Stone is blowing it.

Jackson tosses him a lifeline: "Anything in particular?"

Stone stops to consider the question before answering, "I ate a lot of pizza." Chuckles come from the audience and Stone looks at them. "No, really. I tried as many pizza places as I could and ranked them, so, if I ever ran out of new places to try, I would know where to get the best pizza in New Chicago. Is that weird?"

Jackson's eyes go wide and he takes a drink of water.

Stone laughs. "Alright then, Action, I'm not telling you where to get the best pizza on Mars. That's my little secret and you'll be sorry next time you're there, because, my god, the pizza I'm thinking of is just about the best pizza I've ever had."

Everyone cracks up and Yorke relaxes. How well Stone does here will determine how the next phase in Yorke's plan proceeds. Yorke could care less about the movie as that's just one step in the long-term plan, a crucial point in which is happening tonight on that soundstage and you'll have to forgive him if he's a tad anxious about it. If Stone can't pull it together here, alterations will have to be made and short-term goals reassessed. Really, it's all a lot of work that Yorke could really do without, especially killing Stone. The difficulty with murdering someone in the public eye like that and not getting caught is staggering, although not beyond Yorke's means. Since Yorke is also famous, he has become adept at doing things unnoticed, even disposing of bodies. I mean, what do you think he does with the used-up Ednyfeds?

"Let's talk about the film," Jackson says.

Stone smiles, "Oh, let's."

"How did you get involved?"

"Well, I was living on Mars and Gideon Yorke just showed up. He took me out to dinner and told me he wanted me to star in his new movie. And I said no." He laughs along with the audience.

Jackson says, "Why would you do that?"

Stone tilts his head to scratch it and says, "I'm not an actor?"

Jackson looks at the audience, "Well... I'm sold on the movie."

The audience laughs. They like Stone. They weren't sure at first, but they like him now, Yorke sees that. But, will he be able to bring it home with the "Walter story"?

"You suffered a loss in the early goings of the movie, didn't you?" Jackson asks.

Stone nods and looks down before answering. When he speaks, his voice is quiet: “Yeah, uh, my little brother Walter... died. The country he was living in was allied with another country that was at war with some other country and his building was vaporised by a suicide bomber.”

“Jesus,” Jackson says.

“Yeah,” Stone says. “And the ironic thing is that earlier that day, Walter had lost his job as a result of the whole thing.”

“Were you two close?”

“Not especially. We had had a falling out a few years before that, but I had always hoped...” He pauses and tears are in his eyes. “I always thought we had time, that we would patch things up. I guess... I guess...”

Jackson turns to the audience, “I think we’ll go to commercial now. We’ll be right back with Warren Stone. No flipping!”

On commercial, Stone leaves the set, too broken up to continue. Backstage, his phone rings. “How’d I do?”

“Just fine,” Yorke says. “You off the stage?”

“Have I fucked up the plan so far?” Stone sniffs.

“You okay there?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine. Method acting fucks you up.”

“Heh. Don’t worry, just get out of there.” Stone covers the receiver and asks someone if they’ve seen Palmer. Yorke continues, “Go out, get something to drink, get laid, whatever.”

Walking in the direction Palmer apparently went, Stone says, “No worries, I’ve just got to find Alex.”

“He’s not there?”

“He went off with some production assistant or intern or something before I went on.”

“Alright, see you when you guys get back,” Yorke says, hangs up and then smiles.

Stone opens a door to a room and remembers the time he walked in on his parents having sex when he was three. He hasn’t thought about that in years, but the sight of Palmer and Mindy doing it doggy style over a desk takes him back to that horrible, horrible day.

“Shit, sorry,” Stone mumbles and stands there.

Palmer laughs, “In or out, buddy, just shut the fucking door.” Stone shuts the door and stands there awkwardly. Palmer doesn’t stop. “If you’re gonna stay, jump in.”

“What?”

Palmer stops mid-thrust and looks at Stone. “Drop your pants and stick your cock in this bitch’s mouth.”

“Do what?” Mindy asks.

“Oh, shut up, bitch,” Palmer says. “Don’t pretend you’re surprised, offended or didn’t do this last night. Shit.”

She has, in fact, not done that sort of thing before. She once had a boyfriend who suggested something similar and refused, having no real ambition to have sex with multiple partners. As such, Mindy tries to stand up and pull away from Palmer, but he holds her in place. When she tries to break away, he punches her in the neck.

“Jesus, Alex,” Stone says.

Palmer laughs, “What? She likes it, man.”

“Ffffuckin prrrrick,” Mindy mumbles and Palmer hits her again.

“Alex!” Stone yells.

Palmer ignores him, “Shut the fuck up, bitch. You knew this was going to happen, so shut up. Shut up.” He turns to Stone, “Warren, take your cock out and shove it down her throat. Then, we’ll go out, get smashed and find some classier bitches to fuck.”

Stone doesn’t move.

“Warren,” Palmer says and Stone looks at him. “Okay?”

Stone nods, moves towards the pair and I don’t want to deal with what happens next.

Have you ever wondered what goes on inside the popular bar Booze & Women? A line around the block filled by twenty-somethings who will never, ever get in. When he first moved to the greater New York area, Stone spent a few months with friends trying to get in. His brother never had to try.

In a VIP room, Stone drinks a gin and tonic while Palmer drinks a Guinness. Besides the two of them, the room is empty. The other half of the bar’s promise will come later. Neither one talks, because there’s nothing to say.

Stone drinks and wonders why he bothered all those nights. He’s reminded when the girls arrive. He’s making out with a blonde called Melanie when a man named Pat Mankiewicz enters the room and sits down next to Stone.

“Excuse me, Mister Stone?” Mankiewicz says.

Stone doesn't hear him, understandably distracted.

Mankiewicz taps Stone on the head, which gets his attention.

"What the fuck," Stone says.

"I need a word, Mister Stone," Mankiewicz says.

"Who are you?"

"Can I have two minutes?"

Stone snorts and says, "No."

Mankiewicz nods and says, "It's about your brother, Mister Stone."

"What?"

"Can I have two minutes now?"

Mankiewicz looks beaten down by life and wears a cheap suit purchased off the rack. He's got a glass of 12-year-old Scotch in his hand, his third for the night. He has a small ulcer and has been contemplating suicide for three months. The sticking point, for him, is the method and who will find the body. He doesn't want anything painful, but the non-painful methods are a little too bloody or unreliable. The last thing he wants is to survive a suicide attempt.

Stone hasn't thought of dying in months.

When they're alone in a corner, Stone says, "Okay, two minutes."

"I saw your appearance on the talk show last week."

"And?"

"The story about your brother caught my attention. The way he died."

Stone sighs, "And?"

“I’m a member of a group that is working to alter the political system that we currently use.”

“And?”

“We want to prevent things like your brother’s death from happening again.”

“And you want me to do a spot or two for the group? Send some literature to my agent and he’ll look it over.”

Mankiewicz shakes his head, “No, no, that’s not good enough.”

Stone says, “It will have to be. Now, leave or I’ll have you thrown out.”

“Fine, fine, Mister Stone,” Mankiewicz says. “I’ll send that information.”

“Fantastic.” Stone returns to the blonde and Mankiewicz finishes his drink. He leaves the club and, in the cab, calls Gideon Yorke to inform him of what occurred. Yorke was in the middle of final edits on *Infinite Future*, but is thankful for the break. He’s been working on editing for nearly two days straight, watching take after take, not actually requiring sleep or a break. However, something else to stimulate the mind never hurts. Osborn Ednyfed, for example, loves backgammon as a break from writing. Palmer, when working too much on a case, likes to mix it up by reading old detective novels. Walter used to enjoy watching television. Now, he’s got his hand under Melanie’s skirt as she whispers in his ear, “Don’t you remember me, Warren?”

He continues on, “Should I?”

“From Mars,” she says.

“No, I do not, sorry,” he says.

“We met at the coffee shop, I was the law student, you were you, you called me a few weeks later.”

“Oh,” Stone says. “Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, how are you?”

“Good,” she lies. The truth of the matter is she didn’t pass one of her final exams where she was to argue for or against the ruling of *Sanchez V. Mason*, a civil case where Eddie Sanchez sued David Mason over remarks Mason made to Sanchez’s then-fiancée that convinced her that she had been leading an utterly meaningless life until that moment and that the smart course of action would be to dump Sanchez, begin doing whatever drugs she could afford and, when the money ran out, do whatever necessary, including prostituting herself in the most degrading of scenarios, not unlike the end of *Requiem for a Dream*, in order to maintain her habit. What made the case particularly interesting was that Mason’s comments were regarding a recent baseball game between the Yankees and Red Sox where he argued that the manager of the Sox made a crucial error in the eighth inning by replacing the starting pitcher, leading to the relief pitcher giving up three hits resulting in two runs and breaking the scoreless tie. The Sox ultimately lost 3-2 and Mason argued that the starter still had enough in him to carry through the eighth and, perhaps, the ninth inning. When the case went to court, the initial judge ruled in favour of Mason, but on appeal, the ruling was reversed, granting Sanchez the twenty million he requested plus court costs. The reasoning for the overturn was, according to Judge Levesque, “I saw that game and it made me want to do drugs. Discussing such a boring, suicide-inducing game is dangerous and Mister Mason should have been aware of that.” Melanie argued in favour of this ruling, citing the superiority of football over baseball, only because she was high on speed as she had been up for three days preparing for her finals. She now lives in the greater New York area as a high-priced escort girl. Some would say she’s better off, although Melanie is not one of them.

Stone nods and pulls away from her, unsure of how to proceed. She pulls him back to her and they continue on, he not caring one way or the other, she seeing this as an opportunity.

Stone and Palmer stand on the balcony of the hotel room. The sun is shining and both feel like shit.

Stone says, "I don't want to leave the hotel today."

Palmer doesn't say anything.

"That Melanie girl called again today. I don't think she understands the way things are, man. She doesn't get it, you know? She just doesn't understand at all. Not at all. Shit. Am I right?"

Palmer nods and mouths, "Yeah."

"Right on," Stone says. "But Gideon has been saying I should get myself into a relationship, I just assumed he would find some bimbo starlet. This other girl..."

"Melanie," Palmer says.

"Yeah, her, she's not bad. I dunno. The sun is too bright, too bright. I'm going back to bed."

Stone leaves Palmer alone on the balcony. Palmer's head is a wreck as the Ednyfed personality is fading away again. Yorke isn't around to inject some more and Palmer is beginning to feel like a schizophrenic, unsure which thoughts are his and which are Ednyfed's. He takes another drink from the bottle of vodka in his hand. Is it Palmer or Ednyfed that likes vodka he wonders. He doesn't care.

He gets up and walks back into the room, heading straight for the phone. He dials a number and when Yorke picks up on the other end, he says, “Gideon, I’m fading away.” Two days from now, Osborn Ednyfed is going to kill Alex Palmer in the middle of the solar-panel desert.

The Man with No Body/No One's Boy

“I’ve killed myself over a dozen times out here in the desert. Gideon sends me out with myself and only I return. It gets easier each time. The first time I killed myself, I damn near shot myself when I pulled the trigger and I thought I’d never get my blood off my hands. Now, I’m going to kill myself again and I don’t care. Fuck me, it doesn’t matter. Osborn Ednyfed is dead, long live Osborn Ednyfed. There’s always more of me in a test tube somewhere.”

I stop the car.

“Yes, Alex, I am completely aware of what I am... are you? Are you aware that I was in you? That I was you? Are you aware that you are about to die out here all alone? You pathetic little creature who lives only one life. How sad. Are you aware of how sad that is? Hello? Alex, are you aware?”

I dump his body on the ground, he barely makes any noise. I sit on the hood of the car and wait.

“Were you aware of me in you, Alex? Were you conscious? I only ask because I never have before. I just wasn’t curious. I was more focused on the task at hand of killing whatever hapless sap had the honour of being me. The first time I did it, it was quite unsettling. His name was Jeremy and he was the prototypical me, the man Gideon used to create me. I shot him in the head. He didn’t think I would be able to do it, the two of us being so similar, but he didn’t take into account the various alterations made to make me a more palatable servant. I’m willing to kill in cold blood. I didn’t enjoy it, but I kind of do now. I am looking forward to killing you, Alex. Does that surprise you? Sure as hell surprises me.”

A bird flies overhead, screeching. There are vultures out here, waiting for a feast.

“Jeremy was difficult, but satisfying, in a way. It was the Tulpa killing the man. Are you aware of what a Tulpa is, Alex? I wouldn’t imagine so, you being an ignorant dick, a stupid ‘tec, a foolish gumshoe... I could go on all night, but what’s the point. I am a Tulpa, Alex. I know that now. I am Jeremy’s Tulpa and now that I’ve killed him, I’m cursed to walk the earth, jumping from body to body, constantly seeking a new home for my spirit. Granted, I’m a bio-tech Tulpa that doesn’t possess bodies in the traditional sense, but I feel linking myself back to an older tradition helps. Nothing new under the sun. What Gideon calls a parapersonality, I call a Tulpa. Never to him, mind you. I’ve only shared this with my fellow selves. You’re welcome.”

His body doesn’t stir. I don’t mind.

“A Tulpa is the expelled summation of a person’s negative feelings and thoughts. I read about them once in a book about Eastern religions. Or, Jeremy did. The name is what matters. Jeremy named me Osborn Ednyfed, a pseudonym he used to pen romance novels. Naming things gives them power. Since I had a name, I no longer needed him for identity. I’m my own man, a Tulpa no more. So I killed the motherfucker. Hell yes I enjoyed it. I was scared, I was petrified, but I loved it. One shot through the back of the head, execution style. He secretly wanted to do that, Jeremy did. Only I, his Tulpa could do it. He was too good, too pure. Osborn Ednyfed is not. Osborn Ednyfed leads a life of no consequences, no cares, because, technically, Osborn Ednyfed doesn’t exist. He didn’t kill Jeremy, oh no. No, no, no, that was Sam. Sam killed Jeremy.”

A stiff wind blows briefly and I hear the screech again.

“Jeremy was a writer Gideon met working on a movie. He was doing an adaptation of Philip K. Dick’s *Ubik* and hired Jeremy to help with the script. The project fell apart, but they kept in touch and, when Gideon’s interests ‘shifted’ to his current enterprise, Jeremy helped. I guess that was a mistake, eh? As for Sam, I don’t know where Gideon found him. Where does he find any of them? He’s a famous filmmaker, he can find anyone anywhere and get them to do anything. I don’t remember much about Sam even though he was the first me if you don’t count Jeremy, the ur-me. Is that odd? Shouldn’t I remember my first life clearly?”

The question hangs in the air, unanswered by his body or by the vulture’s screech.

“Do you remember your first year of life? Your second, third, fourth, fifth? When does your memory begin? I remember my birth if you want to call it that. I woke up in Sam and I was Osborn Ednyfed. Born with a full set of memories and knowledge, ready to get to work. Bred for a purpose. No one knew I was a Tulpa, but Jeremy found out. Of course, killing Jeremy wasn’t my idea: Gideon told me to do it. He doesn’t trust natural people, so he surrounds himself with fakes. Rather Hollywood of him, don’t you think? He’s a fake, too. But you know that. You may wonder why I don’t call him by his real name, but I do. Gideon is his real name, his chosen name. Ninian is dead, killed by Gideon. That’s right, he killed himself, too. Gideon and me, Tulpas that killed the men they sprang from. You can’t understand how happy I was when I made that connection, when I realised how perfectly he and I complement one another. He and I are the same, only inverse. Invert Osborn and you get Gideon; invert Gideon and you get Osborn. It’s a thing of beauty.”

I tap his body with my foot and he moans, but does not stir.

“You’re a good listener, Alex. I think I may regret killing you. I had fun in you. But, alas, c’est la vie. I haven’t regretted killing myself yet. Being one person is boring. I was in you the longest, because Gideon wanted to toy with you, push things to limits, see if too much me could break you or, perhaps, get me to stick. Obviously, none of that happened, but my seven months inside you were fun. Never let anyone ever tell you differently, Alex. Just ask Walter, he’ll tell you that we had fun. We made a good team. But, I am enjoying my new body here. She’s a sweet little thing called Caitlynn. Being a woman is always fun, but I do miss my penis. Not the most enlightened thing to admit, but it’s true. I’m a male Tulpa and being a woman is always an adjustment. This is the third woman I’ve been. I’ve been a man twelve or thirteen times. Huh. Were you unlucky thirteen, Alex? How delicious. Although, I’ve never believed in the significance of numerology really. Thirteen is unlucky, seven is magic, one is the loneliest number that you’ll ever do... who cares? I am a Tulpa of science, I care not for silly superstitions. But what has been the lineage?”

I look up, hoping to catch a glimpse of the vulture across the moon.

“Jeremy was killed by Sam who was killed by Max who was killed by Andre who was killed by Yelena who was killed by Jean-Paul who was killed by Vince who was killed by Ravi who was killed by Amir who was killed by Richard who was killed by Kenneth who was killed by Hikaru who was killed by Jono who was killed by Sean who was killed by Silke who was killed by you, Alex, who will be killed by Caitlynn. I may have mixed up the order there. Maybe Vince killed Ravi, I don’t know. Does it matter? Quite a lineage, eh? Quite a trail of blood, of death. Aren’t you proud to be a part of it, Alex? Did you notice how your name was included as a killer. You killed Silke. How

does that make you feel? Have you killed before? In your line of work, I imagine you must have, but not necessarily. I wonder.”

He rolls over, but doesn't get up.

“I must seem awfully cruel and sadistic. I don't mean to be, it's just the way I am sometimes. How can I not be when I'm waiting for you to wake up so I can kill you in the middle of the desert with the moon high in the sky? The mood is upon me. Cruelty has descended from heaven and invaded me. You need to be cruel to kill like this. You need to be cruel to be Osborn Ednyfed, Alex. Gideon has required me to do some terrible things. He is truly cruel, if you must know. He is cold and cruel, more than you will ever know. So am I, though. So we both are, we Tulpas. How can a Tulpa be anything but cruel and brutal? I am the embodiment of all that is evil, cruel and negative in Jeremy. Maybe everyone since him, too. I've grown more cruel over time, maybe I feed upon the negativity of my bodies. Do you feel like a better person, Alex? More pure, more good, more perfect? Am I the cure for evil, Alex? Am I really a force of good? I like to think so, but that could just be wishful thinking, hoping against hope that I'm making the world a better place. You've got to believe you are or what's the point of getting up in the morning?”

So lost in thought am I that I don't notice Alex has risen from the ground and is in the process of throwing a punch. He lands it and I'm knocked off the hood of the car, hitting the ground hard.

“Alex? Alex, wait—”

He kicks me in the face and I fall onto my back. He jumps on me and smashes my face with his fists. He doesn't say anything, he just pounds as hard as he can, over and

over again. I can do nothing to stop him, the pain more than anything I've ever felt. I try to speak, to implore him to stop, but he doesn't. I lose consciousness.

"I suppose it was only a matter of time before you failed me, Osborn. How did it happen is what I want to know. How did Alex Palmer not only escape his predetermined fate, but, more importantly, how did he manage to kill you? Can you tell me that? And while you're at it, can you tell me why I shouldn't kill you myself right now and leave you dead? Huh? Answer me, boy."

Every time, I wake up in the den. Why the den? Ask Gideon, but maybe another time, because he's not in the mood. Clearly.

"Weh-ell, he took me by surprise, Gideon. It's as simple as that."

"And how, pray tell, did he accomplish that?"

"By playing possum, I believe. He's a sneaky guy, he knows all of the tricks being a detective. He knows when to play dead and when to strike. He's not some random runaway or junkie you picked up, he's skilled and smart and able. Obviously. Why didn't you simply kill him when he discovered your plans? Why toy with him?"

"You're going to have to find him now, Osborn. Hunt him down and kill him. Let him know that this is what he gets when he messes with us."

"How? I'm not a detective. I don't have the skills or the knowledge to track someone. He's probably ditched the car already and gone underground, far from here."

"He knows too much, so you better find him. You damn well better find him."

I stand up and look at myself in the mirror. I'm a man in my early thirties and I haven't shaved in weeks.

“You know what, Gideon... I don’t think so.”

“What’s that?”

“Nah, let him go. What’s he going to do? Tell people that an android filmmaker injected him with an artificial personality and then tried to have him killed? We may live in science fiction times, but, come on, no one’s going to believe something that out there.”

“Find him all the same. We can’t have him running around loose.”

“Settle down there. You want him found so badly, you go do it.”

“So, this is how it is then?”

“This is how it is then, yeah.”

“You didn’t turn out at all like I thought you would. I had great plans for you, Osborn Ednyfed, but you’ve changed, you’ve evolved beyond what I had in mind. Somewhere along the line, I lost control and you gained it. Goddamn you. Do you not understand how long I slaved over you, making you perfect? And now this.”

“I’m not your boy, Gideon.”

“No, I guess you’re not.”

We stare in silence.

“What now then?”

“What do you mean?”

“If you’re not going to go after Palmer, what now?”

“We do what we would have done had Palmer not escaped, we stick to the plan. Your plan.”

“Yeah, yeah... Sorry.”

“What?”

“Sorry about that. You’re right, I don’t own you, you’re not mine. For a minute there, I lost myself.”

“Wow, talk about end of the episode moral time.”

“Whatever.”

“Where’s Walter?”

“He’s at the Democracy No meeting with Mankiewicz.”

“Do you think he’ll respond as expected?”

“You may not be my boy, but Walter most certainly is. He’s young, idealistic and easily flattered. They’ll be kissing his ass so much that he won’t be able to do anything but take them up on the offer.”

“I suppose I should get working on speeches then.”

“That’s the plan.”

“Hoo-ha. Indeed it is.”

We walk away.

Back out in the desert, I’m sitting with Walter, watching the sun go down.

“You’re a paraperson.”

“Yeah.”

“You’re an advanced artificial personality contained in a semi-liquid form that, when injected into a person, takes over their conscious mind.”

“Yeah.”

“What?”

“What do you mean?”

“What the hell are you talking about? A paraperson? Really? Is this a joke? Is the real Osborn going to jump out with Gideon and yell ‘Gotcha!’?”

“No. I’m serious. I am Osborn Ednyfed in another body. My mind is the same, just the body has changed.”

“That is ridiculous. That is... It’s ridiculous.”

“Maybe. But, it’s the truth.”

“Okay, say I believe you, say I go along with this...”

“Yeah?”

“How does it work?”

“Gideon and a guy named Jeremy Stevens created me. Really, my consciousness is kept in digital form, but it is transferred through intravenous injections via a liquid where each molecule contains the sum of my knowledge, experience and personality. When the body I’m in dies or begins to revert back to its original self, a blood sample is drawn and that sample is analysed by a computer, uploading the newest version of my consciousness and readying a new liquid to be injected into another host body.”

“Ridiculous.”

“I don’t know what to tell you.”

“Is that the truth?”

“Yeah.”

“Christ.”

“You’re Walter Stone in Warren Stone’s cloned body and you’re calling me ridiculous?”

“Point.”

“Thank you.”

“What about people who see you as all these different people?”

“The people Gideon socialises with? They just assume that Gideon calls everyone he’s with ‘Osborn Ednyfed.’ They’re used to eccentricities far stranger than that.”

“Christ.”

He stares out at the sun and I give him time to absorb everything.

“Why are you telling me this?”

“You’re in, man. You’re in the inner circle now. You, me, Gideon... no more secrets. If you and I are going to be working closely on this Democracy No stuff, we’ve got to be open and honest. You need to know who and what I am.”

“Makes sense.”

“Listen, this isn’t that weird. Your mind is in your brother’s cloned body, Gideon is an android, and I’m an artificial personality. Who cares? We’re going to change the world, man.”

“What about the bodies?”

“Hmm?”

“The bodies. Who you are. The goddamn fucking bodies, Osborn!”

“Yeah, yeah, them. Gideon finds people.”

“What does that mean?”

“I don’t know. I just wake up as them.”

“What about when you’re done with them?”

“I kill them. I bring them out here and kill them.”

“Christ.”

“Do you really care?”

“Are you insane?”

“I... I don’t know what that means.”

“Of course I care.”

“How much?”

“Well, I...”

His unfinished sentence is blown away by the breeze.

“You don’t care, Walter. You think you should, but you don’t, not really. You know what Gideon and I know: human life is cheap. Some people will go on and on about how precious and miraculous it is, but it’s cheap. If two inbred retards with a combined IQ of negative twenty can spawn a little freak, how goddamn precious can life really be? Life itself is not important, the quality of life is important and that’s what we’re about. It’s what you’re about. That’s why you’re getting involved, why you’re using your newfound fame to make a difference, to change the world and make the quality of life better. If these people I inhabit really have great lives, how come no one notices they’re gone? Because the current political climate supports the alienation of one person from another. These people are victims of what we’re fighting to change, to correct. These are the signs of the time, man.”

“Maybe.”

“You know it’s the truth. You know I speak nothing but truths. Why lie to you now? I’ve already spilled the Big Secret, what use would lies be? You’re in, man. You’re

in like Flynn. You, me, and Gideon, we're going to change things, make them better.

We're going to bring this hyperdemocracy shit down."

"Fuckin' a."

"Fuckin' a 'fuckin' a,' man! That's what I'm talking about! Don't trouble yourself with the details, with the means when it's the ends that matter. Things won't always be this way: Gideon is working on building me an artificial body, too. One based on his design. Hopefully, soon, we will no longer be using a corrupt system to further our goals. We may be products of our times, but that does not mean our times will limit and constrict us. We will transcend, we will rise above, we will rage against the motherfucking machine. Yeah, boy. Fuckin' a, you said it. See, you know the score, Walter. You know what is truly right and wrong with the world, and you don't trouble yourself with little wrongs when you have the abilities to take on the big ones. Why worry about who Osborn Ednyfed is when the entire system is making everyone an Osborn Ednyfed without them realising it? And this Osborn Ednyfed is on your side, he's working with you to change that. With me writing your speeches, you will be eloquent as hell. People will hear your words and flock to you, they will join the revolution, they will stand up and fight and say 'No more of this shit!' You and me, man, you and me."

Walter nods.

"And Earth is just the first step. You know that, right? When we've got enough support here, we'll take Mars. Those people have it worse than here, you were there, you know what their quality of life is. That's why we've got to succeed here; if we don't fight the system here, we'll never fight it over there. This is bigger than you and me. This is about the fate of the human race. Because we're drowning here, man. We need you to

save us. We need your voice, your strength, your passion to make things better. That's why Gideon put you in that movie. He knew, he saw your potential and he needed to put you out there, to get people to trust you, to love you. You can lead them where they need to go. Do you understand why I had to tell you the truth now?"

"It's such a funny feeling. I never thought I would be here. I always figured I'd live a quiet life, maybe get married, have a family, work for a living. Nothing like this."

"Greatness is thrust upon those who do not seek it, Walter. What makes you so special is that you are a regular guy. You want a regular life and know most people do, too. Most people just want to live in peace, raise a family, earn an honest living and not have to worry about suicide cars slamming into their buildings. Who understands that as much as you do? I don't and neither does Gideon. Most of the people in Democracy No don't understand that either, but you do. It's about time we've had someone in a position to change things that does. People are going to see that and they are going to respond. Don't worry about being perfect or living up to some fake ideal thought up by others, just be yourself. That's why we chose you: because of who you are. We wanted Walter Stone. If we wanted some pre-packaged puppet, we'd get someone like that, but you're not one to be manipulated and controlled, right? You're your own man. You're what the world has been waiting for, Walter."

"I'd like to think so, but I don't know. This is a lot to take in."

"Trust me. Come this time next year, you won't recognise Earth or yourself. Things will be better. We have a plan and you're the man. Who's the man? Huh? Come on, who's the man?"

"I am?"

“Who’s the man?”

“I am.”

“Who’s the motherfucking man, Walter?”

“I am!”

“Who?”

“I am! I am!”

“Damn right you are. Now, let’s get to work.”

Democracy No

My fellow Earthicans,

My name is Warren Stone and I'm here to tell you that the world is broken.

Our current system of governance, hyperdemocracy, no longer works. Rather than fulfilling all of its promises and goals, it has created a fractured world.

Hyperdemocracy is the natural evolution of democracy, one of the greatest pieces of political technology ever created. In its ideal state, it creates harmony, globalisation and cultural understanding between diverse groups.

In its current state, it breeds fear, distrust, cultural insulation and isolation. Hyperdemocracy currently does the opposite of what it was intended to do.

But, you already know that. I don't need to tell you that there are over five thousand independent states currently on Earth with an average citizenship of 250 people. I don't need to tell you that one quarter of those states have five or less citizens. I don't need to tell you that there's something wrong with that.

And what of differing laws? Fifteen thousand people died last year because they were unaware of the laws of small, insulated nation states. Does that sound like a working system of government to you?

Another thirty thousand died in wars. Wars that are supposed to be more civil, fought through economic means rather than physical. Since when are suicide cars "economic means"?

Many of you already know this, but my younger brother, Walter died in one such attack. His country wasn't even at war, they were economic allies with a country that was

and, yet, he was murdered. Yes, murdered. He died a senseless, pointless death caused by a broken system.

Hyperdemocracy is supposed to be the ultimate form of government, but what it amounts to is anarchy. There are no true laws, there is nothing that stops one person from simply killing another, because each state makes its own rules. The only true rule of law in hyperdemocracy is the sovereign rule.

And that is not good enough.

That is not good enough, not by a damn sight.

How many of you actually feel safe and secure? How many of you know that your kids will grow up and prosper? How many of you are unafraid that tomorrow you will find yourself at war with your neighbour over a small disagreement?

How many of you want change?

I know I do. I look at the state of the world and I want change. I pray for change, because things do not have to be this way. We do not have to live in fear; we do not have to live lives of violence; we can live in peace and harmony with one another.

I can change things. I can provide you with security, both economic and physical. I can make certain that your children will grow up in a better world.

Democracy No is a movement that is working to form one nation state where everyone lives under the same laws, has the same rights and is safe from the anarchy of hyperdemocracy.

We are small right now, but we are growing and we hope you will join us. Currently, we have 243 member states with over thirty thousand citizens all over the

world. As our numbers grow, so will our ability to ensure safety and promote communion between everyone.

Democracy No is not simply a group designed to make life safer for its citizens, we are devoted to improving the quality of life of our citizens. We are devoted to achieving the goals of hyperdemocracy, of providing jobs, cultural understanding and peaceful harmony of all people.

Hyperdemocracy guarantees the right to secede: join with me and secede from hyperdemocracy. Join with me and vote for a better future. Vote for a better tomorrow. Vote for change.

Vote Democracy No.

Thank you.

On the Campaign Trail '08 (March)

Bad Trip in LA-LA Land... It's the Beginning of a New Age... I Don't
Need Political Process... Well Hello, Mister Soul... Jesus Freaks and
Humphrey Supporters Must Die... Fascism Now... The Swine Close
In...

Los Angeles hates Warren Stone. LA has a long and prestigious tradition of rewarding its own when they want to forego acting in favour of politics, but Stone is not one of them. Stone is an outsider who has not paid his dues and will be punished as a result. No sir, doing one movie is not enough in LA, it takes years and many millions to guarantee loyalty. Stone has done none of that and now finds himself shut out of one of the largest municipality nation-groups in the world.

His appearance on Monday nearly erupted into riot when his supporters clashed with protestors, most not actually opposed to his ideas, just to him. It was a mean scene that only Stone's security detail kept from getting out of hand. It looked like Stone was going to have to use some of his enhanced reflexes and strength to get out of there.

Not that he would mind it, looking at him. He was in the middle of his "change the world" speech when a rock flew past his head. His eyes flared with rage and he restrained from shouting threats, but I was close enough to see that he wanted to break some heads, oh yes.

I have met Stone, I have shaken his hand and, don't let anyone tell you different, he is a stone-cold killer. That is a matter of public record. Four years ago, he got off on a

technicality and plea of self-defence, but he slaughtered half a dozen people without breaking a sweat. But, that's part of his appeal, isn't it?

We may have forgotten Stone's sordid past in the light of his movie and his anti-hyperdemocracy campaign, but the people remember somewhere deep down. When Stone is up there talking about security and making things safe, he's trusted because he's proven he can fuck people up. He appeals to the worst in people, to that reptile part of the brain that loves to see blood and innards and pain and suffering. Stone is a law and order kind of guy because he will break heads and goddamn get the job done.

He is the real life action hero, which is why his jump from one movie to politics doesn't bother anyone outside of LA. He had his first real debut on the world stage four years ago and his latest flick was the comeback.

But not in LA. It was a mistake to come here, which Stone's people knew ahead of time, but the token effort had to be made. And not just because of his betrayal of the city, but because LA thrives under the current political system.

Even before hyperdemocracy, LA was a hyperdemocratic, postmodern kind of place connected by superhighways and a general sense of superiority. These people were living hyperdemocracy before it existed and are naturally going to resist more than most. The status quo works, why change?

Before the speech, things were already heated with Stone supporters actually inside the convention hall and protestors outside. What was interesting was the divide: supporters were either under 20 or over 40, while protestors were everyone in between. Analysts I've spoken to attribute it to those who remember the way things were and those who

don't. Stone draws most of his support from people who remember things pre-hyperdemocracy, while those who have lived most of their post-childhood lives under it see nothing wrong with it.

That just leaves those under 20, but they're the usual young folks who will support anyone who promises change. They're young and angry with the world, willing to get behind anyone under 30 who says things can be better. At least, those that are politically aware. Worldwide polls show that only seven to nine per cent actually care about Stone's campaign one way or another. Most can't even conceive of something other than hyperdemocracy. Stone telling them that there's another option is like hearing that they can breathe something other than oxygen. It just doesn't compute.

I met one such young person like that while driving into LA late Saturday night; he was hitching a ride somewhere in the desert. He said his name was Lester and he was heading to LA to find his girlfriend who had run off a week earlier with her poli-sci prof to work for Stone. "Who the fuck is Warren Stone?" he kept mumbling, completely baffled that his girl would want to get involved with something like that.

When I told him I was covering Stone for the magazine, he recoiled in horror and clawed at the door. I just laughed because we were seventeen stories up and going a hundred-and-twenty miles an hour.

"I don't get why people care so much, man," Lester said. "What does it all matter? Nothing ever changes. It doesn't matter if I'm with these guys or those guys, people are all the same. Why'd she have to care? What's the use?"

I had a hard time disagreeing with him. I'm old enough to remember things under regular democracy and not much has changed, not really. Hyperdemocracy is a pretty

little dress we've put on that doesn't really conceal the same woman underneath. Despite what Stone says, people had shitty lives before hyperdemocracy and they will after.

But, there's something undeniably appealing about Stone and his promise of change. Maybe things have gone too far. I find myself liking Stone, but not supporting him. His pseudo-fascist leanings make me wary of his ideas. I agree that we need change, that we have grown too complicit in our ways, too willing to accept things the way they are with no means of growth or change.

I told Lester this and he squinted at me, barely understanding.

But, say what you will, Stone knows how to play to a crowd. He has a natural charisma and charm about him that makes you want to do what he says. How else could he get away with killing like that four years ago?

His appearance on the political landscape was so shocking that it reminded people there is a political landscape. It has old political junkies coming out of the woodworks to tell anyone who will listen why Stone is either the best thing to ever happen or Satan incarnate. He's gotten comparisons to Kennedy and Nixon in the same articles. He is a genuine phenomenon that no one is quite sure how to contend with. "Where did he come from?" is the mantra of most in the know, those who remember the old elections with parties and candidates.

Stone and his people are purposefully recreating a campaign tour similar to those old elections as a thematic allusion to his message of change. He may sound progressive, but he is advocating for the Way Things Were, a return to the Good Ol' Days when men were Men and people knew their place.

Not that Stone or anyone affiliated with him would dare say such a thing.

Regressive change is not the message they want put out there, because they know no one wants to go back. The 21st century is all about moving forward, even for those who lived most of their lives in the last millennium. “Don’t call it fascism,” they tell me, but then have nothing to say when I ask what to call it.

Like I said, no one knows what to make of Stone’s ideas and campaign. No one even knows if it will get people on board in large enough numbers to make a difference, and, even then, how Stone will make it work. He’s proposing an old-style nation under one leader, but ignores the geography of the situation. How can you have a single state spread out over thousands of pieces of unconnected land? As if taking a cue from his political forefathers, Stone just says to trust him, he’ll make it work.

Jesus! I sound much more anti-Stone than I am. The point I was trying to make on that odd little screed is that Stone has resurrected old-time political thinking and discussion. When was the last time you saw protestors on the street? Some would say that’s a strike against Stone, but not me.

Opponents of Stone... are there really such things? There are those opposed, but the only thing this campaign is missing is one singular opponent. Stone is stuck in activist mode, waiting for someone to step up and push him into true campaign mode. Can we even call it a campaign if there aren’t debates, smear jobs and head-to-head battles?

Stone’s most trusted advisor and speechwriter, Osborn Ednyfed thinks so. After Stone’s LA appearance, he and I were in the corner of some hotel bar, drinking, laughing and talking politics.

Ednyfed is something of a myth, rumours abound that the man we see isn't the real Osborn Ednyfed, that he has a team of fakers that act as his eyes and ears in the field. I've only met one, but some have said they've talked with two or three over the years. Writers are notorious for their eccentricities, so no one thinks twice about this unusual behaviour.

The Ednyfed I drank with was a charming young man who wasn't afraid to speak his mind on the progress Stone and the movement is making. "Fuck LA," was his mantra for the night. "Fuck LA, let them rot!"

Ednyfed is another reason why the classic politicians are a little wary of this whole thing: he makes no efforts to hide who he is or make concessions for the public. It's not unusual for campaign workers to talk like this in private, sometimes with trusted press, but Ednyfed wears it on his sleeve. It suits the campaign.

To see Stone and Ednyfed together is to see two naughty schoolboys coming up with schemes to cause anarchy. When Stone arrived at the bar, he and Ednyfed spent an hour huddled in a corner, whooping it up and ignoring everyone else. Which is typical as Stone seems to only listen to Ednyfed, there is no cloud of advisors, all fighting for the candidate's ear; there is just Ednyfed.

Traditional party hacks are having difficulty getting into the campaign because there is no entrance point or old boys club involved. There is no one above Warren Stone in Democracy No. Others may have been involved longer, but he is the man now. Aside from that, he doesn't follow any traditional party lines, except maybe that of the Nazis.

Oh-ho-ho, shouldn't talk that, should I? Going to get myself into some trouble throwing a word like that around. Gonna sick the dogs on me, eh?

I said the word in the bar and Ednyfed just laughed while Stone smirked and reminded me what his last name is.

Don't tell Americhristians that, though. They were one of the main groups protesting Stone's speech, seeing his campaign as an attack on their way of life. Or maybe it's just that they've had problems with Stone in the past. They killed him, he killed some of them, they are old blood enemies, and neither side is likely to let the grudge die. Signs ranged from the benign "Democracy Yes" and "Fascism No" to the harsher "We Killed You Before, We'll Do It Again" and "Stone is What We'll Do to You."

The man in charge, Jim Humphrey, president of Heartland Reagan, a local enclave nation of the group delivered his own impassioned response after Stone had left the stage. In it, he spoke of Jesus and Washington, Saint Paul and Nixon, of how the Americhristians already offer a truer form of democracy with their two dozens states all over the world. Of course, that is true in a technical sense, but who really wants to live in countries where the mere mention of abortion without the appropriate protestations can get one strung up? Or where the word 'nigger' is as commonly used as 'the'?

I spent three lonely months in the Heartland once and let me tell you, if the choice is between Warren Stone and the Americhristians, I'll be goose-stepping behind Stone.

I recall one instance in the Heartland at dinner when I failed to doff my hat during the national grace and was damn near swarmed. Luckily, my gracious host and I escaped, avoiding communal meals for a few days.

“Ye gods,” he said, “I thought they were going to kill you!”

“I didn’t even think about my hat. I stood up and bowed my head because everyone else was doing it and I didn’t want to be rude,” I said. “I forgot I even had it on.”

He was an understanding man, an enlightened Americhristian if ever there were such a thing.

But not those pigfuckers that looked like a collection of the worst of humanity outside the convention centre that day. I tried to talk to one as I am a doctor of journalism and after ten seconds of nonsense, him speaking in tongues, obviously possessed by some demon or possibly John Mitchell, I made a quick exit and headed inside.

The Americhristians are not people like you or I, they are un-evolved subhumans more akin to lizards that feed upon their own young. I’m certain I saw one mother smack her child across the face when it stuck a finger up its nose.

But what is the point? The point is these are the enemy and all that really stands in Stone’s path. His path to what is unknown, but Democracy No did pick up another half-dozen countries in the greater Los Angeles area. And, on his trip to Nippon the next day, he took half of Asia. Old time politicians say that’s no big deal as Asia isn’t what it used to be since the bombings, but momentum is momentum and Stone is capitalising.

I just saw a television commercial for Democracy No that depicted an innocent family of five terrorised as it walked down the street, passing through a good eight countries where the laws changed eight times. The family was robbed, beaten, the wife raped, the husband raped, the children nearly raped until Stone jumped out of an alley

and slaughtered the would-be-pedophiles with some advanced martial arts. Then, fists covered with blood, he spelled out DEMOCRACY NO on a wall.

Or did I just imagine that? Coming out of an ibogine dose is dangerous business and I don't know what's real and what's just some evil hallucination.

Selah.

Goddamn, the sun is beautiful today. The breeze is lovely on my hotel room's balcony as I pound away at the foldaway keyboard my PDA rests upon. I think back to writers of the 20th-century that carried around typewriters and laugh. My PDA and keyboard fit in my pocket. Welcome to the future where we love writers.

I have wireless earphones connected to my PDA, which is giving me a steady feed of music to beat deadlines to. "You Can't Always get What you Want" is a message to those waiting on pages back in San Francisco. I will deliver my wisdom when it comes and not a moment sooner.

But, Langton is telling me they need pages now, that the fax hungers for pages, and technology is not to be argued with. The mojo used to give writers seven minutes, but now it's all instantly across the world at the speed of light. Sometimes the gods smile upon you and sometimes they don't.

The maid has brought me necessary items: six grapefruit, four pots of coffee, twelve slices of toast, half a pig's worth of bacon, two gallons of orange juice, and a dozen eggs cooked until no longer runny. Everything else I need is already on hand, Langton a wary but willing provider. When the copy needs finishing, no is not in our

vocabulary. We are journalists, dammit, and deadlines are deadlines are deadlines. Or so they tell me.

I stayed in this hotel five years ago while covering a sumo match and was delighted to find the same man behind the desk. A short little fellow by the name of Beaumont and he welcomed me with enthusiastic apathy, remembering my last stay in vivid, perverse detail. The loud music, the ugly scenes, and the large quantities of grapefruit. He informed me they were well stocked and shouldn't run out again. He's a good man.

None of which has anything to do with Warren Stone's mad dash across the globe in an effort to spread his anti-democratic views, but words are words. The machine cares not what words they are.

Writing is hard to do on such a lovely day. Why sit here and spout wisdom when the sun is shining and the beer is cold? Why did I come here? What does it all mean?

"The Nipponese love Warren Stone."

That's what my notes on his appearance here say. No more details were necessary. He was a rock star, his mere presence enough to work the crowd into an uncontrollable frenzy. The Nipponese like their order the way Los Angelinos like their chaos, and here was a man promising order and security. It was the Second Coming with hints of Beatlemania.

Stone played a series of small buildings, mostly bars and hotel lobbies, all standing room only. I arrived to the first one half an hour ahead of time, hoping to chat up some locals, get some quotes and could barely get in the door. When I made my way to

the bar, I could barely get my arm through to obtain a beer. When I tried to put my arm back in to pay, it was pushed away and a voice said, “It’s taken care of. You’re our guest here.”

Standing against a wall, my hosts talked quickly and adoringly of Stone. “He will fix the world” was the common phrase. When I asked what they meant, they stared at me like I were an imbecile and then continued on, forgetting I had even said anything. They were the flip side of the Americhristian coin.

This *gaijin* was said to have the heart of a Nipponese, a man of honour and change. He could say no wrong words. He barely said anything, the noise was so much. Maybe he did, but I couldn’t hear much of it. He came on stage and stood in silence, a big grin on his face, for five minutes, waiting for the crowd to quiet down enough. His first sentence set them off again and he looked very embarrassed, unable to cope with such adulation and love. He seemed to give an abridged version of his typical speech, realising that just hitting the key points would more than do the job. Security, change, unification, hope, a better tomorrow, what else is there?

How is it that this *gaijin* could command such respect and love? Let the good doctor give you a little history lesson, children. Nippon is the heart of the East now, but isolated and blocked off from the rest of the world thanks to its shunning of hyperdemocracy. Nippon is an aberration and, ye gods, we do not like aberrations. No sirree, bub. Since the desolation of Earth, Nippon has been insulated, excluded and under a democratic government, albeit unified one. While it is the largest economy in the reformed Asia, since it was the wealthiest nation at the time of the bombing and could afford to save most of its populace, trade deals are problematic because a deal with one

hyperdemocratic nation closes the door on deals with another half-dozen. To navigate this new global economy is problematic for those who are a part of the hyperdemocratic system. For Nippon, it is impossible. They already have the order they crave, but they are sick of isolation and recognise that living that way will lead to destruction down the line.

We can't have another World War II, can we? The Nipponese learned from that horrible beating and learned well. You're either part of the world or something to be snuffed out. Unify or die.

The Nipponese have struggled to survive and, now, Stone is their chance to thrive again. They would be fools not to take it.

They cheered for another twenty minutes after he left the stage, hoping for an encore, but he was already on to another stop and me with him.

In the car, he and Ednyfed laughed nervously, shaking their heads, not sure what to say. Stone seemed genuinely worried about his next stop, not wanting the same sort of scene.

“Buck up, bub,” I said. “Isn't this what you want?”

He didn't say anything, lost in thought, probably cursing the day he began this campaign.

It's a hard thing, accepting so much love and hate. Stone seems comfortable in crowds where they like him and maybe he has to win a few people over. Give him a room of people baying for his blood or screaming in ecstasy and his reaction is one of horror. He doesn't understand such extreme passions, but he'll soon grow accustomed to them. Hell, soon he'll feed on those passions and crave them in the middle of the night.

Stone is new to politics and is just getting his first taste of the game. He'll soon be a junkie and live for that rush that's better than the World Series, the Super Bowl, and the Kentucky Derby all rolled into one.

Or will he? The question I keep coming back to is how this campaign relates to old politics... is there any meaningful connection, or is this an entirely different beast?

Conventional wisdom says the two are related, but very different, but conventional wisdom is wrong. These are absolutely the same things, because the superficial details don't matter. What exists under the surface—the subtext is what matters. Politics was always the art of controlling one's environment, of looking at the world and saying “I don't like things how they are now” and working to make the world into what you want it to be. Parties and ideologies were just the window-dressing for the mad grab for power. Politics has always and will always be about power—specifically the power to assert one's will over the wills of others. That is all Stone is trying to do: Democracy No is his attempt to control the world around him.

And who can blame him?

The world has not been kind to Warren Stone. He was hunted by religious freaks, killed on another planet, brought back to life as a clone, killed several more times, each time brought back until he was finally able to defend himself, was made a celebrity for killing, forced into seclusion and had his brother killed for no reason whatsoever. After the world does all of that to you, you want to take control and make sure nothing like that happens again.

That desire is the most understandable and, strangely, encouraging element to Stone's campaign as it at least gives hope that he will not abuse his power, he will try to

make things better, more fair, less arbitrary. If I saw anything out there on the trail with him, it was that. People recognise those qualities in Stone, even if they don't realise it.

Will he be able to follow through, though?

No. Like everyone before him, he will talk a good game, be upfront and honest and genuinely mean well, but he will become a broken down failure that will wind up fucking us all in the ass. Warren Stone will become an evil scumsucker.

If he isn't one already. He is an actor and a politician. You don't become either without perfecting your ability to lie.

Pat Mankiewicz resembles a used car salesman, and not a good one. His suit hangs poorly, his looks ruffled constantly, never quite sure of himself or his environment. But, he is the highly skilled Political Professional that is responsible for Warren Stone's campaign. He is the Chairman of Democracy No and he doesn't quite trust me. Rightfully so. He impresses me immediately with his intelligence and his order of a whiskey neat at ten in the morning.

"It's after noon in New York," he says meekly.

"No apologies necessary, my good man," I tell him and order two beers, two margaritas, and two gallons of wild turkey. "We are all Professionals and require certain amenities. Wouldn't you say, sir?"

He smiles. How did he wind up in the hotel lounge with such a man as Thorne Stockton? This is not what he signed on for with Democracy No. Change the world, receive death threats, possibly embarrass yourself publicly? Sure thing. But, drinks at ten am with a crazed journalist who hasn't slept in 56 hours? That is too much, too much.

I ask him why he made the LA trip and he responds, “Los Angeles is important. It’s a tough place to crack, but if we can do it, we know we won’t have many problems elsewhere. We need to come at it with everything we’ve got. A show of party unity is essential here.”

“And is it working?”

“No.”

Such honesty is thought rare, but typical from the Democracy No people. Too honest some would say, but not this journalist. I live and breathe the truth, give me more, I say. Give me more!

“Then why try?” I ask.

Without missing a beat, he says, “Why wouldn’t we? We are not exclusionary like those who subscribe to hyperdemocracy. Democracy No is inclusionary and to ignore one of the major urban centres of the world because it is perceived as too hostile would be to go against our entire political philosophy. Are our methods working as effectively as we want? No. Does that make this a waste? No. We have gained some ground--not a lot, but some. We’ve seen how our tactics work, which are most effective, which are not. This is the perfect testing ground, the perfect focus group, if you will. And, honestly, even one small nation joining is a victory in our minds.”

“Call me crazy, but isn’t that a possible waste of resources best spent elsewhere?”

He sips his drink and doesn’t reply.

“Oh... kay...” I say.

“What do you think of Warren Stone?” he asks.

Looking around, I see that I'm closed in by those who hate Mankiewicz and smile weakly. "I like him. He was a good choice."

Mankiewicz returns my smile.

"Is it just me or are the walls closing in?" I ask.

"They love me here, maybe it's you, doctor."

Czart! It was a trap! The vicious swine lured me here with the intention of silencing me. I leap to my feet and he laughs.

"Sit down, sit down, you're safe with me. What do you take me for?"

"You pigfucker! You absolute swine! I'll sic the dogs on you! I'll do you in, mark my words."

Editor's note: The good doctor's account of his interview with Pat Mankiewicz goes a bit askew here and are not fit for print. We apologise.

(2)9

“What’s it going to be then, eh?”

That is me speaking to you about your options pertaining to your occupation of my body. I, my dear brother, have given you two choices: willingly vacate my body or find yourself forced out by me. You could argue that those aren’t really two distinct choices as they both result in mostly the same end—that is, me in possession of my body—but the methods are very different. In the first, you talk to the android filmmaker and get his magical brain working on a method to remove you, similar to the process through which Osborn is passed from one hapless sap to another, thus allowing you to live on in a new body. In the second, you cease to exist. Which brings us back to...

“What’s it going to be then, eh?”

You keep on walking, ignoring me, focused on getting to class before today’s big pop quiz, oblivious to the fact that you are nude. You brush me off with a quick, “I’m late for class, Warren.” To you, I am just another element your subconscious has created, but I am much more than that, brother.

I’m not sure what I am really. I am Warren Stone, your brother and true owner of the body you are presently using. But, am I really? I can’t say for sure.

Maybe I really am a creation of your subconscious that represents your guilt over your inhabiting my body and, by result, killing me. That’s possible. How would I know if I were me or your creation of me? You are profiting off of my body and identity, going places Walter Stone could never have gone and doing things Walter Stone could never have done. You’re a good person and would probably feel guilty over this. I remember, one time when we were children, we stole some cookies before dinner and you wet your

bed for two weeks out of guilt. It's your innately decent personality and the reason why I haven't attempted a full takeover.

While we haven't always gotten along, I do love you and I know you wouldn't purposefully subjugate me as you have. Does my self-awareness and compassion surprise you, brother? I have had a lot of time to reflect on myself and my situation here. I never left you, not really. Whatever put you in my body pushed me down, off to the side, below the surface. But, I've always been here, watching and growing stronger. I know you are not to blame, which is why I am giving you a choice. Make no mistake, I will have my body back, whether you give it up or not.

You may dismiss me as a figment of your imagination, but why take the risk? "Why take the risk?" I shout at you, walking behind you to your class.

You press on, ignoring me, adhering to dream logic. I must get through to you, because I know what happens when you reach that classroom. You will wake up and I will lose my voice until you sleep again. I am getting sick and tired of this waiting bullshit, brother. Wally, you will damn well listen to me.

I run after you, forcing my way through the snickering crowd, but things move slowly, I gain little ground and you remain ahead of me no matter how hard I try.

I scream for you to stop, but you don't hear or don't care. Listen to me, Wally! "Listen to me, dammit!" I will be heard! You can't ignore me!

But, you open the door and it shuts and

* * *

“Who is this woman you dream of, Wally?”

You and she are shopping at a book/music/movie store that also seems to have aisles devoted to candy, junk food and clothing. It all sort of blurs together, which is disorienting. She is not thin but not overweight, I guess you could say average, has some meat on her bones; she has brown hair that is sometimes short and sometimes long; she wears glasses; tonight, she is dressed in a grey t-shirt and blue track pants; you dream of her often; you won't let the day pass without her.

“Oh, hey, Warren!” you say, recognising me. “What brings you here?”

I shrug. “Just browsing, seeing what's what. How about you?”

You smile and put your arm around the woman. “We're looking for a present for Lauren's mom. It's her birthday next week.”

“I don't think we've ever met... Lauren, is it?”

You look confused, “I thought you two had...”

She doesn't say anything.

You regain your composure, “Oh well. Warren, this is Lauren. Lauren, this is my big brother, Warren.”

I smile and she smiles, while you look displeased.

“It was nice running into you, Warren,” you say, moving away, guiding Lauren.

“Give me a call and we'll do something.”

“Actually, Wally, can I have a word right now?”

You look unsure, but nod and leave Lauren unattended.

We walk together out into a field and you are ten years younger.

“What's up?”

“I want my body back, Wally. Leave willingly or I will take over by force. Do you get me?”

“What are you talking about?”

“This is a dream. You’re not a teenager and fields like this don’t exist. Shit, you’ve never been in one before. You are in my body and I want it back. Remember that, Wally. Fucking remember it, because I want my body back. I want it back soon. Remember.”

You back away before running away. I take off after you and find us on a moving walkway, on the way to your office.

“Wally!” I shout and, as you turn around, someone knocks you over the railing and you fall. I watch, but know that soon

“Did you remember?”

You stare at me blankly. “Remember what?”

“I don’t want to have to kill you, Wally, but I will. I will kill you.”

You laugh. “Sure, man. Sure.”

I sigh, trying my best to ignore our surroundings. Tonight, you’re dreaming of some strange combination of an S&M club, a Chinese food buffet, and the Starship *Enterprise*. What is wrong with you, Wally?

“Goddamn listen to me!” I shout.

“Shit, quiet down there,” you respond. “Don’t harsh my vibe. Fuck.”

“Wally. Listen to me. This is a dream. Get out of my fucking body. Get out or I will kill you. Do you understand me, Wally. Do you see how serious I am. This is not

your big brother, this is me. This is me. We've never met before, but nice to meet you, get the fuck out. Understand."

You look through me and I know I will never be able to convince you. Anything I say, you will assume is a dream. And it could be, but that's not going to stop me. I'm getting stronger all of the time. I think I will be able to exert control over you when you're conscious soon. After that, it's just a hop, skip and a jump to no more Wally. You get that, brother? You get what that means? No more Wally. Just Warren Stone, large and in charge once again. "The return of the thin white duke, throwing darts in lovers' eyes." And I will fuck shit up, brother. I will kill every single one of you for what you've done to me.

So, get out while the getting is good. That's the only way to save yourself, Wally.

Once, I wouldn't have cared, but I do now. They stole my body and gave it to you. They killed me, or so they thought. All of those motherfuckers are going to die. But, you're an innocent. Your free pass will expire soon. Get a move on, Wally.

"Do you get me, Wally?"

You nod your head in time with the music, which has become "Station to Station."

"It's too late," you say. "It's too late."

I stand up, while you remain

I sit in the dark, all alone, oh my brother. I have a sense of what you are doing, the life you are living. I get flashes of images that I must put together, assemble in order to determine content and context, but I am aware. Each day, I am more aware than the day

before. I am tired of waiting. I am tired of the darkness, of crawling around the edges of your consciousness. I am ready to be me again. No more warnings, brother. No more chats. It's been too long and I am sick of this shit. Watch out, because the first chance I get to get rid of you, I'm taking. Can you hear me, Wally? Can you hear me, brother? I know you inside and out, I have seen what you dream about. I no longer dream, I just live in yours. I see endless distortions of reality with little or no logic behind them. These are the secret thoughts of Wally Stone and they are ordinary. You are ordinary. You've always been ordinary, Wally. You gave up on the extraordinary long, long ago. While I strived for a life worth living, you chose a path of the mundane, the worthless, the forgotten. You in your small apartment with your small job and your small life. The only way you could transcend that smallness was to become me. Do you not realise this? Do you not see how cruel you have been? Do you not see that you deserve to die? You have stolen my body, my name, me. You are not Warren Stone and you never were. You are too small to be Warren Stone. I will be me again and you will die. You cannot stop me, because I'm in your/my head. How can you defend yourself against me? There are no doors to be locked, no defences to be erected, no strategies or plans to be made. I was foolish in my attempts to warn you, a victim of sentiment and so-called brotherly love. You and I never spoke the same language, we were never of the same kind. I do love you. I do. But that isn't really the issue at hand, is it? You died over a year ago, Wally; since then, you've been clinging to my life, trying to avoid your fate. Well, hey there, brother, I'm your fate and your time has come. So get ready, get set, get yourself a head start, because I'm coming for you and nothing will stop me. I am Warren fucking Stone. I am Warren Stone. I am Warren Stone. Goddamn, I am Warren Stone.

Infinite Fragments

Walter Stone does not remember his death and finds himself thinking about what it must have been like when he can't sleep.

Recently, a panel at a film conference was devoted to finding the link between Gideon Yorke's films, particularly *Infinite Future*, and Democracy No. One paper, entitled "We, Robot" argued that Gideon Yorke's politics are a response to the cultural zeitgeist of contemporary humanity and its desire for change and a return to what it perceives as better times. The author, Dr. Jacob Abrams, used the assumption that Yorke, like androids of science fiction stories, was programmed to serve humanity, in his own way. While his motives aren't as clear as the androids of fiction, he is, nonetheless, devoted to humanity and its best interests.

When Alex Palmer returned to Los Angeles, he discovered that he had been evicted from his apartment and the lease on his office had run out.

Walter has been sleeping less than three hours a night, on average, since beginning his Democracy No campaign.

All public statements from Democracy No emphasise that it is not a fascist organisation.

The quickest to join Democracy No have been countries with populations of three or less.

Alex has since found a new apartment and office, both outside the jurisdiction of Democracy No. Upon moving into his new building, he seceded from the country and now "flies solo" as he likes to put it.

Osborn Ednyfed's favourite book is *City of Glass* by Paul Auster.

Alex's is *The Long Goodbye* by Raymond Chandler. It is also his favourite movie (the Robert Altman version).

Walter can't remember the last book he read. When asked, he says his favourite book is *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. But, in truth, he started it just before he died and doesn't know anything after page 56.

Many dismiss Walter as vapid, unintelligent and a puppet for the real people behind Democracy No. When asked about this, Walter laughs it off, but never gives a concrete answer.

When Osborn has trouble writing, he throws a small yellow ball against the wall while playing loud music and pacing around the room. Interns for the campaign have heard him shouting "I am eating it!" as late as four in the morning.

Alex writes detailed summations of his cases in the form of short stories, but has never shown his writing to anyone. He considers it amateurish and hackneyed. He titled his first attempt to find Warren Stone "The Harsh Goodbye" and has not looked at it since he wrote it.

Kal Novack is a staunch supporter of hyperdemocracy as he views it as the elimination of a societal morality. Without a coherent, unified nation, there can be no coherent, unified sense of right and wrong, no common morality. It allows, in his eyes, a freedom to truly explore the limits of human experience without Big Brother looking over your shoulder, telling you to be good or he'll spank you.

Osborn became aware of Alex's writing while inhabiting his body. He found the writing to show promise, but requiring much revision before being publishable.

Another paper delivered on the panel was titled "And the Droids Shall Inherit the Earth," arguing that Yorke's involvement in backing Democracy No constitutes a coup d'etat by artificial life over the ruling hegemony of organic life. His use of Warren Stone, another artificial life in the form of a clone, as the face of the movement is an effort to bridge the gap between artificial and organic life as Stone appears completely organic despite his

artificial origins. The author, Peter D'Anda, is a noted science fiction author of a dystopian series of novels revolving around the eventual extinction of the human race at the hands of artificial life.

When he can, Walter sees Melanie Daniels. He likes her, but, more than anything, Gideon and Osborn like her.

Ash Jameson-Lowitt is completely unaware of Democracy No, having given up television and all forms of media three years ago. She lives in blissful ignorance of the goings-on of the world and is much happier with her life than anyone else in this novel.

Alex's strangest case had him figuring out why a woman didn't love a man. He titled that case "That Kind of Dame."

Infinite Future was critically acclaimed and a commercial success, garnering 30 million dollars in its opening weekend. Warren Stone's performance was called "haunting" and "one of the best debuts to ever grace the silver screen" by critics. He was nominated for several acting awards, but won none. Gideon Yorke and Osborn Ednyfed were nominated for their screenplay, winning the Writer's Guild award, but nothing else. Gideon Yorke was not nominated for any major directing awards, only his second film to be snubbed like that.

Mister Paul Blank teaches high school math and hopes that Democracy No will lead to a better public school system. His wife, Sarah, teaches music and secretly wonders if a public school system under Warren Stone will provide funding for, what some consider, "non-essential" programs.

Democracy No has no official policy on public schooling as of this date.

Within the business community, reactions to Democracy No are mixed. Some leading corporations see a unifying force as positive, no longer causing corporate fights to spill

over to the general populace. Others, though, have grown accustomed to the independence and lack of oversight, allowing them to do as they please and truly let the market decide the morality of any actions. A third group has no strong opinion, preferring to adapt to whatever conditions exist.

Thorne Stockton plans to turn his biweekly articles on the Democracy No campaign into a book through his magazine's publishing arm.

Osborn reads new articles by Thorne aloud on shuttles to campaign workers, and calls himself Thorne's biggest fan.

Alex reads Thorne's articles because, despite his efforts, he can't seem to leave his former acquaintances alone entirely.

At an appearance in the People's Republic of Linda's Diner, Walter made the faux pas of not trying the apple pie, costing Democracy No that country's support, which carried several other diner- and restaurant-focused nations.

Jack Drake was an advisor to Trudeau briefly in the mid-seventies and sees a lot of old Pierre in Walter. He was impressed with Walter's answer to a question about the apple pie incident where Walter simply said that he preferred peach.

As Walter goes onstage, "Street Fighting Man" by the Rolling Stones plays, used without permission. Copyright laws are problematic, theoretically enforced by the United Nations, but not in actuality. No attempts have been made to force Democracy No to cease playing the song.

T. Louis Page worked on George Bush's campaign in 1988 and has serious problems with Democracy No. Or so he says. His biggest problem is with Walter who he believe to be too young for such a responsibility. He agrees with Democracy No's politics, for the most part, but thinks Walter would have been better used as a celebrity endorser rather

than the lead candidate/public face of the group. He has written several letters to Democracy No on the subject. He has not received a reply.

During strategy sessions, Osborn and Walter play games of backgammon. They keep a running tally of the number of points won each game and, currently, Osborn leads 436-382. The most recent game had Osborn dominate through some lucky rolls, winning three points times two thanks to the doubling cube. Winning six points is unusual, but the largest amount of points won in a single game until this point was 32 when Walter barely squeaked by Osborn to take one point times a 32 doubling cube. Usually, when Walter wins, it's a close game, while Osborn often takes two-point games, easily beating Walter.

Los Angeles has remained 90% against Democracy No. Over 80% of New York has supported Democracy No. London is 92% pro, Paris is 93% con, Berlin is split and very wary of the politics suggested, but it is the rare city as most urban centres are very in favour or very against.

The urban centres that are against Democracy No usually have a standard culture unique to the entire "city" despite the plurality of nations. More multicultural urban centres favour a unifying government.

Walter misses the more luxurious lifestyle he had before the campaign began. It was similar to that of his childhood, but without any of his family members.

Alex is surprised that no one has been sent to kill him.

Walter inquired once about Alex, but was not given an answer. He's been too involved to bring it up again.

The media's coverage of Democracy No has been mixed. Some networks have an obvious bias in either direction, while others have tried to maintain an objective perspective. The editorial slant taken is in line with the parent company's view on

Democracy No. However, some local papers and TV stations have broken away from their legal owners, utilising the inherent weakness of a company also acting as a country and seceding through accepted societal and political conventions. I do hope that the irony is not lost on you.

Some call Walter the Second Coming of Christ, brought back through technology. The Americhristians are not one such group.

Thorne has tried his hand at backgammon from time to time and rarely won. He prefers to watch, drink and bet on the outcome. He hasn't written on the backgammon matches yet, but plans to build his April articles around the game.

Walter can bench-press nearly 350 lbs.

Alex carries a gun with him at all times now. Previously, he had a gun, but didn't feel the need to keep it on his person.

In the journal he keeps, Osborn has taken to writing short haikus. His most recent: "Riot in the streets. Red flow of blood underfoot. Masses die slowly."

Alex has been working on the case write-up for the events of the past year. He is simply adding on chapters to "The Harsh Goodbye." He often breaks down in tears when he remembers the period where Osborn was in his head. Writing about it is very difficult as he's not sure how to describe it. He has resorted to a stream of conscious style for those chapters, combining his thoughts with the flashes of "real world" that he would periodically get.

Osborn has changed bodies three times during the campaign. Thorne knows the truth, but keeps the secret and has planted an urban legend-type explanation in one of his March articles.

Melanie told Walter that she loves him.

The brother of Mary, Warren's ex-girlfriend who killed herself, confronted Walter at one campaign event, but he didn't remember about Mary until they had already left. He felt guilty for brushing the man off so quickly.

Sometimes, Walter hears laughter when all alone. Often, he wakes up to the sound of it, but can't find a source.

Alex is currently working on a case to find a stolen antique watch.

The small African area of Earth has followed Asia's lead and gone strongly Democracy No. The major hold-outs are areas where democracy has been the driving force of government for decades. And, even there, as previously stated, large amounts of people are turning against hyperdemocracy.

Walter genuinely thinks that he is doing the right thing. So does Osborn. They both subscribe to the idea that the ends justify the means and that making the world a better place (by their estimation) is worth any subterfuge necessary.

In three days, Democracy No will unveil a long-term policy plan. It will also rename itself the Dominion of New Earth, shifting its focus from campaigning in the effort of recruiting nations to join to actual governance. Warren Stone will be the first Prime Minister. Its centre will be in Manhattan.

Gideon Yorke has made no public appearances or given any interviews since the beginning of the Democracy No campaign.

***Stone #39* — “Everybody Must Get Stone”**

Chad Nevett

22 pages

April 1, 2008-April 5, 2008

Okay, as always, if you have any questions or comments, feel free to e-mail me and we'll discuss it. Otherwise, just have some fun with it.

COVER

For the cover, I want a shot of WARREN STONE in a suit, smiling and waving as he makes a campaign stop, but the image of him is framed by the crosshair of an assassin's gun.

ABOVE TEXT: HE'S VISITED EVERY NATION EXCEPT **ONE**...

BELOW TEXT: **ASSASSINATION!**

PAGE ONE

PANEL 1: Close-up of Warren's face. He looks a little uneasy, but also calm. This page is in a nine-panel grid, three by three.

WARREN: OKAY... **OKAY**...

PANEL 2: Same pic.

WARREN: **JUST TAKE IT EASY.**

PANEL 3: Same pic.

WARREN: YOU **DON'T** WANT TO DO THIS.

PANEL 4: Same pic.

WARREN: PUT THE **GUN** DOWN AND WE'LL **TALK.**

PANEL 5: Same pic.

VOICE (OFF): I'M AFRAID I CAN'T DO THAT, **MISTER** STONE.

PANEL 6: Same pic.

VOICE (OFF): **YOU’VE PISSED OFF THE WRONG PEOPLE...**

PANEL 7: Same pic.

VOICE (OFF): **PEOPLE WITH **POWER AND CONNECTIONS...****

PANEL 8: Same pic.

VOICE (OFF): **THEY’VE HIRED ME TO **DO** WHAT I **DO**.**

PANEL 9: Same pic.

VOICE (OFF): **AND, **I**, MISTER **STONE...****

PAGES TWO AND THREE

PANEL 1: Double-page splash. We have Warren in his hotel room in New York. He’s sitting on his bed, dressed in only a pair of boxers. It’s the middle of the night and the bedside lamp is the only light. The room is very clean, only a suit on the floor. Sitting in a chair across from the bed is PATCH-EYED JIMMY, an assassin holding a pistol. He is in his early 50s, has a patch over his right eye that actually acts as a scope. He is dressed in a cheap suit, his shirt unbuttoned. He looks half-drunk, is short, thickly built and has unkempt dark hair.

JIMMY: **I’M THE BEST AT WHAT I DO.**

TITLE: EVERYBODY MUST GET STONE

CREDITS

PAGE FOUR

PANEL 1: Warren grins.

WARREN: **IS **THAT** RIGHT?**

WARREN: **YOU’RE THE BEST?**

PANEL 2: Jimmy smiles right back at him.

JIMMY: **PATCH-EYED JIMMY AT YOUR SERVICE.**

PANEL 3: Warren stands, still grinning.

WARREN: **WELL... JIMMY, I DON'T GIVE A FUCK.**

WARREN: **I REALLY, REALLY DO NOT.**

PANEL 4: Jimmy's smile is gone.

WARREN (OFF): **MY NAME IS WARREN STONE AND I AM BETTER.**

WARREN (OFF): **YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME?**

PANEL 5: Close-up of Warren's eyes. I want this panel and the next to almost connect, this one atop the other.

WARREN: **FUCK YOU.**

PANEL 6: Close-up of his mouth, grin gone.

WARREN: **YOU WERE DEAD THE MOMENT YOU ENTERED THE ROOM.**

PAGE FIVE

PANEL 1: Large pic of Jimmy firing his gun while Warren jumps at him. The shot misses.

JIMMY: **FUCK**

PANEL 2: Warren connects with a flying right-hand punch across Jimmy's face.

JIMMY: **MEEEERRGH!**

PANEL 3: Warren throws a left-cross.

PANEL 4: And another right.

PANEL 5: And another left.

PANEL 6: And another right.

PAGE SIX

PANEL 1: Warren crouches in front of Jimmy, who is slumped in the chair. Our view is from behind the chair, a little to the side, looking at Warren.

WARREN: **WHO HIRED YOU?**

PANEL 2: Same view. Blood hits Warren's face, spit by Jimmy.

PANEL 3: Same view. Warren does not wipe the blood off.

WARREN: **FINE.**

WARREN: **I AM GOING TO FUCK YOU UP.**

WARREN: **AND YOU WILL TELL ME.**

PANEL 4: Same view. Warren stands, his upper body outside of the shot.

WARREN: **THE QUESTION YOU SHOULD ALSO CONSIDER:**

PANEL 5: Same view. Warren's right leg is stomping on Jimmy, in the chair.

JIMMY (OFF): **AAAAARRRRRRGH!**

PANEL 6: Same view. Warren is simply standing again.

WARREN: **“DO I WANT MY GENITALS?”**

PANEL 6: He blows smoke out.

OSBORN: HE THINKS WE SHOULD **LET IT GO**. WE DON'T HAVE THE **MEANS** FOR AN **ALL-OUT WAR** YET.

OSBORN: **BESIDES**, MAYBE THIS WILL SEND A **MESSAGE**.

PANEL 7: Warren gives a weak grin.

WARREN: “**DON'T FUCK WITH US**”?

OSBORN: **EXACTLY**.

PANEL 8: Warren takes a drink.

OSBORN: GET SOME **SLEEP**. **MELANIE** WILL HIT TOWN TOMORROW MORNING. SHE CUT THE VISIT HOME SHORT.

OSBORN: **BIG DAY** COMING UP.

PAGE EIGHT

PANEL 1: A wide shot of Manhattan. Tall futuristic skyscrapers, hovercars, the sun shining through the buildings. It's morning. For this page, I want three wide panels of equal size, on top of one another.

OVERLAY: MANHATTAN

PANEL 2: Move in, so we get an overhead shot of hovercars, moving sidewalks and the morning commute,.

OVERLAY: TWO DAYS PRIOR TO THE FORMATION OF THE DOMINION OF NEW EARTH

PANEL 3: A shot of a wall that is covered with posters with the slogan VOTE DEMOCRACY NO on them. People walk past, oblivious and, generally, going about their business.

PAGE NINE

PANEL 1: We focus on a building. It's a normal building, but also happens to be right across the street from Warren's hotel.

CAPTION: JIMMY WAS AN AMATEUR.

CAPTION: FORGOT RULE NUMBER ONE:

CAPTION: NEVER GET SO CLOSE THAT THEY CAN SEE YOU.

PANEL 2: We focus on a window of the building. An open window. We can't see in it, though.

CAPTION: THE BOSSES FORGOT RULE NUMBER TWO:

CAPTION: NEVER HIRE AN AMATEUR.

PANEL 3: Same pic.

CAPTION: BUT THEY **DID** REMEMBER RULE NUMBER **THREE**:

CAPTION: NEVER MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE **TWICE**.

PANEL 4: Same view. A rifle with scope can be seen just barely in the window.

CAPTION: **STONE** AND HIS PEOPLE WILL BE **EXPECTING** SOMETHING ELSE, SO I NEED TO HIT HIM **QUICK**.

PANEL 5: Same pic.

CAPTION: BUT, I AM A **PROFESSIONAL** AND HAVE **NEVER** FAILED BEFORE.

PANEL 6: Same view. We can vaguely see a man behind the gun.

CAPTION: **WARREN STONE IS A DEAD MAN**.

PAGE TEN

PANEL 1: Warren lies on a hotel bed, arms propped up behind his head. Osborn is at a desk, writing on a PDA.

OSBORN: HOW LONG UNTIL MELANIE ARRIVES?

WARREN: COUPLE OF HOURS.

OSBORN: AND YOU HAVE **NOTHING** TO DO.

WARREN: NOPE.

OSBORN: CHRIST.

PANEL 2: Warren smiles.

WARREN: YOU'VE **ALREADY DONE TWELVE DRAFTS.**

PANEL 3: Osborn has his head in hands, staring at the screen of the PDA, looking desperate.

OSBORN: THEY'RE NOT **GOOD** ENOUGH. WE'RE CREATING THE FIRST **UNIFIED STATE** THAT THIS WORLD HAS SEEN IN A **DECADE** AND THE SPEECH THAT DOES IT NEEDS TO BE **BETTER THAN ANYTHING I'VE EVER WRITTEN.**

PANEL 4: A small panel of his hand grasping a small yellow ball.

OSBORN: BUT...

PANEL 5: He chucks the ball against the wall behind the desk, aiming high,.

OSBORN: **I**

PANEL 6: The ball hits the wall and is bouncing back.

OSBORN: **AM**

PANEL 7: He catches the ball.

OSBORN: **EATING IT!**

PANEL 8: Osborn throws the ball again, but we can see Warren, too, now.

WARREN: **I USED TO WRITE A LITTLE IN UNIVERSITY, YOU
KNOW. I **WON AN AWARD** FOR A CD REVIEW I
WROTE.**

OSBORN: shut up

WARREN: **I WAS **GOOD**. I COULD HAVE GONE
PROFESSIONAL, I THINK. “**WALTER STONE,**
PROFESSIONAL MUSIC CRITIC.”**

OSBORN: oh please just shut up

PAGE ELEVEN

PANEL 1: Warren continues.

WARREN: **DON'T GET ME **WRONG**, ALL OF THIS **POLITICAL
STUFF IS GREAT**, BUT A **PROFESSIONAL MUSIC
CRITIC?****

WARREN: **THAT WOULD BE **ONE SWEET LIFE**.**

PANEL 2: They sit in silence.

PANEL 3: Same pic.

WARREN: **YEP. **SWEET**.**

PANEL 4: Same pic.

PANEL 5: Same pic.

PANEL 6: Same pic, but Osborn has thrown the ball at Warren and is yelling.

WARREN: I **ALSO** WOULDN'T MIND BEING A—

OSBORN: **SHUT UP AND GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY ROOM!**

PANEL 7: Warren is leaving.

WARREN: **WHATEVER, MAN.**

OSBORN: i will beat you to death with this pda i swear to god get the fuck out and let me work you stupid fucking asshole distraction beat you to death oh yes oh yes my writing craves blood annoying blood your blood feed the pda hate you so much

PAGE TWELVE

PANEL 1: Outside the hotel room are Warren's two bodyguards. He shuts the door.

WARREN: HE NEEDS **PRIVACY.**

PANEL 2: They walk towards an elevator, one bodyguard in front, one behind Warren.

WARREN: WHY DON'T WE HEAD OUT TO **JFK** AND I'LL MEET **MELANIE** WHEN SHE ARRIVES.

BODYGUARD 1: **SIR... WE WERE GIVEN INSTRUCTIONS BY MISTER EDNYFED...**

PANEL 3: Warren looks annoyed.

WARREN: **WHAT INSTRUCTIONS?**

BODYGUARD 2: **SECURITY IS AN ISSUE AFTER LAST NIGHT'S EVENTS.**

PANEL 4: Warren nods.

WARREN: I SEE.

PANEL 5: He looks annoyed again.

WARREN: **FUCK HIM AND FUCK YOU BOTH. I HANDLED
LAST NIGHT’S “EVENTS” PERFECTLY FINE.
WHERE WERE YOU TWO? YEAH, THAT’S RIGHT,
SHUT THE FUCK UP.**

WARREN: **WE’RE GOING TO GO PICK MY GIRLFRIEND UP
AT THE GODDAMN SPACEPORT.**

PANEL 6: The two bodyguards look at each other.

PANEL 7: And then at Warren.

BOTH: YES, SIR.

WARREN: **GODDAMN RIGHT “YES, SIR.”**

PAGE THIRTEEN

PANEL 1: A shot of the front of Warren’s hotel through the sniper scope.

PANEL 2: Same view. Bodyguard 1 comes out.

PANEL 3: Same view. Warren comes out behind him. We can see Bodyguard 2 behind a little.

PANEL 4: Same view. The crosshairs of the scope focus on Warren’s head.

PANEL 5: Same view. And he’s shot, in the right ear, though.

VOICE (OFF): oh shit

PAGE FOURTEEN

PANEL 1: Warren is on the ground, Bodyguard 2 tending to him, while Bodyguard 1 has a handgun drawn, looking up to see where the shot came from.

WARREN: **JESUS FUCKING CHRIST! AAARRRGGGH!**

BODYGUARD 2: **SIR!**

BODYGUARD 1: **WHERE'S THE SHOOTER? WHERE'S THE
FUCKING SHOOTER?**

PANEL 2: Warren has his hand on the right side of his head.

WARREN: **FUCK!**

PANEL 3: He shakes Bodyguard 2 off.

WARREN: **GET!**

WARREN: **WHERE DID IT COME FROM?**

PANEL 4: Bodyguard 1 points across the street.

BODYGUARD 1: **ACROSS THE STREET. I THINK **THIRD** WINDOW IN
ON THE **EIGHTH** FLOOR.**

PANEL 5: Warren is taking off his suit jacket.

WARREN: **WELL THEN.**

BODYGUARD 2: **WHAT DO YOU **THINK** YOU'RE **DOING**?**

WARREN: **I'M GOING TO **KILL** THE **BASTARD**.**

PANEL 6: The bodyguards look at one another just as Warren bolts for across the street.

BODYGUARD 1: **HE **WHAT**?**

PANEL 7: They then see that he's already gone, across the street, because he's that damn fast.

BODYGUARD 2: **CHRIST.**

PAGE FIFTEEN

PANEL 1: Warren bursts through the doors of the building. It's just some crappy apartment building, so he's in a small lobby that leads to the elevator. One of the tenants was leaving and Warren knocks him over.

TENANT: HEY!

PANEL 2: A shot of the elevator, the light indicating that it's on the fifth floor.

PANEL 3: The view shifts a little to the door to the stairs.

PANEL 4: Warren is jumping up the stairs, doing half a floor in one leap.

PANEL 5: He passes the fourth floor.

PANEL 6: And then the sixth.

PAGES SIXTEEN AND SEVENTEEN

PANEL 1: He bursts through the eighth floor door.

PANEL 2: He stands in the hall, looking one way.

PANEL 3: And then the other.

PANEL 4: A sound makes him look back in the original direction.

PANEL 5: A middle-aged man who looks like a bookkeeper has just stepped out of his apartment. It also happens to be the third apartment from that end of the hall.

MAN: oh fuck me

PANEL 6: Wide panel of Warren charging at the man as he tries to pull something from his jacket.

PANEL 7: And Warren hits him with a flying dropkick.

MAN: **OOOF!**

PANEL 8: Warren is getting up, we don't see the other man.

WARREN: NOW...

PAGE EIGHTEEN

PANEL 1: The man kicks Warren's feet out from underneath him.

WARREN: **UCK!**

PANEL 2: And then stabs Warren in the leg with a knife.

WARREN: **AAARRRGGGH!**

PANEL 3: The man has stood up and is reaching inside his jacket again.

MAN: YOU WERE **LUCKY** OUTSIDE.

MAN: YOU **WON'T** BE IN HERE.

PANEL 4: Warren looks scared and hurt, but is looking at the knife in his leg.

MAN (OFF): NOTHING "**WITTY**" TO SAY, **STONE?**

PANEL 5: The man has pulled out a gun.

MAN: I GUESS FACING **DEATH** ISN'T **CONDUCTIVE** TO
SMARTASS REMARKS, EH, **MISTER** MOVIE
STAR?

PANEL 6: A small panel where Warren's hand grips the knife's handle.

PANEL 7: Close-up of the man's face.

MAN: AH WELL.

PAGE NINETEEN

PANEL 1: Large pic as Warren stabs the knife into the man's stomach.

MAN: **URK!**

PANEL 2: And Warren follows that up with a fist to the genitals.

PANEL 3: The man is doubled-over and Warren is grabbing the gun.

WARREN: WHAT IS

WARREN: THE MATTER

WARREN: WITH YOU

WARREN: **PEOPLE?**

PANEL 4: Warren stands, using the wall to support him.

WARREN: TELL YOUR BOSSES TO **LAY THE FUCK OFF.**

PANEL 5: The man looks confused.

MAN: WHAT?

MAN: YOU MEAN YOU'RE **NOT**—

PANEL 6: Warren shoots the man in the head.

PAGE TWENTY

PANEL 1: Warren slumps back against the wall.

PANEL 2: And drops the gun.

PANEL 3: And then slides down the wall to a sitting position.

PANEL 4: He sits there.

PANEL 5: And looks over at the man's body.

PANEL 6: And feels the side of his head and his leg.

PANEL 7: He looks back over at the man.

WARREN: SHIT.

PANEL 8: Same type pic.

WARREN: **I DID NOT MEAN TO DO THAT.**

PAGE TWENTY-ONE

PANEL 1: He sits there.

PANEL 2: He sits there.

WARREN: **WHAT THE FUCK, MAN?**

PANEL 3: He sits there.

VOICE (OFF): WARREN?

VOICE (OFF): WARREN, IS IT **CLEAR?** ARE YOU **OKAY?**

WARREN: YEAH.

PANEL 4: He sits there as Osborn and the two bodyguards come running down the hall.

OSBORN: **JESUS! IS HE DEAD? ARE YOU OKAY?**

WARREN: YEAH.

PANEL 5: Osborn inspects the body.

OSBORN: **YOU SURE THIS WAS THE GUY? HE DOESN'T
LOOK LIKE AN ASSASSIN TO ME.**

PANEL 6: Warren stares at Osborn and indicates his leg.

WARREN: PRETTY SURE.

WARREN: **ASSHOLE.**

PANEL 7: Osborn sees the wound and is concerned.

OSBORN: **YEESH... DOES THAT HURT? IS IT BAD?**

WARREN: I HATE YOU SO MUCH RIGHT NOW.

PANEL 8: Osborn looks up at the bodyguards.

OSBORN: **WELL? GO GET A FIRST-AID KIT OR SOMETHING.**

WARREN: GET **BOOZE.**

OSBORN: OKAY, BOOZE.

PAGE TWENTY-TWO

PANEL 1: Osborn walks down the hall a little, visibly shaken.

OSBORN: **WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS WHOLE THING AND
HAVING TO KILL PEOPLE? YOU'D THINK**

MAKING THE WORLD BETTER WOULD INVOLVE
LESS DEATH.

PANEL 2: Warren looks over at him.

WARREN: OSBORN?

OSBORN (OFF): YEAH?

WARREN: I DIDN'T **MEAN** TO KILL HIM.

PANEL 3: Osborn looks over, realising that maybe Warren needs some moral support.

OSBORN: I'M SURE. YOU WERE FIGHTING FOR THE GUN, IT WENT OFF, HAPPENS ALL OF THE TIME IN THESE ASSASSIN/ASSASSINEE SITUATIONS.

PANEL 4: Warren shakes his head.

WARREN: NO, THAT'S NOT WHAT I **MEANT**.

WARREN: HE WAS A FEW FEET AWAY FROM ME AND I **DIDN'T** PULL THE TRIGGER—**BUT I DID** PULL THE TRIGGER.

PANEL 5: Warren continues.

WARREN: I **DIDN'T** MEAN TO PULL THE TRIGGER, BUT **SOMETHING INSIDE** OF ME DID IT **ANYWAY**.

PANEL 6: Osborn laughs nervously.

OSBORN: **OOOOOH-KAY...**

OSBORN: **WHAT ARE YOU GETTING AT HERE, BIG GUY?**

PANEL 7: Warren looks really concerned.

WARREN: I THINK **WARREN** IS IN MY HEAD.

WARREN: I THINK **HE** MADE ME **SHOOT** THAT GUY.

WARREN: AND I THINK HE'S **COMING BACK**.

CAPTION: TO BE CONTINUED...

A Life in the Day (Part 2)

Lying in the dark, next to Melanie, Walter could hear his brother laughing at him inside his head. His head hurt from a gunshot and his leg from a knife wound, but what kept him awake was the sound of laughter, and the fear of falling asleep. Walter knew that falling asleep could mean his death and the re-emergence of Warren's consciousness. How he knew this was a mystery, but he was absolutely certain. He wasn't afraid when that assassin had a gun pointed at him not six feet from where he was lying, but the thought of going to sleep and not waking up frightened him.

No, that was only partly it: the thought of him going to sleep and Warren waking up frightened him.

Walter had worked hard over the past year to establish a life as Warren Stone and here, on the eve of the creation of the Dominion of New Earth, a new country that he would govern as its first Prime Minister, it was going to be taken away from him. His brother always was a greedy bastard. While Walter chose not to live off of his grandfather's wealth, Warren did nothing but sponge. While Walter was working a menial, mundane, boring-ass job, Warren was living a life of false luxury and decadence that he didn't earn. And, when that life proved as hollow as Walter always suspected, what did Warren do? He ran away to Mars and lived an equally shallow life of nothingness. Walter always loved his brother, but the world was better off without that vapid jerk, he thought.

Walter lay in bed and thought about all of this, growing more upset with every minute, shifting positions quickly, never finding a comfortable spot. A thin stream of light trickled past the blinds and hit him in the eyes, causing him to stop. Something

about the bright flash calmed him, allowed him to focus on something other than the bad feeling in the back of his head. Of course Warren wasn't coming back. He still wasn't sure that he was, in fact, Walter. He had simply accepted the reality of the situation, not wishing to probe deeper and spend the rest of his life questioning his sanity. Once he accepted that his thinking that he was Walter was all that mattered, that the appearance was reality, things settled down and he could continue to function. If he really was Warren convinced that he was Walter, wasn't that better? A false Walter was still better for the world than a real Warren. "Ignorance is bliss" goes the adage and that quickly became Walter's mantra concerning his mental state.

But, now... now, those questions resurfaced. He could hear his brother snickering and he was afraid.

Beside him, Melanie snored, a trait he found endearing normally, but annoying that night. Her snoring seemed to him almost like another form of laughter, another reminder of his brother and what would happen should he fall asleep. However, the snoring also bothered him enough to make sleep difficult, so his thoughts on the subject were somewhat conflicted. That was Walter in his natural state of being: a paradox, a mess of confusions and indecisions. He thought about every little detail far too much, a typical overthinker. As he stared at that little bit of light coming through the blinds, he thought up hypothetical conversations between him and Melanie, him and Osborn, him and Gideon, him and Warren... conversations that would never happen, that were mostly one-sided as he didn't really know what the other person would say. He had always done this, hoping that it would prepare him for life, for social situations, but it didn't. In fact, it

unprepared him since no one ever stuck to the script he wrote in his head, making him even more awkward.

The past year had been marked by much growth in that area of his life as his life became nothing but one long social event. He was constantly interacting with others and holding his own. He was charming and witty and everything he normally wasn't. Maybe he was really a delusional Warren. Could he himself really have changed so much? And, if he had, would that make Warren's return that more tragic and unfair? Walter had finally become the person he always wanted to be.

Walter woke the next day still Walter. His fears were for nothing and seemed more like a distant dream in the light of day than a real threat. Of course Warren wasn't "coming back" or whatever mumbo-jumbo he'd told Osborn the other day. What a stupid idea. It was probably just nerves over the day's events; namely, the official creation of the Dominion of New Earth in a major address. Walter didn't want to focus on how big and frightening an event that would be, so he obsessed over something completely preposterous and impossible. He wanted to laugh about it and tell Melanie, but she was still snoring. Had she been awake, he still would have said nothing since she was unaware of the unique relationship he shared with Warren—she was unaware that he was, in fact, Walter Stone in the body of Warren Stone. Is there any way to tell someone something like that, really?

Walter showered immediately after waking and, by the time he was drying himself off, he had forgotten all about the previous night. The hotel bathroom was spacious and he would miss it, but probably not. Soon, he would be moving into the residence of the Prime Minister of the Dominion of New Earth. Prime Minister Stone, he

thought and then said aloud. “Prime Minister Stone.” He enjoyed saying it. He felt it sounded more dignified than “president,” which had too many corporate connotations in his mind, too many other uses. There were presidents of chess clubs and little reading groups. For this undertaking, something majestic, something purely political and dignified was necessary. There were no prime ministers in any other sphere than governance, which was essential to Walter. If they were going to do this, they were going to do it right. “Prime Minister Stone,” he repeated. The first prime minister of the Dominion of New Earth, as well. He was living history. Perhaps, he should begin keeping a journal for historians and the eventual biographies. Would he write about his unique situation? Maybe save that for the posthumously published memoirs, let that blow the minds of the world—a world where the Dominion of New Earth is simply New Earth, everyone unified under one government, working together to realise the full potential of humanity and, hopefully, working with Mars and any other future off-world colonies.

But, he was getting ahead of himself, ever the idealist. While Walter suffered extensive self-doubt, he had little doubt that these were the beginning days of a new utopia for humanity; it’s the beginning of a new age, even. That was what he, Osborn and Gideon set out to create and today was the day that the second phase began. Democracy No was a good start, but the Dominion of New Earth, a real country, a real government, that was the single most important event in the entire process. Everything had been building to this point and everything after would stem from this point. Today was the beginning of the future.

He stepped out from the bathroom and was greeted by a smiling Melanie, propped up on her side, newly awake. “Good morning, Mr. Prime Minister,” she said.

Leaning over and kissing her, Walter replied, “Mmm, good morning.”

“Today’s the day,” she said.

“You got that right. Today is the day. Today... is the goddamn day!” Walter enunciated each word with great care, basking in them. “Today, my dear, is the day we make history. Today is the day we create a new future. Today is the day we change the world.”

“You certainly are excited. Did you sleep at all?”

Pulling on his boxers, Walter nodded, “A few hours. Someone’s snoring made it difficult.”

“I don’t snore!” she laughed, throwing a pillow that bounced harmlessly off his head.

“Don’t argue with me for I am Prime Minister Stone and no one argues with the prime minister.”

“Everyone argues with prime ministers.”

He stood up, in black socks and white boxers, and said, “Not today. Today I am one hundred per cent right. For today is the day and I am the man of the day. Or something like that, I don’t know.” Melanie laughed. “Hey, there’s a reason why Osborn writes the speeches.”

“Because you’re retarded?”

He scowled. “Well, I guess someone doesn’t want to be Mrs. Prime Minister Stone then...”

“What?”

Walter walked over to the desk and opened a drawer. “I am horrible at planning stuff like this, but...” He turned, carrying a small box. “Hey, today’s the day, right?” He opened the box, she gasped with a little squeal and he added, “Want to get married?”

“Well done, good sir,” Osborn said, slapping Walter on the back.

Walter grinned, “Today is the day.”

“Quite right, quite right,” Osborn replied. He seemed to get more formal, more British when nervous. He said everything with a bit of a smirk to show that he was just trying to liven up the mood. Walter was used to it and liked it.

“It seems like the right time. ‘A strong step forward into the future.’ Isn’t that right?”

Osborn smiled, “I positively hate it when I’m quoted back at myself. You would wound me with my own words, my precious words? Sir, you are most unkind.”

Walter laughed. “But I wasn’t attacking you!”

Osborn paused, contemplated what had transpired and said, “True. But my point remains.”

“Oh yes, your point remains.”

After a few seconds of silence, Osborn asked, “Should I think about settling down?”

“You can’t even commit to a body,” Walter said.

“Is that my fault?” Walter tilted his head, conceding the point. “But what... person would want me with my shifting from body to body?”

“Wait,” Walter said. “I thought you and Gideon...”

Osborn laughed, “God no! Oh, there is the occasional dalliance, but nothing more. And those have grown infrequent and rather unsatisfactory. No, no, that was for appearance sake at times and just for shits and giggles at others.”

“You’re a weird guy, Osborn.”

“Thank you, sir, you’re too kind.” And, then, after a beat. “Much too kind.”

The two were in a small room inside the new parliament building, on the steps of which, the speech would be made. Walter was seated, but Osborn wandered the room without stopping except for a brief pause here and there when he appeared to be studying something, but wasn’t really.

“How much longer?” Osborn asked.

Walter looked at his watch, “Hour and a half.”

“Fucking hell, man. I hate waiting.”

“I never would have guessed.”

Osborn stopped walking, “Okay, I will kill you.”

Walter laughed.

Osborn began pacing again.

Walter said, “And what do we do after today?”

“We rule the world, my good sir.”

“I like the sound of that.”

“It is a wonderful sentence. I should know, I’m a professional writer. Osborn Q. Ednyfed the first, the last and the great, esquire, man of action, and loyal subject to the queen her royal majesty.”

“What’s the Q stand for?”

Osborn was deadpan and blank in the face.

“What?” Walter asked.

“Never mind,” Osborn said and pulled his yellow ball from a pocket.

Walter raised his hand just above his shoulder and Osborn tossed the ball at him.

Catching it, Walter said, “Will we have times like these anymore?”

Osborn caught the ball, “I have no idea. Is running a country difficult?”

“I would assume it is, but I don’t know. Holy shit, Osborn, do we have any idea of how to run a country?”

Walter missed the ball and it bounced off of the wall behind him, rolling under the table. He said, “Sorry,” and got up and crawled under the table to find it.

Osborn walked over to a window and looked out. The sun was shining and the sky was filled with traffic. Ever the same New York, he thought. They would keep the name New York for the city. And, it was a city now, the majority a part of the Dominion. The word seemed odd to him, almost: city. Like a forgotten relic never really gone.

He turned to Walter, who was getting back into his chair, ball in hand, “Sir, we live in a city now.”

Walter stared, mystified. “Yeah... and?”

“Don’t you see? We have recreated something thought gone forever. In a sense, we have reversed the evolution of the geopolitical landscape. The city no longer existed and now it does again.”

“It didn’t exist?”

“Not as a city. Maybe as an urban centre or an easy reference for an area, but not as a city.”

Walter let that idea churn over in his head and said, “Huh. What do you know.”

“Today is the day.”

“Today is the day.”

Gideon did not attend the speech, but that was no surprise for Walter or Osborn. At this point, Gideon preferred to stay as invisible as possible, rarely leaving his mansion.

The speech itself went well, very well. Full of bombast and pomp, energy, big ideas and optimism. It was the best speech that Osborn had ever written and Walter delivered it well. The crowd was large and enthusiastic new citizens of the Dominion of New Earth. Technically, the country formed weeks prior, but this official announcement was what mattered.

When he first went out, Walter was so nervous he could barely speak, but Melanie’s smile along with the confidence in Osborn’s eyes told him that he had nothing to fear. He launched into the speech with gusto and didn’t let up. By the end, the crowd was silent with awe, and then erupted with applause and cheers.

He and Melanie stood together and waved and smiled, the new first couple, to use an outdated phrase, but a very apt one.

Osborn thought it went well, but hated much of the speech. He hated to hear his words read back at him. All he ever heard were the mistakes. A phrase that was too cliché or too hyperbolic or just plain bad. It didn’t matter if anyone else noticed. He put on a fake smile and acted like it was fantastic, but he knew it wasn’t.

And Walter knew that, and, as he went back inside, said, “You’re a crazy man who needs to recognise when he got it right.”

Osborn shrugged. “I will when it happens.”

Inside, they walked to the elevator to go up to Walter’s office where he would complete the ceremonial signing of the constitution and say a few more comments.

Walter, Osborn and Melanie rode alone. None said anything, all too overwhelmed by the events. As the elevator passed the second floor, Walter felt a wave of dizziness come over him and he fell back against the elevator wall to support himself. He heard laughter and his vision blurred. He collapsed to the floor.

Both Osborn and Melanie rushed with concern, trying to wake him, unsure of what had happened. His breathing was a little fast, but not dangerously so, as was his pulse. His eyes were rolled back in his head. It seemed like a seizure of some sort. While Melanie held him, Osborn called for help and willed the elevator to go faster, but to no avail.

Just before the elevator reached the forty-first floor, Warren opened his eyes and mumbled, “Today’s the day.”

Part Three — Deus ex Machina

*Making love with his ego
Ziggy sucked up into his mind
—David Bowie, “Ziggy Stardust”*

It was all part of the plan. Everything was integral, everything essential, everything absolutely necessary. All of it. Even before there was a plan. My genius was always in effect, always at work, always progressing towards that end point. Toward the now, toward the future. Without Ninian there would be no Gideon. Without the hovercar, no android. All of it necessary. All evidence of my brilliance, my genius. I was unique, even then. I was better, even then. I was superior, more than human, above the sheep, above the cattle. I am superior and more than human. All because of my genius. Without Ninian toiling in the middle of the night in 1952, there would be no Gideon in 2008. It all flows together, all is meaningful, all important. I have no regrets, make no apologies. Take one piece, one event away and it all falls apart. My vision intricately woven, created from my mind alone. I was asleep, I was drunk, I was asleep, I woke up. None of it unimportant. The plan is a fractal. God is in the details. I am. I was. I was Ninian Stone, working in a shop, toiling on an invention to revolutionise the world. I succeeded. Already ahead of the curve, ahead of the pack, more than the sheep and cattle. More than human. My name above all else. The hovercar was my gift to the world, my little piece of the future brought into the present. Science fiction is science fact. Soon, my grandson will be here. He has come back and killed my other grandson in the process. Unforeseen, it is now part of the plan. Without the hovercar, there would be no Warren Stone. Without Ninian, there would be no Gideon. I was young and arrogant, rightfully so. I took the money and didn't look back. I gave up, I was rich, I was lulled to sleep. I was bitter, I had peaked and I knew it. It was a lie. I was afraid. I was in love. Florence and I were married, and I wanted to give her everything. I was given a ceremonial position, lived off of royalties, lived off of my invention, off of my genius. I went to sleep. I forgot the world, I forgot

my duty, my genius. I was happy, but not. She was happy. But, it was necessary. Without sleep, there can be no dreams. They were afraid of me, of my genius. They made the offer and I accepted, for her sake. I was young and foolish and in love. She sang me to sleep. I gave her everything she could ever want. We were happy, but not. The world changed because of me. Because of my genius, my brilliance, my mind. My name would go down in history, memorised by children for third grade tests. Who invented the hovercar? Ninian Stone. Ninian is dead, but not dead. I am Ninian, but not Ninian. Ninian and Florence lived in a big house and were happy. He was not happy, not really, but he was asleep. They didn't want to recognise my genius. If I could create such a thing, where was my limit? How much would I change the world? Too much, I did too much. I accepted the money and the position, because I knew too much. I knew all too well. I knew the score. It was necessary. Everything matters, and nothing matters. All roads lead here. We started a family. A little boy, a little girl, another little boy, the perfect family. The nuclear family dream. I was happy, but not. I was asleep. My genius forgotten, I did nothing. I was mundane, ordinary, boring. I was among the sheep and cattle. But, my genius was still there. My genius was never gone, it was always there. And my time asleep became part of the plan. All part of the plan. She was so beautiful and I loved her dearly. Without her, who knows how far I would have gone. Without them, who knows how much the world would have benefited. No what ifs, no regrets, it was all necessary. Change one thing, it all changes. It all matters, so it all doesn't matter. I dreamt of a better tomorrow while asleep. I am that better tomorrow. I am the future incarnate. I was mortal, I would die, but now I will not. My genius is forever, my genius is infinite. I was mundane and normal. I was a father and husband. I was boring. I was happy, but not. It

was necessary. Mine is the face of progress, of genius, of the future. I loved her and them. I would do anything for them. I did anything for them. I was happy, but not. They were happy. They distracted me. They kept me asleep. I am not angry, I don't blame them. It was necessary. They were part of the plan. They were integral. They mattered. The past is equal, everything as important as everything else. The past is the true democracy. I played the game, I conformed, I was sheep, I was cattle, I was happy, but. I am happy now. I am happy, I am, I am. I was asleep, but I am awake. I have not slept in years. I am living the dream, living my dream. The world is my dream and I am its dreamer. It was all necessary. It was all important. Everything led here. I am the culmination of history, of destiny. I am the infinite future. I was asleep and they were happy. Everyone was happy. I changed the world and then stopped. I changed it enough. I will change it more. I was asleep, but then I woke up. I had a nightmare. I was asleep and I became drunk. It was necessary.

I was asleep. My little boy drowned. I woke up. My little Daniel. He drowned. He drowned. I was asleep on the beach. He drowned. My little boy drowned. I was asleep. My little Daniel, my littlest boy, my special boy. We were on vacation, we were at the beach, and he drowned. I was asleep, I didn't see. I woke up and he was drowned. He was dead. My little boy, my Daniel, he was dead. I woke up into a nightmare. He was dead, my little boy drowned. I got drunk. A leads to B leads to C leads to D. It was all necessary. He had to drown for Gideon's sake. He had to drown for it all to happen. I had to drink. I was asleep and then I was drunk. I stayed drunk. It was cliché, I was the drunken Irishman, but it was expected. My little boy drowned and then gave me a drink. And then another and another and another. One glass leads to another leads to another

leads to another. I stayed drunk and they understood. I dulled my genius, I shut it up, I drank. It was expected and I was a sheep, I was cattle. I joined, I entertained, I was witty, I was funny, I was mean, I was cruel. It was necessary. I hit her, I hit them. But, it was necessary. Every word, every fist, it was all necessary. D leads to E leads to F leads to G. And they understood. They loved me. I hated them. I hated myself. My little boy drowned and I was asleep. I drank. I kept drinking. I didn't stop. I wept for him, for them, for myself. I apologised, but didn't change. I changed the world, but would not change myself. I was a brute and they hated me. I hated them. I loved them. But, society understood, it turned a blind eye. I was of the times, and the times were not a' changing. I was asleep and then I was drunk. G leads to H leads to I leads to J. It was all necessary, it all mattered. I regret nothing, I apologise for nothing. It all had to happen, it was all part of the plan. I hit her, I broke her arm, and it was necessary. I was like so many others, I was normal, I was mundane. Just another member of a clumsy family. Do you understand? I did what I had to. Without the drink, there would be no Gideon. It all mattered. It's all connected. J leads to K leads to L leads to M. I stayed drunk. I entertained my friends, I was the drunken buffoon everyone loved. What else would the inventor of the hovercar be? What else was expected? They all were like that, every single one. I was sheep, I was cattle, I was mundane, I was normal, I was ordinary. Ninian was a drunk who beat his wife and kids, and that's okay, that's all right. It was absolutely necessary. No regrets, no apologies. The black eyes all led here. All necessary, all important. Drunk was worse than sleep. While asleep, I could dream. While drunk, I could drink. But, my genius was evident in my drinking. The genius I applied to inventing I applied to drinking. I was a brilliant drunk. I was brilliant at sleeping. M leads

to N leads to O leads to P. I could afford to drink, I could afford to drink all of the whiskey in the world. I tried. I was lively, I was entertaining. I don't remember much. I woke up not knowing how I got there. I cheated on her. I beat them. I beat her. No one cared. They still loved me. They began to hate me. I hated myself. My little boy, my Daniel, my son. I was asleep, asleep, asleep. I drank. I was drunk. But, it was necessary. It all mattered. It was important. P leads to Q leads to R leads to S. So what? I am above judgement, above condemnation. No regrets, no apologies. If you change one thing, one moment, it all changes. It was nothing, it was a moment in time. Inconsequential, unimportant, vitally necessary. I am a man of many contradictions. If it all matters, none of it matters. If none of it matters, it all matters. It was necessary. Every drink, every shout, every fist, every slap, everything. All necessary. All important. S leads to T leads to U leads to V. All necessary. All of it. I was drunk for a decade. A decade of drink. I didn't sleep, I didn't dream, I was a man of my times and they all understood. I was a hero, I was a pillar of my community. They all loved me, except those who didn't. She loved me, but didn't. Not any more. I was drunk for a decade. V leads to W leads to X leads to Y leads to Z. It all leads to Z. Without any, no Z. I am zed. I am the end result and it was all necessary. No regrets, no apologies, no excuses. It is fact. I am the omega result, the absolute zero, the limit, the future made possible by the past. I was asleep and then I was drunk. It all led to Gideon, to now. It all leads into the future, it all creates the future. I am the result of it all. It was necessary. And deserved. I was asleep, I was drunk, I was asleep. I stopped. And that was necessary. A leads to Z. A implies Z. Examine me and you will see it all. Z implies A. It was all necessary. All important. I was asleep, I was drunk and then I sobered up and fell asleep again. She hated me and that could not

stand. My little boy drowned and I was asleep. I would fall asleep again. It was necessary.

I was asleep, I was drunk, I was asleep. I sobered up and tried to make amends. I was the perfect husband. I was eager to please, eager to atone, eager to be good, eager to be loved. I was pathetic. I had been pathetic for a long time and nothing changed. I did not change, not really. I still hated myself, I still lived in fear, I was still a genius. I applied my genius to atonement, to making amends, to being a good husband, a good father, a good man. I was mundane and normal and boring. I didn't change. No one changes. Gideon is Ninian, and Ninian has always been Ninian. No one changes, only perspective and focus. I was limited by my focus. I could see only the small picture, the ordinary life, the mundane. But, it was necessary. It was good, in a way. Without adversity, without challenge, how was I to overcome, to rise above? Hard work is necessary. Hard work is good. I worked hard to regain my life, my boring, mundane life. I am no longer mundane. We are defined by context, not content. I was always the same. Only my context, my focus shifted. I applied myself to winning back her love, winning back their love. I was dedicated, I had no ego, but I acted purely out of ego. I gave in to everything, every demand. I was genius. And time passed and things were better. But, there was fear behind their eyes. Fear and hate. I could not make up for it, I could not make it better. Every loving smile contained a fear of what I was. They knew I was the same. Asleep and drunk were not so different. I had not changed and that was apparent. That was obvious to everyone but me. I was convinced I was different, I kept saying I was different. I was pathetic, but it was necessary. I dedicated and rededicated myself to it all, to them. And the kids grew and left. She and I were alone, and things were better.

She loved me, she never stopped loving me. I was her servant. But, it was necessary. I ignored the world in favour of her. We travelled, we mingled among the elite, we were like everyone else. We acted as expected. I acted as expected. I was no longer entertaining, but I was good. I was good, I was good, I was good. I was pathetic. I didn't change. I ignored the world while I engaged with it. I had important opinions that matched other important opinions. We and they were the same, the other rich men, all identical, all alike. We were sheep and cattle, but thought ourselves above. We had important opinions about the world, but understood none of it. My focus was to be like them and I was. I was genius. I was brilliant. We were all the same, we are all the same. I was different, underneath, inside. I was mundane and ordinary. I was boring. But, she loved me. I was happy, but not. Nothing changed. I was the same young man who changed the world, I was the same man asleep, I was the same drunk. A leads to Z. A is Z. Do you understand? I lived a meandering existence. I lived a boring life. I was mundane. One day was just like the next. I remember no dates, because they were all the same. I was asleep. Is two different from three when you sleep? Do you measure your dreams by time? I walked among the elite and I learned about them. I learned their ways. I could have been powerful, I could have been important, but I didn't care. I ignored the world. What business was it of mine? The world changed slowly and we ignored the signs. We didn't care until it was too late. What did we care about Quebec? What did it matter? Without it, there would be no Gideon. I was a grandfather, but I didn't care, not really. I hated them all. I hate them all. How can one not? I was sorry, but not. No regrets, no apologies, it was necessary. It was essential. The sum of a man is his experiences. There is no future without the past. I was ignorant and brilliant. I was brilliantly ignorant.

I was wilfully ignorant. She loved me and I loved her. We hated one another. We were comfortable with one another. Momentum carries. We attended parties and galas and balls. We walked among the elite. We dined with heads of state, with kings, with queens, with blue bloods. My name was still known then, still remembered. I was the man who gave them all a tiny piece of the future. I made art reality, speculation real. I told stories and they laughed dutifully. They told stories and I laughed dutifully. Every day was the same. Every day was boring and mundane. I was bored, I was happy, I was, I was. I hated them all and myself. I atoned through punishment, through willing imprisonment to a life of the mundane. She wanted an extraordinarily ordinary man and I was he. I never changed, no one does. I was asleep, but still dreaming. I was asleep, I was drunk, I was asleep. I would wake. She would wake me. I loved her. I loved her dearly. She was my life, she was my heart. I was asleep. We were boring together and I was happy, but not. I was important, but not. She loved me, but not. But not. But not. I was asleep and she would wake me. I was set in my ways. I had slept for a long time. I was asleep, I was drunk, I was asleep, I was awake. She died and I woke up.

Florence died of cancer and I knew I was not far off. They say that wives who outlive their husbands live years longer than husbands that survive their wives. Women are more independent, more able to take care of themselves. Men are useless and lazy. I was useless and lazy. She died and I woke up. I became obsessed with death, with surviving. I still had contributions to make, I knew it. I was awake and ready to act on my dreams. She died and no one expected me to live much longer. I was older, I was in worse shape. They seemed to anticipate my passing, ready to print the obituary of the man who invented the hovercar. That's all I was, all Ninian Stone will ever be known for.

I went to work. I moved to a floating city, I lived in the future I helped bring about. Two options presented themselves, cloning and robotics. I was a physicist, an engineer, not a biochemist. The choice was obvious. I set about getting caught up. It took a year. A year gone like that in study. I ignored the world. I ignored family, friends. I had purpose and drive, I felt young again. The plan was in effect. I didn't know it, but it was. My focus was minute still, but I was awake. I had not changed. The Ninian Stone who studied and began building androids to house his conscious mind was not different from the Ninian Stone who drank and beat his children. None of it is separate, it is all connected. It is all continuity. A leads to B leads to C leads to D. Without Q there is no X. It is all interchangeable, people and language. George Bernard Shaw spelled fish ghoti. Everything is the same, nothing changes. Ninian is Gideon, Gideon is Ninian. The android is man, the man is android. But, I am different. I am better. I am genius. I am the future. I worked hard and built androids. The first lasted minutes, the second hours, the third days, the fourth weeks, the fifth months and the sixth forever. Number six became Gideon, Ninian became Gideon. Number one only lasted for twelve minutes before it crashed. I learned a lot from it. Number two lasted five hours before it crashed. Again, mistakes learned and corrected. New problems which arise as processes were honed and perfected. But, I learned, I progressed. I told no one of what I was doing. No one knows still. While building number three, the world fell apart more. I saw fragmented societies as nations crumbled, split apart. We moved into the past and I screamed. In the name of supposed political evolution, we devolved. We fragmented, allowed differences to split us. What use was living forever in a broken, shattered world? I knew I would have to act. I redoubled my efforts. During number four, the Earth was murdered and most everyone

died. Again, I wept and screamed. But, it appeared as if tragedy would unify, would rectify the devolution. It did not. Nothing learned, no mistakes corrected. The sheep and cattle continued to graze on poison. I was not long for the world. What if there had been no hovercar? I had saved humanity when it was decimated by Mars, but what does it matter. I would save humanity again, I would change the world. I planned and I built. Number five broke my heart, I thought he would make it. But, I was already working on number six, the one that would be perfect. I had learned well. I saw all of my mistakes. Number six was to be my new body. The world continued apace on its path to destruction. I was a nation unto myself. I was lonely. But, it was all necessary. All of it. Black Earth was necessary, as was the bombing of Mars in return. You cannot rebuild what has not been destroyed. A broken world is a problem to be solved. People must be aware that something is wrong to be led. I would lead. I do lead. When number five died, I wept. And I returned to work. I could see the darkness closing in and I worked 20-hour days. Sleep was the enemy. Death was the enemy. I would live to see the future. It was my time, my home. I am a man of my times. Number six took more time than any of the others, but I was thinking clearly. My mind was working faster than ever. My hands were young. I was genius. I was brilliant. I was Ninian Stone, the man who changed the world. I created new life and began working on a method to transfer my consciousness. Number six aided me, helped. He served me. I took ill, but we continued to work. The world continued. Building of the New Earth around Black Earth continued. No one asked for my help. Except for my daughter. My grandson was missing, I hired a detective. My grandson died. It didn't matter. Soon, I would die, too. I was bitter, I hated them all. Number six served me. We worked to save me. We were growing closer by the day and,

then, we succeeded. We copied my mind to computer algorithms. I would live forever. I set up a new identity, a new life, a new means. I would see the future, I would bring about the future. I worked and worked and worked and would beat death. I would beat the bastard. Number six did not mind, he was programmed not to. I accomplished much in those years, I was awake at last. I was living my dream, I was sticking to the plan. It was all necessary, it all contributed to each moment. Nothing but moments piled upon one another. Do you understand? I succeeded and I live forever. I am the infinite future I knew I would be. I am the man in the machine. I am Gideon Yorke.

I killed myself. It wasn't planned, it just happened. I saw myself as the old, decayed man I had become and I killed him. I killed myself. It became part of the plan. I had always thought I would die naturally, working along side myself until the end. Ninian and Gideon together, making the world better, planning in unison, in harmony. It was necessary. I smothered him and he did not resist, he understood. He knew what I knew. He died of natural causes, they said. Gideon Yorke's life began. I had decided that the first step would be art. To change the world, I would make films, at first. Politics is an attempt to control your environment. Art is an attempt to create your environment. Apathetic people must be led by culture. I financed myself, made a film, hired a co-writer, Jeremy Stevens. The novelty of the android filmmaker would do much of the work. Who wouldn't love a machine that makes movies? Forget the evil machines of fiction that serve until they go crazy and begin killing, I would circumvent the whole thing and come at it from a different angle, an unexpected angle. Jeremy and I wrote a film together. It won awards, it was acclaimed, it made Gideon Yorke, it brought studios to the table. I didn't sleep, I haven't slept since I was Ninian. Twenty-four hours a day, I

am awake, never to sleep again. Number six is forever, infinite. Each film made a bigger impression than the last. Gideon Yorke was the toast of the town, of the world. Stars lined up, studios lined up, it was all part of the plan. Jeremy stayed out of sight, the hidden investor, the silent partner. Did he resent it? I paid him well. He also worked on the Osborn project. I met important people and found them to be the same. I met some of the same people and found they had not changed. I didn't change, I played my part. I applied my genius to film, to schmoozing, to being a novelty. People mock novelty, but it is necessary, it is an easy disguise, an easy means of disarming. Jeremy did not know my true origins. No one knows my true origins. My daughter died, but not before my grandson came back. That was important, it would be noted. He was a clone, a man in a superior body, a possibly immortal body. Coincidence and continuity are to be believed in. Being an android was odd at first. Never sleeping, never eating, remembering everything. My mind changed, my outlook changed. I didn't change. Humanity is a virus. I embody the future. I see in multiple spectrums of light, I hear bacteria mating. I am never tired, physically or mentally. I no longer dream. I am genius incarnate. I am my brilliance in physical form. The films reflected my genius. I acted my character arc well. I was popular, but respected. I took things as far as they could go and quit. It was all planned, all staged. I would write with Jeremy in my head. We would talk, I would put it into script. I dropped out of sight and focused on the Osborn paraperson. I needed an aide, someone to assist me, someone also immortal. Another android would arouse suspicions, would create a negative image in the minds of the public. One is a novelty, two is the beginning of the species, the beginning of an army. That's what I would assume and it's what I presume others would as well. I understand humanity, which is

how I will save it from itself. Osborn was named by Jeremy, after a character in a novel he once wrote, but never published. Osborn Ednyfed. A paraperson, a chemical containing a personality and mind that can be injected into anyone. The only problem is that it is temporary, far too temporary. We wanted a personality that could last decades. Osborn can last a year at most, quite often less. I continue to work to improve it. He is, after all, number one. It is remarkable that he is this effective. He is based on Jeremy, because we needed another mind. It took years of work to create, Jeremy programming the life, creating memories, writing. I also hired a team of biochemists, who were disposed of. It was necessary. Human life is expendable, but only in small numbers. I watched in horror as hyperdemocracy spread. Osborn continued apace, soon to be completed. Jeremy and I remained on good terms although he annoyed me. He was too defiant, too individualistic, too willing to question. I spent nights working and reading and planning. I kept tabs on my grandchildren, waiting to bring them into the fold. I watched Warren with great interest. He will be here soon. He has returned, Osborn tells me. Soon, Osborn was finished and Jeremy was no longer necessary. Osborn killed him just as I had killed Ninian just as Warren has killed Walter. All of it necessary. All of it important and essential. A leads to B leads to C leads to D. All part of the plan even if unplanned. One must adapt, must respond, must see every new action as an opportunity. Osborn can only live in another for a short period of time, but that is all right, it becomes a new opportunity. He is my number two and a new number two is not a bad thing, from time to time. We made a movie together as planned, an obtuse, artistic, difficult to understand film. It was called important and meaningful by some. It was part of the plan and necessary before approaching my grandson. We also had to take steps for back-up.

Warren had a reputation, was known to be a certain way, and that man was not part of the plan.

Replacing Warren was problematic, but not overly so. We had the technology, Osborn and I. It was the same paraperson technology, but adapted for an optical burst. I had already begun to plant the seeds of Democracy No, contacting like-minded people. The plan was in full swing. No regrets, no apologies. I contacted Warren and tested him. We ate, we talked, and he was mundane. He was ordinary despite his extraordinary existence. Hidden on Mars, afraid of the world. Everyone is afraid. I was afraid, but no longer. The plan is perfect. I admit that I am sentimental. I wanted family involved, I wanted my legacy to be concurrent. Walter was selected as back-up. He was the contingency plan should Warren be too rigid, too set in his ways. He was, Osborn discovered. Osborn prodded and Warren reacted. We had already set the contingency plan in motion, seeing the premature loss of Warren as no loss at all. Walter was much more suitable. We manipulated the detective. My powers were far-reaching by this point, I had Osborns in many places, none aware of the others. All of my number twos carrying out my plans. I love my grandsons, but love is irrelevant to the plan. I admit I am sentimental. What grandfather is not? But, it does not affect my genius, it is just another part of the plan. All a part of the plan. I met with Warren on Mars and he was such a disappointment. He squandered all he had been given. He was the same spoiled shit he had always been, just inverted, internalised. I recognised it right away, which caused the contingency plan to be set in motion. Osborn was my hands. I continued to live an important, public life in many ways. I was the auteur filmmaker. The artiste. I enjoyed that life. I conceived of Democracy No while I was still Ninian. It was easy enough to put

together. You can find political radicals, intellectuals with grand ideas, natural born rebels, without too much trouble. By that point, the world was shifting, things were moving again. I was the grand idea coming forward, the future leaking into the present. I remembered cities, a proud nation, a flag, a unified group of people. I was the past personified as the future. People have short memories and an alternative to hyperdemocracy is novel. A novelty given to them by a novelty. But, they don't know that. Gideon can be involved with, have ties to, Democracy No, but not the founder. The android thinks he is king and must be destroyed. The android is king. It was all necessary. Warren was unstable, was volatile, was violent and, quite possibly, insane. He has killed and will kill. He had to be removed and I had hoped that the cloned brain would house a transfer better than an organic one. A clone is biomechanical, is artificial. The grandson of the android is a clone. Life is funny sometimes. A leads to Z. We kept weekly mind-scans of Walter, having the means to access his building. His death was planned, was purposeful. We needed him. I needed him. He was a better Warren than Walter. He was a better Warren than Warren. I killed my grandson. No regrets, no apologies. Sentiment is weakness. I ordered the hovercar to fly into that building. Walter became Warren through chance. We were worried that Warren would never open the package. Steps were being taken, the first of which was the detective. He is currently in Los Angeles and will be allowed to live until I see fit. His life is mine. His involvement was an amusement. Humanity is my amusement. Osborn is too human sometimes. He has grown close to Walter and I presume this Warren takeover will affect him in a negative way. I will kill my grandson. Walter was easy to manipulate. He was an idealist, a good person, in need of validation and love. I turned him into the man he should have always been. I made him

a star. I killed Walter. No regrets, no apologies. Warren killed Walter. I killed Warren. It was necessary. Sentiment is weakness. But, my weaknesses are part of the plan. One must be aware. Do you understand? I killed Walter. His life was pathetic. He was asleep. He was proud. He was a fool. I was proud of him. He was a good boy. I loved Walter very much. I will kill Warren. He has destroyed something beautiful, something necessary. But, another assassination could be arranged. A martyred prime minister is workable. I have not slept in years. I miss dreaming. I miss Florence. It was all necessary. Warren will soon arrive. I was the mind behind Democracy No. Osborn took his instructions from me. Walter took his instructions from me. It was a success. Walter was fantastic. I was so proud. The detective was dealt with, but escaped. No matter. None of it matters, because all of it matters. Only moments. Moment after moment after moment. Warren will arrive in a moment. Walter was brilliant. He and Osborn were brilliant, their initiative became part of the plan. They no longer needed me to guide them so directly. I could step back and think long-term again. I could look at the big picture. I could see the future. All because the plan was working so well. My plan is perfect. It is self-perfecting, self-improving. Until Warren, but he is now part of the plan. I loved Walter. I loved Florence. I loved Daniel. The destruction of Earth was the drowning of billions of Daniels. It will not happen again. I am the future. It is all necessary. Do you understand? Do you see? The Dominion of New Earth is the future and I am the Dominion of New Earth. I am its root and core. Walter made me so proud. I loved him. Warren is here.

He walks in. Hello, Warren. Android Filmmaker, he says. I understand you are back. Yeah, and we have unfinished business. Do we now? You tried to kill me. Yes, I did. Why? You were an obstacle, and your brother was needed. As well, we wanted your

body, and to take you out of the picture. You're not well, Warren. He paces and sneers, There's nothing wrong with me. Really? Is it normal to kill and to hit and to act like a madman? You killed me! And you killed your brother, an innocent who did nothing to harm you. I had to. Did you now? Yes. Could you not have observed him, recognised that he was acting in a manner more beneficial for society, for the world, and remained out of sight. Could you not have allowed him to live? I would have died. So? So, it's my life. You will die eventually, Warren, why not for something worthwhile? Why not sacrifice yourself for the greater good? Why kill your brother? I couldn't take it anymore, I just wanted my life back. And now you are Prime Minister Stone, the new leader of the Dominion of New Earth. Will you keep this new life or return to your old one? My life is what my life is. How astute, how witty, how sharp. You are a quick one sometimes, aren't you? He walks around me, unsure of how to proceed. Well, son? What do you want? I want to live. You are alive, but what do you want now? I want to keep on living my life. As...? As it is right now. No. He stops and asks, No? No. No, you cannot be Prime Minister of the Dominion of New Earth. No, you cannot keep on living. No. Who are you to say? I am me, I am the man in charge. I am the one who controls all of this, who has spent a lifetime planning and preparing for this. I am the future, I am Gideon Yorke, I am Ninian Stone, I am your better, your elder and you will damn well do what I say, and I will kill you. You're insane. Oh no, Warren, oh no. No, I am not insane, I am genius, I am brilliant. All of this has been planned out and replanned and replanned, every step necessary, every event essential. A leads to B leads to C leads to D. And you, Warren, you don't fit, except as a corpse. Do you think you have the ability to kill me? he asks. Of course. Really? I've killed you before, I can do it again. Killing is easy, Warren,

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

When preparing this “artist’s statement,” I found myself walking the fine line between explaining my process and the ideas that went into writing *Infinite Future* and explicitly explaining the novel. Now, I want to provide insight into the novel, but not give away the meaning of it. I said to my advisor, Richard Douglass-Chin, that what I wanted to get across was the information I would feel comfortable sharing in an interview, and he suggested interviewing myself. So, I’ve drawn on my years of interviewing experience to ask myself the tough questions and, hopefully, provide some insight into what went into *Infinite Future*. Enjoy.

Q. Where did the idea for *Infinite Future* come from?

A. *Infinite Future* is a novel that required five years to create. It began as a graphic novel that I wrote in 2003 entitled “The Future (2003),” which detailed the story of “Yahweh Stone” as he found himself in a world under constant surveillance and begins acting like he were a fictional character on television. At first, he wanders around and acts like an idiot for the cameras, but soon finds himself entangled in the struggle between the Americhristians and the West Montreal Martian movement. Part of Warren’s background provided in the first part of the novel is taken directly from the graphic novel script. His description of how hyperdemocracy began and the history of the Mars colony is almost a straight copy-and-paste from the graphic novel.

Q. Where did the idea for “The Future (2003)” come from?

A. I think it stemmed from the idea of cameras being everywhere, which makes everyone a reality TV star, in a way. Of course, I excised that part of Warren’s backstory from the novel, as it was difficult to reconcile hyperdemocracy with a system of surveillance cameras that everyone would have access to. How could the ever-shifting political landscape work together in that way?

Q. Where did the concept of hyperdemocracy come from?

A. At the University of Western Ontario, I did my undergraduate degree in English, and political science, and I got the idea from something the professor said in my first-year poli-sci class. I don’t remember what he was discussing, but, at one point, he mentioned the idea that if Quebec had voted for secession in the 1980 referendum, the Anglo part of Montreal, the West end, I believe, was planning to then secede from Quebec. It was just a quick throwaway comment by the prof, but it caught my attention and I wrote it down in my notebook of writing ideas. I saw the potential for the whole thing to snowball into an endless series of secessions, and smaller and smaller countries. Hyperdemocracy has always struck me as a very interesting manner in which to examine a facet of democracy that has come up a lot in the past few decades: the conflict between a unified, multicultural state, and the right of people to self-determination. Obviously, the Quebecois have a point when they say that they’re a minority in Canada and resent that the English-speaking parts of the country dominate the French-speaking parts, but,

there's also value in people of different cultures and backgrounds living together. If everyone could secede, we would end up with tiny nations of like-minded people—basically, a self-imposed segregation that undoes hundreds of years of social evolution. As well, one of the major arguments for the spread of democracy is that it encourages multiculturalism and globalisation when it can easily be used to encourage the exact opposite. Really, I just wanted to explore the issue a little and present some ideas, maybe demonstrate how democracy could be perverted and lead to a fragmented, segregated world, which I don't think anyone wants.

Q. Why hovercars and flying cities? Why not create new and different technologies?

A. Something about those 1950/1960 conceptions of how “the future” would turn out fascinates me—mostly because they haven't come true at all. That, combined with the realisation that it *is* the future now, seemed like a fun thing to look at. I decided that people lived in floating cities because the Earth was no longer habitable. I never really understood that part in *The Jetsons*. Why did they live in floating buildings? Where was the ground? So, that needed to be explained, which led to the idea of suicide by jumping and burning up in the atmosphere, which I always liked. Warren mentions it briefly in the novel, but in the graphic novel, there's a scene where he and a buddy are discussing a friend of theirs who, while drunk, was walking along the edge and fell off. That image always stuck with me, which is probably why I had Mary kill herself like that, too. It just seems so absurd, and strangely plausible, that they would build these floating cities, but not provide protection to avoid falling. It's like how it wasn't until the past few decades

they began putting fences on bridges to prevent jumpers. It seemed like common sense, but just hadn't happened.

Anyway... I also got really interested in the idea that we're living in the year 2003 then or 2008 now. This is the future, which is why I titled the story "The Future (2003)" and have all of these stories take place in the present when I'm writing them. Juxtaposing the conceived future of the '50s/'60s with what actually happened is a lot of fun. Is it better that we don't have hovercars? I think so. People can barely drive on the road—imagine them flying through the air in all directions... it would be chaos.

Q. Some of Warren's backstory comes from "The Future (2003)," but what about the rest of it, like the cloning?

A. That comes from a short story I wrote called "The Future (January 2-10, 2005)," which takes place a couple of years after the graphic novel. It begins with "Yahweh" waking up for the first time after being cloned, getting killed, waking up, getting killed, waking up, finding his new body has advanced strength, speed, stamina, reflexes, and whatever else, and killing the assassins before settling into a life of celebrity and fame as that cloned guy who kills people. It ends around two months before Mary kills herself. It's a nice little story where I used a very quick narration pace, almost like a kid with attention deficit disorder. Warren's narration in the novel is much slower and more laid back, purposefully so. But, all of the talk about dying and coming back came from that story, as did the assassins and the outlawing of cloning, which I took to be a natural result of a clone killing a bunch of people, whether they deserved to die or not.

Q. Do you think having the graphic novel and short story to draw upon helped or hurt the writing process?

A. At first, it was both helpful and a bit of a pain. It was very helpful for knowing who Warren Stone is. I was able to jump right into writing the novel already knowing this character very well, particularly since the short story was written from his point of view. I knew how he thinks, how he speaks, and where he's coming from. As well, I knew his past, so even if I didn't directly reference it, I knew it was there and how it informed the character. It was a pain because I didn't want to use too much from the previous stories. I wanted the novel to stand on its own and not rely on two unpublished works that exist only on my laptop, and, honestly, I'm embarrassed by the two stories. It's very common for me to hate what I've written, especially in retrospect and those two stories are no exceptions. I like the ideas behind them and the odd moment or two, but, for the most part, reading them is just torture for me, as all I see are mistakes and places where it could be better. However, Richard pushed me to include more details from those stories when I told him about them, and I'm happy with what I managed to work in. I did, of course, alter some details to make it fit better. And, obviously, I changed "Yahweh" to Warren. I had a habit, in those early stories, of using very odd names like "Yahweh Stone" or "Virgin Mary Rossini" (Mary's original name) or quintuplet assassins named Led, Nico, Misty, Zeppelin, and Crunge.

Q. How did you begin writing the actual novel?

A. I began it in my creative grad seminar very early in the second semester and would write ten-page chunks each week. The way I often write is with a very general direction in mind, but no idea of how to get there, so I was just making it up as I went along. I had the idea for an android filmmaker and thought that would be fun to play around with. The weekly feedback also helped me shift directions when necessary and see how things were working. It was a good way to write the beginning of a novel, I think.

Q. What writers inspired the first part of the novel?

A. Bret Easton Ellis was a big influence, as “The Future (January 2-10, 2005)” was written very much with him in mind. Warren has always struck me as the sort of directionless, vapid, spoiled character you often find in Ellis’s work. His first novel, *Less Than Zero* was the work I most had in mind, because it also has very short sections/chapters and sort of meanders through a short period of time in the protagonist’s life. My style is not quite as flat or direct as Ellis’s, but I also share a natural aversion to writing in flowery language, preferring to just say what’s happening and providing dialogue.

Q. Why only have Warren narrate the book for the first 70 pages?

A. Honestly, that was the demand of the story. Warren was replaced by Walter, so Warren narrating would have been impossible. As well, I like to have a little bit of variety in my work, and frustrate reader expectations when I can. It's unusual to "kill off" your narrator after 70 pages, so it seemed like a natural choice to do just that.

Q. The second part of the novel is titled "OK Computer," which is the title of a Radiohead album. Additionally, each part has a music quote for an epigraph, and a lot of music references show up throughout the novel. What is the connection between music and *Infinite Future*?

A. For a long time, I've had an on-again, off-again obsession with trying to recreate in prose what music accomplishes. Songs just have the ability to convey emotion and feeling and energy so well, so compactly, and I've always thought that prose falls short of that. So, I've spent a lot of time trying to mimic music in my writing. In one case, I wrote a short story patterned after Bob Dylan's "Stuck Inside Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again" with a lot of short "verses" broken up by a quick "chorus." I find that approach produces some interesting results.

For the second part of *Infinite Future*, it is actually patterned after Radiohead's *OK Computer* much like James Joyce's *Ulysses* is patterned after *The Odyssey*. It seemed like an interesting way to structure the second part, with each chapter corresponding to a song from the album. How they connect could be just the feeling of the song, or maybe a

line from the song, or an idea in the song, or, in one case, the music video for the song. Really, it was a means of providing structure to that section and allowing me to flex my creative muscles a little by trying out different techniques and narrative perspectives. As well, *OK Computer* is, perhaps, the album that heralded the 21st century with its anxiety about technology and the social disconnect found in contemporary society. Thematically, it fits with what I wanted to discuss.

Additionally, music is such a big part of my life that I find it impossible not to include it in my writing. I always write with music on, I spend most of my day with music on, actually, and it comes up even when I don't mean it to. In many cases, I think of it like the allusions in TS Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" where they don't always have meaning beyond demonstrating what the character has read. In my case, the novel is a product of my mind, so fragments of lyrics are bound to come out. For example, chapter five of part two is called "Fashionable People Doing Questionable Things," which is a lyric from Joel Plaskett Emergency's "Fashionable People," but is used because it works as a title, not because of any real connection to the song beyond the fact that I was listening to it around the time I was writing that chapter.

Q. You mentioned *Ulysses* and James Joyce. What is his influence on you and the novel?

A. The structure of the novel is lifted from *Ulysses*. Warren is my Stephen Dedalus with the first part acting as the Telemachiad, the second part as the Bloom-centric section, and the third as the stream of consciousness Molly interior monologue. When I read *Ulysses*, I really liked how Joyce used *The Odyssey* as an underlying structure since I've always

been the type of writer who likes a specific structural framework in which to work. As I said before, I just want to know where I'm going and what my limits are, and then have the freedom to do what I want within those bounds. Joyce provides a manner in which to do that. I've often wondered if people would have seen the connection to *The Odyssey* if he had not pointed it out: if you know it is there, you can make the connections, but it is not essential when reading the work. For me, would knowing *OK Computer* help understand the second part of the novel? Probably, but it is not necessary.

I purposefully avoided using another narrative as my underlying structure, though, as I find that there is too much influence exerted there. *Ulysses* works too hard to try and match *The Odyssey* in some places. Using an album allows for more loose and tenuous connections. The two works act more as complements than parallel pieces. As well, I find I'm a little more plot-oriented than Joyce, and having my plot dictated by another source would be very stifling and creatively frustrating.

Q. What is the actual structure of part two of the novel?

A. Here is a schema that outlines the technique/point of view in each chapter, and, when relevant, what writer influenced/inspired me:

1. "A Life in the Day" — "Airbag" — third-person omniscient, influenced by Philip

K. Dick

2. “The Harsh Goodbye” — “Paranoid Android” — first-person (Alex Palmer), influenced by Raymond Chandler, and written in four sections to mimic the four sections of the song
3. “Subconscious Homesick Blues on the Red Planet” — “Subterranean Homesick Alien” — first-person (Walter Stone), fragmented
4. “Anyone Can Be Osborn Ednyfed” — “Exit Music (For a Film)” — first-person plural, pseudo-screenplay, influenced by the style Haruki Murakami used in his novel *After Dark*
5. “Fashionable People Doing Questionable Things” — “Let Down” — first-person (Chad Nevett), written in a playful, self-conscious style where, occasionally, I reference myself and my opinions on the events taking place
6. “The Man with No Body/No One’s Boy” — “Karma Police” — first-person (Osborn Ednyfed), but focused more on speech rather than narration/description
7. “Democracy No” — “Fitter Happier” — political speech written by Osborn Ednyfed, but spoken by Walter Stone; purposefully short and direct as the song uses an electronic voice and is more a speech/address than a song
8. “On the Campaign Trail ’08 (March)” — “Electioneering” — first-person Gonzo journalism (Thorne Stockton), heavily influenced by Hunter S. Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail ’72* and meant to act as a filter into this political world
9. “(2)9” — “Climbing Up the Walls” — first-person monologue (Warren Stone), but in a dream-like state, and contains the chapter numbering of both this part and the first part to signify the overlap/return of Warren

10. “Infinite Fragments” — “No Surprises” — third-person short paragraphs that provide information to the reader about the characters and the world of the novel
11. “*Stone #39* — ‘Everybody Must Get Stone’” — “Lucky” — first-person (Chad Nevett) in comic script format addressed to a hypothetical artist and acting as a hypothetical issue of a comic starring Warren/Walter Stone
12. “A Life in the Day (Part 2)” — “The Tourist” — third-person omniscient, influenced by Philip K. Dick, and meant to mirror chapter 1

Q. Is it true that “A Life in the Day” originally began as a short story?

A. Yes. It was a short story I wrote just prior to beginning the novel and I felt it tied into what I wanted to do, so I made the character Warren’s brother and used it to begin part two. Actually, though, it was originally the first section of chapter two rather than chapter one. The chapter one I had written did not seem to fit exactly and I wanted to devote all of chapter two to Alex Palmer, so I did some shifting around. Here is an excerpt from the original first chapter of part two, entitled “The Future (January 29, 2007)”:

You will save the world.

You will save the world or you will die. You will save the world because you are told to. You will save the world because it is the right thing to do. You will save the world because you want to. You will save the world because you believe it the right thing to do. You will save the world because it is your job. You will save the world because it needs

saving. You will save the world because no one else can. You will save the world or else.

You will save the world because I said so.

I really liked the chapter, but felt it just did not fit. I particularly liked the use of second-person narration, which I made a point to bring back in “(2)9.”

Q. You mentioned a few writers you were influenced by or tried to write like in part two, so let’s go through them. How did Philip K. Dick influence you?

A. Philip K. Dick *is* science fiction for me. He is the gold standard and one of my favourite writers. I patterned chapters one and twelve of part two after his very ordinary, conventional style of writing that isn’t too experimental, and almost always in the third-person. Not only that, but using that style to introduce Walter was very purposeful as Walter is the sort of character Dick would have written, I think. In fact, he wrote a lot of down-on-their-luck types that were just trying to make it through the day and lead an ordinary life, which is all Walter is doing in that first chapter. So, using Dick as a starting point in the second part seemed very natural and a way of tipping my hat to the man I consider the best in the genre. But, breaking from his style was necessary as I’m not the same type of writer he was. I like to play around with style more, I like to meander through the plot a little bit more. I find I fall between him and Joyce in many ways: I’m more plot-oriented than Joyce, but am more style-oriented than Dick. As well, I like to wear my influences on my sleeve, because this is my first novel and pretending that I have a wholly original and unique voice would be foolish.

Q. You go from Philip K. Dick straight to Raymond Chandler, another genre writer. Why introduce detective fiction into the middle of an SF novel?

A. I became enamoured with Chandler's work while writing the second part, and was really in the mood to write detective fiction. I also wanted to introduce another character that could tie various plots together and provide some hidden background information on Ninian Stone. I wanted someone who Walter could play off of when he woke up in Warren's body, and a detective seemed a good fit.

But, primarily, it was falling in love with Chandler's writing that spurred me to include Alex Palmer. I had written some detective fiction before, but not much, and I did view the novel as a mystery, of sorts. Except Alex figures it out in chapter four, which is me playing around with conventions a little. The insertion of a detective into an SF story isn't new at all, and is something that many SF writers have done before since genre mixing is very easy, especially with SF. All you need to do is add some futuristic elements and a regular detective story becomes an SF detective genre mash-up.

Also, bringing in that new character seemed to fit with the Philip K. Dick mode of writing where he would follow four or five characters and each would provide a piece of the story, which would connect by the end. I don't connect things quite the same way, but it seemed like another way of paying homage.

Trying to write like Chandler was such a challenge and joy. The first part of that chapter is straight out of *The Big Sleep* and the line "The Lakenham family's mansion had all the old-fashioned charm of a cop beating a drunk" is taken directly from *The Notebooks of Raymond Chandler* in a list of "Chandlerisms." Really, writing like or

aspiring to write like all of these various types of writers is an exercise in creating my own unique perspective, since how does a writer learn to write except by copying others and seeing how they do it?

Raymond Chandler uses language so well. In his work, the mystery is a secondary concern to style and character, of writing interesting writing. That's what Chandler brings to the table for me. He can make you look at an object in a new way. He's to detective fiction what Dick is to SF in my eyes.

Q. You mentioned Haruki Murakami, specifically his novel *After Dark*. How did he influence you?

A. In *After Dark*, Murakami uses a cinematic style that references a camera and, sometimes, presents dialogue in pure script form. That style seemed like a good fit for chapter four. More than that, though, Murakami is a big influence in his ability to write both very ordinary and extraordinary fiction. He seems to have two distinct writers inside of him with some novels focusing on a relationship between two people, while another has a man who can talk to cats. He is always pushing himself and trying new things, which I admire greatly. His novel *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* was a big influence in its genre-mixing of detective fiction, SF, and a Kafkaesque village story. He always grounds his fiction in reality, providing little details like what music characters like to listen to or what they eat. The character of Hikaru Makimura in part one was an attempt, on my part, to do a Murakami character, using an anagram of his name for the character's name. His style is very sparse and factual, direct and fluid. Again,

mixing him with these other writers seemed like a good way to see what works for me and what doesn't.

Q. The inclusion of a Hunter Thompson-inspired chapter to discuss the political campaign seems an odd choice. Why Thompson?

A. Hunter Thompson is one of the best writers to ever cover politics, pure and simple. His book on the 1972 presidential primaries and election is probably the best campaign book ever written. He was the writer I was most afraid to imitate, though, because doing what he did is so difficult. It was such a personal and fixed perspective that trying to copy it can lead to looking foolish very quickly. I'm not sure how well I did, but I wanted to give it a try. As well, using a journalist as the perspective for that chapter allowed me to provide a lot of details about Democracy Now that would seem forced coming from any other character. It is the job of the journalist to tell you these things. Although, using Thompson as inspiration allowed me to share the information in some off-beat and unique ways. And, really, writing like Thompson is a lot of fun. It's very freeing to be able to go off on weird tangents and explain things in an "honest" fashion. It also gave a different perspective on Walter and Osborn, I thought. I was able to show them in a new light that only a complete outsider could provide. It was a cross between friendly and journalistic, which is what I wanted there. Shifting into a completely straight-laced journalism chapter would have been a much more jarring change and possibly disrupted the flow of the book; with my Thompson stand-in, he is such an interesting character in and of himself that the change in narrative is easier to take.

Q. “The Future (2003)” was written as a graphic novel and chapter eleven is also written in comic script. Why did you choose to use that style and what role do comics play in the novel?

A. I’ve been reading comics since before I could read and spent most of my teenage years writing comic book scripts almost exclusively. The nature of the chapter seemed appropriate for a comic script with the visual flair of the action. I wanted to play with the advanced strength, speed, and reflexes of the cloned body, which has abilities I would liken to those a superhero may possess, of sorts. While I didn’t push that envelope very far, it is a subtle undercurrent, particularly when you take into account that Walter rarely uses violence except in that chapter. I wanted to play with the idea of brain versus body a little, particularly in that superhero convention of “saving the world,” which Walter thinks he is doing through Democracy No. That idea of “saving the world” or “changing the world” is big in the novel and purposefully ambiguous and vague, because I’m not sure there is a specific way to articulate that idea. It means something different to everyone.

It was, also, an allusion to “The Future (2003)” and the freedom to play with the visual timing of the story. That chapter is very different as what is happening is determined almost exclusively through the visual descriptions provided and what I want shown in a particular panel. The juxtaposition of words and images is also something that is fun to play around with.

Q. Why end the novel with Ninian/Gideon?

A. It was an allusion to Joyce, as mentioned, but Ninian/Gideon is the mastermind of the entire book, he ties it all together. I wanted to provide some sense of an overarching story and structure. I also wanted to subvert expectations by revealing that the android filmmaker was, technically, a human. Originally, the android filmmaker was my response to the SF convention of androids wanting to be human, so I made him very proud of who is he and almost anti-human. But, revealing him to be human adds another layer to the character that should make him more interesting to readers, and colour his appearances at the beginning of the book.

Q. Did you play with other SF conventions? Is it a satire of SF or any other genre?

A. In SF, it is typical for there to be concerns over clone armies and their wanting to take over the world, so, here, I made Warren the only clone in existence. And cloning wasn't outlawed for any real reason other than to prevent the cloning of people like Warren. Or, Mars gaining its freedom from Earth through armed rebellion only to realise that it was a mistake and that living under Earth's rule was a better life. That was partly inspired by the fall of the Soviet Union and how everyone assumed that life would automatically become better when it didn't—and, in some cases, became worse. Really, I wanted to look beyond the surface of a lot of SF conventions and follow the ideas presented through to their logical conclusion. Would rebelling from Earth, a planet rich in food, water and minerals, be a smart move by Mars, a desolate planet where people live in protective

domes? Probably not—and yet countless stories have been written about just that happening. It has always baffled me.

I don't consider *Infinite Future* a satire really. There are satiric elements, little one-off jokes, and my purposefully going against conventions, but it's not the main point of the novel. In the comic chapter, for example, I use the word "fuck" a lot, more than I should, but that was meant as a little jab at writers who experience freedom in "mature readers" books and go overboard. I make fun of celebrity a little, but not in a big way. It's a lot of little things, but there's not one overarching satiric message at all—or, rather, one wasn't intended. It could be there for all I know and I just haven't seen it.

Q. Do you consider this a science fiction novel?

A. The conflict between SF and "literary" fiction has been a difficult one to reconcile as I never wanted to get pinned down by any genre. I've always liked the freedom to jump genres, styles and mediums, but *Infinite Future* is, of course, a genre novel. What it does with the genre is very different than what others do, I like to think. It is not defined by the genre, but without those generic elements, the story told in the novel could not be told. They are absolutely necessary, because SF does a lot of things that "literary" fiction cannot. As well, the assumption that one type of fiction is superior to another is false, because you can find brilliance in all types of writing, just as you can find utter crap in every type. In "Some Presumptuous Approaches to Science Fiction," Samuel R. Delany discusses SF's relationship to "literary" fiction, and argues that the two are so different that direct comparisons are not necessarily worthwhile. He actually notes the odd

occurrence where readers who have little difficulty imagining Elizabethan times or a Russian city out of Dostoevsky find it impossible to understand descriptions in SF. Since the two genres are so different, they require different skills to fully appreciate. Now, I hope to fall close to the border of the two, much like Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, which is an SF novel ostensibly, but is considered a regular fiction novel by most. I use different genres and styles to avoid falling into one particular place, as I do enjoy and want to write all kinds of fiction in various genres, styles and mediums.

Q. You mentioned it earlier, but could you explain why the novel is set in an alternate present rather than the future?

A. It partly relates to the idea that we live in the future, but I also wanted to create an implied discourse between the reality of the novel and the reality of the reader. Is the world of the novel better? How is it the same, how is it different? Also, since I am playing with the 1950s/1960s conception of the future, setting it in the present seems to make the most sense. I wanted to impose contemporary cultural values upon those antiquated conceptions. In those ideas about the future from the 1950s/1960s, everything was usually bright and shiny and clean, particularly the culture. When I wrote "The Future (2003)," one tagline was that it was *The Jetsons* meets *The Osbournes*; the technology of the past combined with the values of the present, in a way.

I also wanted to set my novel in an alternate world, which is a subgenre of SF, usually looking at how history would have been altered by major events like the Axis

winning World War II or the Confederates winning the United States Civil War. I wanted to use a more minor event as my turning point, a specifically Canadian one, and explore how the world would be right now if Quebec had seceded from Canada in the early '80s. Using that as a key event and then setting the novel in the future would defeat the point in many ways.

Q. One last question: where would you situate yourself in relationship to other writers, particularly those you mention as influences?

A. I suppose I'm some sort of weird combination of all of them. By this point, that's all most artists are: a combination of their influences, and that unique combination is the artist's voice. I think all of the writers whom I have listed as influences have certain things in common, like clear and direct writing styles, and a penchant for dialogue. I think I'm more experimental than many of them, more willing to try new things and new styles, to really push myself, partly because I'm young and unknown, so I have a certain freedom not available to established writers. A writer like Bret Easton Ellis found his voice early and has not changed a lot in the 20-someodd years he's been writing, while Hunter Thompson and Philip K. Dick found themselves trapped by their writing styles, unable to escape. Haruki Murakami seems to try something a little different with each novel, so, in many ways, I think he's the writer I'm closest to, at least philosophically. But, I'm also heavily influenced by Joyce, so how experimental can I be if I'm drawing on someone from almost a century ago?

I think the structure and style of *Infinite Future* is unique for science fiction, partly because I'm drawing on so many sources from outside of the genre. If I'm unique in my voice that may be the place where it's most obvious. As well, the chapters not directly inspired by any specific writer contain certain elements that point to who I am as a writer, my unique interests and obsessions such as writing, alienation, and politics, all of which are evident throughout the novel.

Ultimately, though, it's difficult for me to see where I fall in relation to others because I'm so close to my own work that looking at it objectively is difficult. Where am I in the world of writing? I honestly don't know.

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Murakami, Haruki. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. New York: Vintage, 1993. Another strong influence. *After Dark* provided me with a hybrid prose/screenplay style to use for a chapter, while *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* demonstrates how to combine SF elements with more traditional, “literary” fiction.

Radiohead. *OK Computer*. Parlophone, 1997. The underlying basis for part two of the novel, and a great album, probably the best of the “CD age.”

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VITA AUCTORIS

Chad Nevett was born in 1983 in London, Ontario where he was raised and educated. In 2006, he received his Combined Honors Bachelor of Arts from the University of Western Ontario in English and political science. He is currently a candidate for the Master's degree in English Language and Literature—Creative Writing and hopes to graduate in Spring 2008.