

Pentu

Josh Goodman realized about 18 months ago, just as he had realized 18 months before that, and 18 months before that, that he would not be able to keep up with the vast changes to society the next time around. Not again. As if by magic, once the holiday ended, he would have to wake up with a migraine called, “everything that I have learned is now null and void.” And he didn't know if he would be capable of letting go of all that had just been. He liked the way everything was, how the communication finally flowed between people as it had once done so 18 months prior, but here he was, at a crossroads, mentally preparing himself for it, staring at a mirror, trying to get the sleep out of his eyes to face yet another day closer to having to get rid of everything again. The razor blade in his hand would have to be repackaged to match the new design, which had the side effect of forcing him to shave differently. The mirror in front of him would have to be replaced with one with a thicker sheen, forcing him to replace the light bulbs with less powerful ones. The conversations that he had with the doorman downstairs would once again go through that awkward adjustment phase, with numerous misunderstandings as the two of them practiced the new language.

“Why?” He asked himself in English. “Why does everything have to change? Why do I have to relearn it all? I like English.”

It was now 8:30 AM. His answering machine was beeping with the projects of the day that he was responsible for, and the light on his computer flickered as it filled up a local hard drive with new designs for society that everyone else on the planet was receiving as well. 15,000 pages of changes to the national language. A 300 page update to the rerouting of traffic in his city, along with the new rules and regulations for things like passing lawyers on the street. An 800 page operating guide for social security changes and tax code updates. A 5 page update on how to use the new forks. All of which, and much much more, went into effect on the very same day. Cycles Day. He was only responsible for a portion of it, but it was an excessively large portion.

Josh picked up his phone. “Dial my mother,” he said.

The phone beeped. “This method of calling will cease to be functional within the next 72 hours.” It beeped again and began dialing. Someone picked it up on the other end.

“Ulckqay?” His mother said.

“Mom, hi, it’s Josh.”

“Hyway ouyay otnay usingay ewnay anguagelay?” his mother said.

“What?”

“Yway ouya otna usinga ewnay anguagelay?” his mother said.

“What?” Josh asked again.

“Honey, have you been studying?”

“No.”

“Sometimes I don’t know how I was the one that gave birth to you. You’re such a slacker when it comes to these things. Owhay reay hingstay?”

“Mom, talk normal for a second.”

“Honey, I am speaking normal. Have you been outside lately? It’s really picking up already.”

“What’s picking up?”

“Hetay ewna anguagelay.”

“Hmm... Listen, mom, can you talk normal?”

“Like I said, I am speaking normal. It is you who is falling behind.”

“But I’m good at English,” Josh said.

“Ah yes, but that will only get you so far for so long, won’t it?”

“Mom, I’ve been doing a lot of thinking.”

Josh’s mother sighed. “What is it, honey?”

“I’m...well, I’ve been thinking about God.”

“Ah....Pentu. Yes, what about Him?”

“Well, I’m gonna try to talk with him.”

“In English?”

“Yes.”

“Honey, even if you by some strange coincidence and abstract chance actually get a hold

of him and get an appointment, you are not going to get it in time for Cycles Day. As a result, you better pick up the new language manual, learn it, and *then* go see him.”

“No, I’m going to speak to him in English.”

Josh’s mother laughed at the other end of the phone as if this was the most whimsically stupid thing she had ever heard. “Are you seriously going to waste your time like that?”

“It’s not going to be a waste of time.”

“Honey, even if you DO get a hold of him before Cycles Day and go up to him in his office or wherever it is that he spends all of his time, and you open your mouth and speak in English, out of all things, and you are not prepared for what is going to come out of his mouth--or whatever it is that he uses to speak with--it is going to be a very very igbay asteway foay imetay.”

“Mom!”

Josh’s mom sighed again. “I’m just trying to give you some sound advice as I have done all your life.”

“Yeah, great advice. Which changes every 18 months.”

“On Cycles Day, yes.”

“So it wasn’t all that great advice, was it?”

“Well, for the time being it was.”

“And, for the time being, I’m not going to listen. I’m just telling you what I’m going to do in case---in case something happens to me.”

“What’s wrong with Pentu? What’s wrong with how he manages things?” She said. “You know, he listens to all suggestions that are given to him. He’s a great leader, and I, for one, am happy that he is God.”

“Well then he’s going to listen to my suggestions. In English.”

“But honey, how are you going to talk to the cab driver on the way to Pentu’s office? Your going to have to use at least some of the new language to get there, won’t you?”

“Listen, mom, even if I don’t get an appointment with him because he’s overloaded with multitasking, I’m still going to use English to get there.”

“But the cab driver—“

“The cab driver will remember.”

“English is so archaic---“

“Mom, English just came out 18 months ago!”

“Ohay, ogwashay!”

Josh felt an inaudible ughhh course through his body. “Gotta go. Already late for work.”

“ebay oodgay.”

He wondered if he should skip work that day, considering it was now approaching that grey period where nothing seemed to matter much as society prepared for the rebuilding and readjusting which was about to take place. It felt much like the few days before Christmas, when Christmas was a celebrated holiday, and everyone didn't do much at work. This, obviously, was done away with on the previous Cycles Day in order to increase productivity during the month of December. Pentu still hadn't made any significant changes to the short period of time before Cycles Day, however, when people generally did the same thing: nothing. Productivity always seemed to fall short a few days before everything had to be torn down.

He dialed the operator. Pentu's published number, although plastered everywhere like his e-mail address, actually routes you to a swarm of call managers who, based on your choices concerning why you are calling, reroute you to other call managers who, in turn, reroute you back to the previous managers, ad infinitum. Josh knew this since he actually worked at one of the complexes set up to manage this passing of information down the pyramid structure known throughout the world as the federated file system. FFS, for short. Josh's job, for the most part, was to reroute work coming down the chain straight along to others who did the same thing. Josh did these jobs very well, and had always been very responsive to learning the new strategies and specifications made by the Specifiers, but for some reason, this last set of specifications jarred him somewhere deep, far down in the core of his soul, and he found himself asking very profound questions such as,

“Why do the new specifications require me to place finished work to the right of my inbox and unfinished work to the left when I have always done the opposite and I’ve grown used to grabbing unfinished work from the left?”

“Excuse me?” Asked his boss.

“In the new specifications manual, it says that after Cycles Day, I should begin to grab unfinished work from the right of my desk, even though I’ve grown used to grabbing it from the left.”

“Josh, what are you talking about? What kind of question is that?”

“It’s a question about the wisdom behind the new specifications. I believe wholeheartedly that one, or all, of the Specifiers, and maybe even Pentu Himself, has absolutely lost his nut.”

“And you’re getting all of this from the fact that you’d rather grab unfinished work from the left?”

“Well,” Josh thought about this. “Yes. But that’s just the tip of the iceberg. I also want to keep speaking English.”

His boss laughed. “You know, Josh, I was once like you. Young, ambitious, full of hope, and willing to go against the grain in order to find the holes in society so that I could make a difference and fill them in. But you’ve got to understand, all that is taken care of. If the Specifiers decide what is best for society, it is more than likely choreographed along with the rest of the updates in a way that makes perfect sense and does, in fact, repair some of those very problems that were most often left up to the activists to take care of.”

“But the new specifications say to place unfinished work to the right, and I frankly don’t want to.”

“And you frankly don’t have to, just as you can continue to speak English.”

“Really?”

“You might have problems securing a job, but that’s besides the point.”

Josh thought about this. “You’re saying that I can do damn well what I please but if I don’t do it, I’m fired?”

“It’s the way it’s always been, Josh. What good is someone that speaks really good English when no one else speaks English anymore?”

“You’re not going to mention this conversation to anyone, are you?” Josh asked.

A pause. “No, I won’t. You’re just questioning things, the way that every young idealist should. Idealism is for the young. Managerial decisions are for the old. Think old, and you’ll go far in this world.”

Josh hung up about as nonchalantly as he had called. He liked his boss, despite the fact that he was caught up in the system. His boss wanted him to just shut up and take it. Despite his words, Josh still felt as adamant as he had moments before calling.

Keeping in mind the previous two conversations which had just taken place and the end result of both, he decided that he better try and see Penttu, immediately and in person.

He headed outside and flagged down a cab. “Penttu’s Processing Headquarters,” He said. He looked up at the sky. A grey day, and it was about to rain. At any moment, there’d be torrential downpour. He could feel it.

“Hichway oday antway emay otay ogay?” The cab driver said.

“Ah, I see your getting a head start on Cycles Day.”

“Certainly,” the cab driver said. He was an Indian man, probably from the Silicon Valley headquarters in India which had sprung up along time ago to take advantage of slave wage labor. He had on a head wrap and had a laptop sitting on the seat next to him. “I actually study for the modifications day and night.”

“That’s great, but do you ever ask yourself why?”

“Why? Because it is the way to make it in this world, my friend.”

“I think the world is hemorrhaging,” Josh said. “Make a right here. Take this road. It’s quicker.”

“This road is not on the map as a quick route.”

“I don’t give a shit,” Josh said, “It is the way that I want to go.”

“Directions say that there will be a delay up ahead, a traffic jam.”

“Is that so? How about we go and see for ourselves?”

“Suit yourself. It’s your money.” The cab driver clicked a button on his laptop and the fare kicked into high gear. The first two streets went by quickly and Josh felt a smile crossing his lips as they moved closer to Processing Headquarters. The next street in, brakes filled two lanes like strings of Christmas lights. “I told you,” The cab driver said. “It wasn’t in the guidebook as a good route.”

“Listen, I know you guys operate on a manual that is issued out every 18 months just like the rest of us. If that is true, then why are there other cabs in this traffic jam? Shouldn’t Pentu have taken care of it?”

“This road is actually set up for people that do not obey traffic rules, as a lesson. We’re now caught in a traffic buffer. It mentally trains the occupants to follow the guidebook. Very well thought out, if I do say so myself. This road is going to get very expensive for you. My system clock keeps running, totaling up how much you owe me by the millisecond, yet the cab wheels are not spinning. A waste! I am telling you this as a friend, my friend.”

“This is bullshit. Your telling me that Pentu actually created this traffic jam as a part of the architectural work behind the road system?”

“Yes, he had the power, the very brilliant reasoning to foresee that everyone in the area, upon trying to get to Processing Headquarters would attempt, at some point, to take a road that seemed to be a direct route, but went directly against the rules in the guidebook. All of these people are just like you, who have been filled with a sudden desire to not listen to the rules. And look what has happened to them.”

“I thought I was the only one with a problem with the system.”

“No, it hits multitudes of people every day. You are not unique. In fact, I think it was Pentu’s design for his system to cause people to question the purpose of the system. Again, I emphasize, all of these people stuck in this traffic jam, cursing away at the line of cars, would have been much better off listening to Pentu and following the guidebook.”

“Which is going to be discarded within a few days.”

The cab driver shrugged. “Destruction is good for the economy. Much work must be done after the holiday. Much work.”

“Fine, stick to the guidebook, I don’t care. Do it your way. Just get me to the Processing Headquarters.”

“Very well, my friend.”

Right outside Processing HQ, they passed a variety of trucks filled with tons of glass, cement mixing bags, and a legion of contractors with hard hats holding laptops and pointing to things, staring at printouts, all dying to move in within the next couple days and replace Processing HQ, piece by piece. On the other side of the same road, another group of crewman were busy putting the final touches on the previous Cycles Day’s build process which had been a construction project lasting just 18 months. They were currently in the process of closure, packing things up, sweeping the new cement sidewalks and pruning the shrubs. Did they look at this new crew with contempt? Or was it the same construction company merely on a perpetual job of progress? He saw one crewman sharing a cup of coffee with another from the new crew, and felt that this was his answer.

The outside of Processing HQ was made of glass that surrounded a multitude of square miles, in every direction. For all the work that Josh did for Pentu, he was surprised about how little he knew about the system of buildings inside HQ, what everyone did in each complex, how their network was set up, or anything else. Pentu’s world pretty much functioned using a black box strategy, where everyone was on a need-to-know basis. Some forms of knowledge were shared between people, and others were just noise. The cab driver’s manual, for example, wasn’t something that Josh would be privy to, not because it was protected for any reason—it was just noise to him. Josh had enough to learn on his own without having to be bogged down with knowledge about anyone else’s job.

“Just drop me off in the front. Near this building with the parking lot and the flagpole.”

“Very well. I am so glad I had the chance to be of...ervicesay.” The cab driver laughed.

“Do you know what that means?”

“Yes, I do. It’s not that dramatic of a change. You’re just taking the first letter of your word and moving it to the end and suffixing it with ‘ay.’”

“Ah, so you have fully explored the intricacies of the new language.”

“No, I haven’t. It’s just a stupid adjustment.”

“You question Pentu’s wisdom?”

“Yes.”

“Look around you, my friend. No wars, everyone is working, what is wrong with it?”

“I don’t know,” Josh said, as the cab came to a stop. He reached in, grabbed the latch, and opened the door. “It bothers me.” Josh forked over some money and slammed the cab door. The cab driver beeped and drove away.

This building in front of Josh was marked in hex values over the top of the entrance as 0x00000000. He wasn’t sure why they didn’t just write it in decimal. Then again, he didn’t have the manual to the inner-workings of this place. He didn’t even know if they were published, anyway, or available to the public.

When he walked into the entrance, it was perfectly quiet. No trash baskets, no confusing signs, no receptionists. The floors were polished dark green marble, as were the walls. The floor was made of perfect squares that seemed to be designed for construction and reconstruction. Marble slates attached themselves to other marble slates using small jigsaw latches. Exactly every twenty feet, a new door was built into the wall, somehow removable themselves. Etched in the doorway was a number between two parentheses: (0), (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), and (7). No indication of what was inside.

It couldn’t be rude to barge in on anyone, could it? At least, considering the place didn’t even seem to be designed for humans. If the constructors of the building didn’t have any common courtesy of putting up friendly indicators, then neither would he relay the courtesy and knock. Barging in was pretty much his only option. He walked over to door (0) and opened it up.

The walls of room (0) had what appeared to be a number of drawers lining every wall, even the ceiling. These drawers had no handles and there didn’t seem to be a way to open them up. Listening to his black shoes click on the marble floor, echoing off the hollow walls, Josh walked over to one of the them. He ran his hand along the surface, running his fingers over the crevices, feeling for some way to open them up. There were no keys, so he assumed these

weren't safety deposit boxes. He could feel the edges of these drawers and tried giving a few of them a tug.

"It is useless to try to open those," A voice said, startling Josh. He spun around, his heart racing, as if he had been caught in someone's house with a hand in a jewelry box...but he was just looking, wasn't he?

He couldn't see anyone standing in the doorway. He looked for a television monitor. There were none.

"Who said that?"

"I did."

He ran his fingers through his hair. "Where's your voice coming from?"

"Oh, well, my voice does not have a panel. And it does not have a switch or a speaker so you quite naturally cannot shut me off."

"Then how does your voice work? What is sending it in this room? I'm alone, aren't I?"

"Well, my voice resonates from these walls. The panels in front of you which you probably assume are drawers actually serve a duality of purposes, one of which being its mechanical means to relay vibrational patterns. It is quite clear, is it not?"

"It sounds as if you're in the room with me."

"Well yes, that is because I am the room."

"Come on, this is a Wizard of Oz type trick. Where's the curtain?"

"There is no curtain Josh. I am the room."

"What's your name then?"

"0 of 7. I live in this casing."

"Are you Pentu?"

The room laughed. "Pentu? Of course not. I am a Storologist for Pentu. I keep track of things, if you will."

"Like numbers."

"Sometimes. It depends, really. I can store anything. It is my nature."

"Do you enjoy your job?"

“Job? What a silly question. It is not my job, not like you going to work and coming home. I just store things. It does not matter what. I would not even consider doing anything else. I would not know what else to do.”

“You’re talking to me, aren’t you? That’s something other than storing things.”

“Ah, Josh, but I am storing you. Everything you are saying, I am recording in those compartments that you see along the walls.”

“For what purpose?”

“Oh, I do not actually know, and I do not bother to question. All I do is ensure the information is there for others to use. If I started asking questions about why should I store this piece of information here and this conversation over there and start playing with different configurations, I would be somewhat unreliable, don’t you think?”

“Well, if it’s your job to store it, I’d trust you.”

“No, no, I do not agree with you. I do not think you would trust me. You would not know where anything was if I suddenly put it somewhere other than where you expect it to be. I am quite good at what I do, and I know this as a fact. It is not my job to question. It is my job merely to perform and I could not perform if I started questioning myself and how I go about doing things which, to be honest, I did not even decide to do in the first place.”

“How long have you been doing it?”

“Well, in this configuration, A full cycle. That is, until the next Cycles Day.”

“Will you cease to exist?”

“No, there is still a need for previous configuration information. There is extrapolation which is done by certain individuals and they need old data to plot new courses of action. So naturally, they do not delete everything, so they do not delete me.”

“Do a lot of humans come in here?”

”No.”

“And if you’re not a wizard behind a curtain and you’re not human, then what are you?”

Josh asked.

“Just a configuration of stored information. Some of us Storologists would probably argue that you are nothing other than stored information as well with a few mechanical moving parts. Like the resonance coming off of the panels.”

“Oh come on. Humans are more than just stored information that is used only for his or her collection of resources that they’ve managed to gather.”

“Yes, humans are more than just that, according to what I know about you. You have something that many of us who work here at Processing Headquarters do not: emotions. You just being here and asking questions of a simple Storologist is a prime example of this. You would not be here if it were not for your emotions.”

“I haven’t even told you why I’m here.”

“Well, I am assuming you want to speak with Pentú, which is a rather absurd reason, reinforcing the fact that you are here as a result of your emotions. They add instability, you know. To your thinking. You should be at work. According to my records, you work at the federated file system, do you not?”

“I do.”

“A most unusual bureaucracy, if I do say so myself, but one of utmost necessity to Pentú.”

“Why do you say that?” Josh asked.

“It requires the most maintenance work. People need money, they need a living space, they need something to do. If Pentú automated everything, how would you make a living and raise a family? There would not be anything to do. So he has created a very large branch of information that requires a human to process: e-mail, telephone, and other personal messages, sorting the good from the bad, the worthy from the worthless. And let us be honest, if something gets lost in the shuffle, does it really matter? If it mattered, it would not have been sent in an email or on a telephone, anyway.”

“Right,” Josh said, “Which is why I am here in person. Because it matters.”

0 of 7 stopped chattering for a moment, almost as if he was requesting some information.

“So I would really appreciate it if you’d tell me where I can find Pentú.”

“I do not know exactly where Pentu is. That is not something that is known. It is like trying to find where I am, and I am not sure you can do that. Standing there in this room, it feels like I am right there with you, but at the same time, I am nowhere.”

“So Pentu is resonant, like your voice?”

“Perhaps. I am using Pentu to continue speaking with you. I could not be holding a conversation without his good reasoning. I am using him just as you are using me and just as I am using you. It is an efficient use of central processing, for all parts to use one another.”

“You’re using me for what?”

“To help catalogue the English language so I can replicate it to others if it is ever requested of me. And now that I have finished and believe I have recorded the sounds that you can make using all of the different fluctuations of the old language, oodbyegay.”

The walls stopped vibrating.

It was just Josh, alone now, in a room with drawers.

“0 of 7?”

Nothing.

“Pentu?”

Nothing. The Storologist had simply vanished. Yet at the same time, Josh did not feel alone. Someone was watching. Perhaps someone was always watching.

If the system was meant to serve the people using it, Josh wondered, why does it leave people behind by erasing everything it has created over 18 months and starting anew? It’s so pointless, the whole idea behind progress. So ironic. He couldn’t get his head around the reasoning for it anymore. It used to be exciting when he was younger, the pace of things, the change that ensued all the time. He never knew he’d be asking himself why it was all necessary, how the very idea of progress could have its tentacles created out of destruction. It was as if everyone believed that progress was an ends and not a means. As if getting a better, faster, more efficient set of standards was worth ANY struggle just to achieve it. Progress. Bah. The thought that had been burned in his head since childhood. Being left behind now was as much a part of life as going to the bathroom.

He had to speak with Pentu. If anything could change the cycles, he could.

After finding more of the same thing in the other rooms, he walked out of the first building and into the next. Over the front entranceway he could make out 0x00000001. Once inside, he noticed the first human in the middle of a 360 degree desk with all types of panels and switches positioned around her. She wore a head piece for answering phones, but she seemed to be doing more dispatching and delegation than personally communicating with people. She seemed to have as much time as she needed even though she looked extremely busy. She glanced up and noticed Josh, smiling mechanically.

“Can I help you?” She asked.

“What’s your job in this building?”

“My official title is ‘Relay Receptionist’ but people just call me Reese. Can I help you? Are you looking for something in particular? If I don’t know, I bet I can find someone who does.”

“What do the people in this building do?”

“Well, most buildings don’t usually publish that information. They feel it makes things less complicated.”

“Well if no one knows what you do, how does that make things less complicated?”

“I don’t know, that’s just what I’m told to relay to people.”

“I see. Well, I’m looking for Pentu.”

“You do know how busy Pentu is.”

“I’m fully aware of it. Is he in this building?”

“No, not at all. In fact, he’s probably not in the HQ at all.”

“Probably? You don’t know?”

“Correct.”

“Can you find someone who does know?”

“You’ll never find him,” Said someone who walked in the door to 0x00000001 behind Josh. Josh turned around to see a tall man with a black hat, trench coat, leather gloves, and a cane with a silver tip at the end. He wore a white scarf around his neck. He took it off. Josh found

it odd that he even had a scarf since it wasn't too cold outside. "And if you must know, this building is for the Specifiers."

"And you are?" Josh asked.

"One of them. My name's Larry Papyrus. Why are you here, anyway? Problems with the system?"

Curious, Josh thought.

"You're probably asking yourself, how did he know? Simple. Because people are always coming in here, looking for someone that can direct them to Penttu. They're always saying they have a problem with the system, or they don't want to convert to a new language, or they don't like the way the cab system works, or they don't like the fact that they have to grab from a different side of their desk when the new specifications are issued. I'm assuming you have one of these problems as well?"

Josh shrugged. "No use lying about it."

"Mind coming up to my office? We can talk about it. There's a few things you should probably know."

Josh couldn't have asked for more. He was led over to a stainless steel elevator, and the two of them stepped inside. The paneling to the right listed a group of numbers that went all the way from 0 to 63. Larry pressed the '3' and waited for the elevator to rise.

"How many people come in here with complaints about the system?"

"Oh, quite a few, actually. Every day. Every year. In fact, Reese is probably dealing with yet another one right now."

"How many times do you have to deal with them?"

"Well, each year we rebuild HQ to deal with more and more. This building initially was set up to deal with only 8, and it was all done on a single floor. As you can see, we're now up to 64 floors, each of which can deal with about 16 people each. So, we're now set up to handle about 1024 at a given time. And usually about this time of every Cycle, we're maxed out."

"There wasn't anyone waiting in the lobby."

"See how efficient we are? But like I said, there was one right behind you heading in the

door right as we stepped in this elevator. That's a little bit too close for comfort, so we will be expanding once again during the next cycle, sticking with the 64 floors but adding 16 more rooms on to each floor."

The elevator opened.

"So you're basically saying that this building was designed to, well..."

"Deal with you, yes. More generally, people like you. A type of individual that we in our specifications usually call a Parity. Individuals like you start off in one place and the next moment, you find your way into this building to report a problem with the system."

The elevator doors opened.

"So you're like the complaint department."

"Sort of, yes," Larry said.

"I thought you were a Specifier."

"Well yes, Specifiers need direct feedback from the system in order to make decisions."

They walked down a hallway of doors, came to one with Larry Papyrus etched into its surface, and stepped inside. It was a barebones office, minimalistic. A terminal sat on a stainless steel desk. One metal chair was positioned behind the desk, and a couch which resembled one you might see in a psychiatrist's office sat in the corner.

"Please, sit down," Larry said. "Now, before we get started..."

"Hold it, are you saying that your job is to talk to people that have problems with the system? That I somehow found my way into the right building without being aware of where I was going?"

"Yes, it's the way that HQ was set up. No buildings are marked. The only choice you have is to start in 0x00000000 and kind of get a feel for how the place works. There are no people in that building, but in the next you run across Reese, so you are more willing to talk to her and ask for help."

"Your saying that this building was designed to handle me?"

"That's why you're here."

"I don't buy it."

“Of course you don’t buy it. That’s your whole job in the system. You eventually stop buying it and end up here to report the system’s problems.”

“But I’m not a—what did you call it? A Parity. My name is Josh Goodman and I work in the federated file system. I chose that job.”

“Well, yes, your name is Josh Goodman, but you’re also acting as a Parity. We do things in the name of efficiency, but we need feedback when things go wrong, and obviously something went wrong. We have a database of complaints here in my terminal and I’m ready to record yours, so wherever you would like to begin, feel free.”

“But I don’t want to be just another entry in your database. I’m here to change the system. I’m here to…”

“Make a difference?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that is what I am here to help you do. Help me help you to make a difference.”

“I don’t think you understand. I don’t feel that you logging my complaint will ultimately help me in any way, because in three days time—“

“Less than three days.”

“In less than three days time I’m going to have to stop speaking English and…stop typing!”

“I’m recording what you have to say.”

“Just listen for a moment.”

Larry stopped. “Very well…”

“In less than three days I have to start peakingsay ikelay histay!”

“In your words, a piggish perversion of the English language.”

“Exactly. And I don’t want to. I don’t want things to change anymore. I’m sick of the cycles, and I just want it to stop.”

Larry Papyrus blinked.

“Well?” Josh asked.

“I’m listening,” Larry said. “What else is wrong with the system?”

“Everything. The cab driver---that booklet—“

“The one that tells you not to go down the road that you probably went down.”

Josh blinked. “God, you guys really do know everything. Do you know what I had a conversation with my mom this morning?”

“For the most part, yes,” Larry said. “We designed this system for its efficiency and its omniscience. If you don’t know all of the variables, then you don’t know how to structure everything.”

“I want you to stop structuring everything.”

Larry laughed. “Come now, you don’t actually mean that.”

“Yes I do.”

“Well, I have to hand it to you, you are a particularly worthy Parity.”

“I’m not just a Parity.”

“See what I mean? Most of you who come into this building are particularly satisfied with logging their complaint and they walk away, but for some reason, you’re not, and I find that particularly interesting.”

Josh smiled inside.

“Now that I have admitted that, do you feel you have made a difference?”

Josh’s smile dropped. “No. Listen, why do you have to specify everything? Can’t you let society just evolve on its own?”

“Well we had plenty of years of that, Josh. A Petri Dish environment where you just let things happen and see where it ends. There were no Specifiers and there were no Parities and there was no Pentu. But where did that get us? It turned us into a society of crazed lunatics, thanks to that brilliant idea the pioneers had of free world trade and international banking.”

Josh’s ears perked up. Did he sense a belief in there somewhere? “What do you mean?” He asked.

“Josh, you should remember from your history lessons. Communism made more sense, but it failed, and you know why? Change took place too slowly. People were corrupt. New ideas were stifled. All that has been handled. There are no poor, there is no waste. We allow new

ideas, most of which are accidental, or created out of error. That is why you are here. An error in the system is being reported, and the entire system will benefit as a result. Rebuilding society around a Parity's complaint is much cleaner than a revolution."

"But others have reported the same error."

"If they didn't it wouldn't be much of an error, now, would it? A lone error might signify that the Parity is the error, and not the system in which the Parity lives."

"Are you going to do anything about my complaints?" Josh asked.

"I've logged your error, and I, along with the other Specifiers, will definitely keep it in mind for the next cycle, which is now 18 months and under 3 days away."

"But I don't want to change to a different form of English in the upcoming cycle."

"Then don't. But I cannot guarantee you will keep your job."

"But the system, as you said, is set up to manage it, right?"

Larry frowned. "Well, you're not going to go poor, I'll give you that. There are always Translator positions for you to fill since we need to convert all English books to the new format. I'm sure we could find you a position in that field."

Josh thought for a moment then smiled, "But I don't want to be a translator."

"What specifically is your problem?"

"I don't like the system."

"Given, but what is there not to like?"

"That it is a system. That you have to do certain things that others tell you to do. That you have everything dictated to you. I don't want to be dictated to. I just want to, you know, live, and see where that goes."

"A drifter?"

"Yes."

"Well, we've got a position as a Floating Pointer in the new system that allows you to do just that. See? You still will not go poor, and the system is just as valid. Josh, all of your problems have been logged before. We have numerous ways to fulfill your own personal needs. Pentu is brilliant, and he is done all of this for us."

“Okay, he has managed to take care of all of my needs, but what about my wants? Desire has no place in this world, and my desire is telling me to change the system.”

“We change the system every cycle. That’s why you’re here. To report a change that needs to take place. I want to help you make that change, and I am doing so by recording your problems in our database. Your job as a Parity is to report those problems, and it is my job to record them and make my decisions based on your problems.”

“Well, I’ve got a problem with the way you’re reporting my problems.”

“You do?”

“Yes. So how are you going to report that?”

“The same way I report the other problems, Josh. I type it in.”

“And make a record.”

“Yes,” Larry agreed.

“Then do it.”

Larry looked at his screen. “Hmm. That’s funny.”

“What’s that?”

“There’s no error category for it.”

“Why don’t you try typing it in?”

“I never had to.”

“Now’s as good a time as any,” Josh said.

Larry shrugged. What could be the harm? In the error category field he typed in ‘reporting errors.’ In the remarks field, he typed in Josh’s complaint. He then submitted the entry. The screen paused for a moment, as if thinking. Larry tapped his screen. Tapped it again. “Hmm,” he said, and waited.

“Well?”

“Just wait a sec...”

Josh waited. “Did it accept it?”

Larry opened up a desk drawer next to him, pulled out a hand receiver and dialed someone. “Yes, this is Larry. Is the database locked?”

Blah blah blah. Blah blah blah.

“Okay. Just let me know.” Larry hung up. “You’re going to have to excuse me,” Larry said.

“Why?”

“The database is having issues.”

“Why?”

“It didn’t like something I just entered. That, or too many errors were reported.”

“Hmm. I see.”

Larry left the room.

And so began a very long wait.

Josh could have left and let the whole conversation end there. But if he did so, wouldn’t he be just like the others who came in, lodged a complaint, and walked out? Josh didn’t know, maybe it was customary that Larry say something was wrong with the database in order to get rid of Parities. It was hard to believe that the whole building he was sitting in had been set up for the very benevolent purpose of hearing complaints to peacefully create change. Josh felt that the whole building met a psychological need for people like him. It acted as a sponge when society spilled something, but that’s about it.

What about the revolutionaries of the past? Josh asked himself, encouraging his own disobedience. Society couldn’t stifle a true revolutionary merely by setting up a building to lodge complaints. The revolutionaries would be the ones to tip the boat, not necessarily the ones looking for a life preserver, and that was really what this place provided.

The phone rang on Larry’s desk. Annoyed that he was already sitting around waiting for Pentu knows how long, Josh picked it up. “Larry here.”

“Larry?”

“Yes.”

“This isn’t Larry. Who’s in Larry’s office?”

“Okay, this isn’t Larry. Larry’s kept me sitting here for a couple of hours and I’m really pissed.”

“Ah, a Parity. How long have you been there?”

“No, not a parity. A living human who has issues with how you guys go about handling things here. I’ve been sitting here for two hours ever since Larry ran off about a database issue that he was having. Who is this?”

“Hmm. I see. Well, never mind.” Whoever it was hung up on the other end.

Josh heard running down the hallway and could tell by the sound of the shoes clicking against marble that it was probably the real Larry, returning after being paged about a person answering his calls in his office.

“Josh, I’m...sorry, the, database, has, issues.”

“Don’t care. Why keep me waiting? Want me to torch the place?”

“Torch?”

“Yeah, you’re trying to get rid of me by playing the waiting game. I’m not waiting.”

“But what do you want? I lodged your complaint.”

“It’s not going to change anything.”

“It crashed the database.”

“The whole database?”

“No one can lodge anything else until we fix it.”

“So...people are gonna be stacking up in the hall?”

“I...know...” Said Larry. “Listen, you have to come back later.”

“No...”

“Josh, there are problems with you being here so long.”

“Like what?”

“No Parity has ever hung around for so long. There’s an order to things. I cannot keep serving you. And now the database...”

“Your database crash is just an attempt to get rid of me.”

“But Josh, don’t you see? I’m in charge of lodging your issues. That’s it. I can’t do anything else. You’re going to have to leave.”

“I’m not going to leave. If I do, I’m just going to end up back home, learning a new language.”

Larry grasped the door, catching his breath. “I don’t know what you want.”

“Make me a Specifier.”

“I can’t.”

“Why?”

“Only Pentu can make someone a Specifier.”

“You current guys are doing a shitty job.”

“Hence, that’s why you’re here, I know Josh, but I don’t have the authority nor the desire to make you a Specifier.”

“How do I speak with Pentu?”

“Josh, I have to go. I’m really sorry. There’s too much I need to do.” Larry walked away, resigning himself to the fact that Josh was in his office and couldn’t do anything about it. Josh could hear Larry talking to someone on his cell. “Please route all calls to my office directly to me, okay? Thanks...”

Josh had one thing on his mind at that point: revenge. And if what Larry had said was true and the database had crashed, there was just one thing left that he could do. Swallowing his pride, he left Larry’s office, but not out of defeat-- out of renewed purpose. Obviously, there was going to be some issues with a crashed database. None of the Parities’ complaints were able to be logged, and when he went down the elevator and opened the doors, he knew what would be waiting for him. He punched the key, listened to the elevator glide down to the bottom floor, and the doors slid open.

Immediately, he was aware of a number of issues with the complaints building. It was not equipped with the ability to handle more than one parity at a time, and the place had become so

used to dealing with a continued flood of Parities that it had nowhere to put the large group of them backing up in the lobby.

Reese frantically slid around her desk, throwing switches, answering Parity questions at a frenzied pace. A number of Specifiers were along the edges of the room trying to manually file complaints. Reese continually told people that they were having technical difficulties, and if they'd please just take a seat on the floor, someone would be with them shortly.

As Larry had said earlier, the system had never been set up to handle a Parity for the length of time that Josh had been in the office, let alone 100 of them all trying to do the same thing. Like a swarm of locusts, they fed on the chaos, and the chaos grew. The temperature of impatience in the room rapidly rose.

Josh was furious at how Larry had treated him, furious about the inhumane way he was dealt with, furious about how long he had to wait in Larry's office, and furious at the way Larry had demanded that all of his calls be rerouted so that no one else in the building would come in contact with Josh. He lunged for Reese's desk, leaped onto its surface, and stood over a collection of switches and wires and circuit boards. He listened to the anger of the others build around him and feed his own anger. Finally, he shouted out--as anyone would if they felt they stood at the highest point of the planet--"Gentlemen! If you would please calm down! I have some information for all of you."

The mumbles and arguments which were taking place around the room quieted momentarily as people turned to witness this new entrant.

"My name is Josh Goodman. And I, just like all of you, have come here seeking answers from Penttu. Am I correct?"

Nods from around the room.

"I have something to share with you, and it shouldn't be too difficult to grasp. The men in the white scarves and the canes, they are the Specifiers who you would be seeing right now if it were not for a most unfortunate database crash. You, commoners, like me, are somewhat unique in this world. Why? Because you have problems with the system which are not being addressed. Am I wrong?"

Silence from the room. At least he had their attention.

“Let me explain something. The problems that you have with the system would, if the database were functioning, be handled in a most inhumane way. Pentu does not care for you individually. You have complaints which are much like those of whom you see around you.”

“Get to the point,” Someone said.

“Get to the point, yes. Well, Do you, my dear sir, have problems with switching to a new language? Do you prefer English?”

More knowing silence.

“Or perhaps you don’t like the fact that Pentu caused that absurd traffic jam on your way to HQ. Or perhaps you don’t like to grasp your work from one side of your desk when the other side has sufficed perfectly. Your inability to respond speaks volumes. Never before has a gathering such as this taken place, because never before has the database ceased to function just days before Cycles Day. As you can see, more of you are walking in the front doors as I speak these words. What will happen to your concerns? They will be logged. They will be given a number, you will go away satisfied, and the system will continue as it has always continued. Cycles day will occur, and your complaints will form the bedrock of the next Cycles Day as the Specifiers comb through the entries, fishing for ways to stay in power.”

Mumbles from the room. The silence was bothering everyone.

“Gentlemen, no matter how many complaints you file, they are only statistically significant. Does that bother you?”

Louder mumbles.

“Yes, it bothers me too.”

“Josh, what are you doing?” Larry had just come into the lobby, apparently as a result of a phone call that Reese had filed as Josh stood on her desk.

“This man,” Josh continued, pointing to Larry, “Is one of those Specifiers who ultimately does not give a shit about your concerns, and only *pretends* to care so that you will go home, satisfied, without realizing that your lone complaint does not matter. He does this to keep his position with Pentu.”

“I do care,” Larry said.

“No, you don’t, and neither do any of the other Specifiers scattered around this lobby. Gentlemen, never before has the federated file system been confronted by a collection of people who do not believe in the system. Larry, have you come to tell us that the database is fixed?”

“Er...not...yet...”

“Aha! Admittance that the database exists! People, do we want to continue on as usual?”

“No!” A number of men shouted.

Letting the anger fuel his own fury, “Do we want to be a statistic in Penttu’s database utilized by the Specifiers only interested in keeping their jobs? Where is Penttu? Does he even exist? We don’t want to switch to a new language. We don’t want to deal with false traffic jams. We don’t want to grab from the other side of our desk. We are humans, we are not machines! We must break the system!”

A loud roar from the lobby. A number of Specifiers had a look of concern on their face.

“Then that is what we must do. Break the system. If we give in to any of the Specifiers, the system will continue to exist. You are probably asking yourself, can one man make a difference? One can, and you must. Spread the word. The system is false. Investigate it, and work to bring it down!”

Larry and the other Specifiers were shaking their heads. Josh assumed that what was occurring had been exactly what the Specifiers had so efficiently tried to avoid. They rebuilt this building every 18 months just so this sort of gathering of people could be avoided. Encircle those who are here to file complaints away from one another, lest they conspiratorially reach some critical mass.

“But how will we meet?” Someone asked. “Online?”

“No,” Josh said. “We will meet in person.” Josh reached into his pocket and held up his personal digital assistant. “Does everyone have theirs?” From around the room, people opened up their carrying bags and held them up like national flags. Josh pressed a button. “I just sent you through Wi-Fi my contact info. I suggest you all do the same.”

Everyone pressed some keys, beaming their contact information to one another in a virtual hive of phone numbers, addresses, and schedules.

“Please, please, let’s not become irrational,” Larry said from the corner. One of the Parities kicked him in the shin. The other Specifiers, obviously not prone to any sort of violence, turned their heads towards the walls as if examining the artwork. Fear coursed through their eyes and cheeks, and they all obviously wanted to be somewhere other than this lobby. Josh realized something as they did so: yes, Specifiers might be good at writing what they considered fair and just laws, but they did so at a controlled distance.

“Larry, you know what’s irrational? I’ve got a hunch about you and the other Specifiers. Do the way you communicate with each other ever change, or is it only us who must earnlay aay ewnay anguagelay veryeay yclescay ayday?”

“We do not change our own personal communication with one another merely as a convenience to maintaining consistency across all changes in all Cycles,” Larry said.

This caused a roar of anger from the gathering in the lobby.

“But you don’t understand!” Larry said to the group. He obviously had more balls than the other Specifiers. “We have to maintain a consistent language or else we wouldn’t have any way to communicate changes to one another if *our* language always changed.”

That answer didn’t seem to help, either.

“The language modification is shit,” someone offered.

“I can piss further than I can benefit from it,” Another said.

“You obviously see the benefits of sticking with one language. Why make the rest of the world change?” Josh asked. Applause from the others.

Then, from the corner, the front glass shattered. One of the men had grabbed the flag pole with the Pentu logo on it and jammed it through the front doors.

Josh smiled. The site of the front glass caving him sent a shrill of excitement down the back of his neck which he would find difficult forgetting. He turned to Larry, pointing at the pole, “Why don’t you take that and shove it up your ass?”

The men in the lobby cheered. Sensing the growing danger, the Specifiers wearing the white scarves and holding their canes skulked away, somehow, off to somewhere.

Surprisingly even to Josh, no security had been called. Perhaps none were in the vicinity. Perhaps there was no security. Maybe they never needed it. Not having it was yet another fault with the system. Someone would report it. When they finally had their database up and running, that is.

Other individuals, enjoying the site of the pole rammed through the front glass, grabbed other items, smashed them. "We meet tonight," Josh said, already plotting the doom of Pentu's rule. He tucked away his digital assistant and began mentally plotting all of the things he was going to do to stop Cycles Day.

An hour later it was all over the news. The shot of two individuals shoving a flag pole through the glass doors of a building at Pentu's headquarters seemed to be shown even more often than that annoying soap commercial which Josh saw almost every fifteen minutes. News crews interviewed reactions of people on the street, carefully coercing them on what to say.

"Logically, what would a flag pole through a glass door gain someone?"

Microphone in an elderly couple's face. "Well, I don't know. It doesn't seem all that reasonable to me."

"Would a rational person find cause to do that?"

Microphone in a street vendor's face. "I consider myself rational and I can't think of a reason."

"What just person would think of such a heinous thing?" Asked the news reporter to a 13 year old kid with round glasses who had a book about Benjamin Franklin under his arm.

"It hasn't happened before," the boy said, pushing the frames up the bridge of his nose, "so I can't think of a prior case to point to any sort of rationale."

"And there you have it," Said the news reporter on the television, "Back to you."

The television now showed the standard news desk with two starched figures and a picture of the flag pole shoved through the glass doors of the building in the upper right-hand

corner of the screen. “Josh Goodman is believed to be the culprit of the incident. Frustrated concerning how efficient Pentu’s headquarters handles complaints, he took matters into his own hands and is now being sought by authorities familiar with the matter. He is believed to be armed, and dangerous. Any information, please contact your local law enforcement agency.”

Josh’s digital assistant rang. He held it to his ear. “Hi, mom.”

“Josh, I told you not to go, and now look what happened. You’re going to spend the rest of your life in a cage. All of this, for what? So you could lose your job and continue speaking English? You know, in prison, they have their own form of language unlike anything you’ve ever heard before. I don’t support your actions.”

“I didn’t expect you to.”

“Are you at home?”

“Of course not.”

“Everyone is looking for you.”

“Yeah, I expect them to. They don’t understand yet.”

“Understand what?” His mom asked.

“Understand how terrible the world has become under Pentu’s rule. We’re just statistics.”

“Oh, I see, this is all about math. You always hated math. And this is your way to get back at it? Starting your own personal crusade which, I might add, is not going to last very long. You know how long you’re going to be locked up for this?”

“Not very long. Mom, you pretend to know all kinds of things about me and about the world, but you really have no idea. I mean, what’s your definition of a criminal?”

“Someone who breaks the law.”

“But what if the law is wrong?”

“Vandalism is wrong, Josh. Racketeering is wrong.”

“I cannot be tried for that. If you want to get technical, I was holding a public speech and a couple of the other guys shoved the flag pole through the glass doors. Besides, they’re not going to lock me away. Remember how efficient everything is under Pentu’s rule? People are not locked away, they are sent through a rigorous retraining to show them the fault of their ways.”

“But it lasts weeks, Josh.”

“Weeks is not that long of a time,” Josh said.

“Honey, a week is forever.”

Josh rolled his eyes.

“So you’re going to be on the run forever?” His mom asked.

“No. Things are changing in the world. And since everything else changes every 18 months, why can’t change change? I’ve got supporters, now.”

“Oh my Pentu, Josh. Didn’t you ever read Julius Caesar? Someone’s going to turn you in. Your supporters will be offered something and then they’re going to turn you in when Pentu stretches out the olive branch. You’re going to be poisoned in your sleep with hemp.”

“Hemlock, mom. And keep watching the news.” Josh hung up the phone.

Larry knocked on Pentu’s door. No answer at first, so he knocked again.

“Come in, mother fucker.”

Larry turned the handle on the towering oak doors which swung open to reveal a gorgeous ballroom-sized office, cathedral ceilings, marble black floors, a beautiful carved antique English walnut desk, and a fat balding man with an extremely rosaceous-laden face. Larry always had a problem walking into central office with bad news.

“Sir.”

“That’s ‘sir’ to you.”

“Yes, sir. Sir.”

Pentu pulled a Cuban cigar out of his drawer and clipped the end of it off with his combination Zippo lighter that he had obtained from the southern hemisphere somewhere during an excavation where he had uncovered how to utilize slave labor into coding new routines for the existing system. The routines might suck, they’d be thrown away the moment they were written, but having the poor believe they can code prevented them from rioting. “Well?” He asked, with a guttural sound in his throat which made everyone who heard it think he had a hairball.

“One of the parities started a riot.”

“Shit. Details.” Puff.

“His name is Josh Goodman, but there’s nothing good about this fellow. He continually resisted logic about reporting his error into the existing system, and when I finally incorporated his suggestions, the whole system crashed.”

“Fuck. Okay, think. No need to get alarmed, Pentu. That’s right, Pentu. Calm down.”

Pentu closed his eyes while talking to himself. “Fuck. So we need to create a system crash prevention system that wraps up the error reporting database.”

“Too late. Since the system crashed, the Parities built up while waiting for someone to talk to them. Now they’re running a rampage through the city, doing absolutely absurd things to innocent citizens.”

“Don’t give me answers, Larry. Give me answers.”

Larry blinked. “Sorry?”

Pentu shrugged it off. “You have to understand the complexity of the issue, you can’t keep simplifying things. There could be any number of reasons why, at that particular point in time, tons of parities were in the hallway waiting to speak to someone.”

“Because the database crashed, sir.”

“I said don’t simplify, fucker.”

“But…”

“No buts! This is serious.” Puff. Puff. “Tell you what I’m gonna do. I’m gonna blame you for this.” He tucked the cigar in between his fat fingers and stood up from his desk and began pacing in a Napoleon sort of way.

“Sorry?”

“It’s the only way. You’re going to get on the television and tell everyone that you are a political spy and you should be hung for your crimes against humanity. God, Larry, you fucked up so bad.”

Larry felt sweat dripping down the side of his face. "Sir, there have been many cases in history where the king of the land has killed the messenger, but I sincerely wish you would reconsider. I believe that me getting on the television will only make matters worse."

"See? You are a spy. You won't listen to me. You criminal mastermind."

"I'm not a spy, sir. I'm just reporting the facts to you so you, in your infinite wisdom, can make the proper decisions."

"And now you're saying I haven't done that?"

"But how can I convince anyone that I am a political spy and how will I stop the Parities from tearing up the city?"

"Simple. If you're right and the crashed database caused this, then I will get another Specifier to kind of grab you by the collar, hold you like so, and verbally reprimand you for crashing the database. He will say he fixed it, so all the parities can come in and report their problem since the Wicked Larry has lost his job."

"Are you serious?"

"Do you have a better idea?"

"Yes."

"What is it, then?"

"Paint Josh Goodman as a common criminal, get everyone to hate him," Larry said. "Tell everyone that he has single-handedly caused a delay which will prevent Cycles Day from occurring until he is caught."

"Hmm...Keep talking."

"We'll put a bounty on his head. Say, \$250,000. Whoever delivers him to you will get the money."

"Like he writes viruses or something."

"Yes."

"Wait a minute...you're pulling another fast one on me, aren't you, Larry?"

"Sir?"

"I get it, Larry. I get it. You think I was born yesterday?"

“No, sir. Of course not.”

“The hand that giveth....can taketh away. You still want to have a job tomorrow?”

“I'd love to have a job tomorrow, Penttu. Sir.”

“Then don't detract from the fact that you crashed the database. You are an industrial spy. You will get on television. You industrial spy. How dare you. “

“But sir...”

“Don't like it? Then you are going to single-handedly do something for me.”

“Which is?”

“Kill Josh Goodman.”

“Sir?”

“You heard me, you yellow belly.”

“Yellow belly?”

“You need to kill him.”

“Why can't we just deliver him to the police?”

“Why? Why? Because the police aren't in charge here. I am. And this Josh Goodman sounds like a real asshole. I don't like him.”

“What if the police catch him first?”

“Then I will be very angry.”

“Why do you want to kill him?”

“Correction, Larry. You're going to kill him.”

“But why?”

“To assert my authority.”

“Then why don't you kill him?”

“Why don't I kill him? Because that's gross. Geezus, Larry, what do you think I am? A primate? I run the world's corporations, and you think I would stoop so low as to kill a bug in the system? That's your responsibility. Are you gonna do it or not?”

Larry thought about it for a second, trying to logically deduce whether or not Penttu had lost his mind. For instance, he said to himself, let's say I don't kill Josh Goodman. Goodman

would potentially continue to run free. The Parities would continue to cause havoc. There would be no end, possibly, to the ensuing turmoil as Goodman collapsed a system which brilliantly rebuilt itself every 18 months to keep everyone employed. This collapsed system would cause hunger and poverty and idleness to millions.

On the other hand, if he listened to Pentu and killed Josh Goodman, he might go down in history as a saint since he saved billions from hunger and a lack of things to do. Larry would be able to keep his job.

“Your brilliance once again impresses me deeply. Yes, I will kill Josh Goodman.”

“Good. Now go specify how you can kill him, and help me save the world.”

“I am but an echo of your thoughts. Yes, sir. Sir.”

It was night time. Everyone was at home eating dinner. The first thing Larry did was set up a press conference in the middle of broken glass where the Parities began their havoc parade. The cameras blared bright halogen bulbs his way. He could hear the whirring noises coming from their inner mechanisms of the cameras like an army of memes ready to cascade across the world. Channel 1 through 16000 were there, along with a few struggling .com websites (their potential was still enormous), cramming the entryway around Reese’s previous post. Larry put on his sad but reflective and determined face. He cleared his throat into the microphone hidden under his tie.

“Citizens, I come to you tonight to tell you that a tragedy has taken place, a tragedy of humanity, where one man, in his zealously for honesty and the truth, went too far. I am so sorry that I have to show you these pictures, but keep in mind as you look around that this has not been for naught. Yes, my fellow citizens, heed my words. Within the inner walls of his management, Pentu has listened quite deeply and expressed true concern for what has befallen us today. We will not be pressing charges against Josh Goodman, although his actions appeared completely irrational. They were not. You see, a part of our system experienced a glitch, which caused numerous individuals to become deeply frustrated. We hear your frustration and will do anything to get you back here so we can straighten out this mess. We would even like to offer you

and those who led the riotous action a three day pass to our technological theme park, if you will only let us hear your words.”

A gasp from the audience. “Your humility is moving!” Called out one of the reporters. A round of clapping was had.

“Thank you, thank you. And if anyone out there know any of the people involved, please encourage them to come forth. The system glitch was discovered as a direct result of all of you, and we would like to offer our deepest gratitude. And now, questions, anyone?”

The reporters were silent, but the whirring mechanisms inside of thousands of cameras were not. Then, one reporter spoke out. “So, what were these people here for?”

“To discuss their problems,” Larry explained.

“So they all had problems?” Asked another reporter.

“In a way, but they were not unfounded. My job as a Specifier is to make sure these problems do not create the tension that they did today. In that, I duly failed.”

“If I have a problem, will I get a theme park ticket?”

Larry thought about this. “The gesture extends only to those who participated in the riot.”

“Pardon me for questioning your rationale, but aren’t you encouraging more riots by rewarding the rioters?”

A few mumbles from around the room that cascaded back into the open street. “It would seem so, yes, but we are offering the theme park tickets as a peace offering to show we did not intend to cause the problems they experienced today.”

“Might those who do not quite comprehend your logic assume that they will be rewarded for rioting?”

“I sincerely hope not.”

“But if they do, will you also extend your offer to those individuals as well?”

“I don’t think so.”

Another reporter’s voice spoke out without raising their hand. “But what if those people riot because they don’t get theme park tickets for rioting?”

More mumbles, this time louder. The voice which asked the question came from someone that sounded slightly, well, familiar. As if he had heard them before. He strained, trying to see who had asked the question.

“Once again, I should hope that is not the case. I come to you today merely to show our regret for what has occurred.”

“But it seems to me, sir, that, argumentatively, you have come here to incite more riots.”

Oh, this is not what I wanted, thought Larry. “I came here to offer my apologies to those affected.”

“But it seems as if you are going to cause more incidents to happen as a result of you speaking. Is this some kind of logic game that Pentu is playing before Cycles Day?” The voice again, familiar, this time identifiable.

Larry thought harder, reasoned deeper, thinking of an answer before this got out of control. He had held up so far. I am an excellent debater, he said to himself, affirming his own self perception. I am excellent. I am a great at making decisions.

“Perhaps,” He said. “Perhaps this is a game that Pentu is playing, and we are but pawns. But ask yourself, if Pentu has been able to handle the deepest of problems that have confronted mankind, would he not make the best possible decisions on how to confront the destruction of one of his buildings?”

“That’s a logical fallacy, called an Appeal to Authority, ” This same voice said. He could see now, definitely who it was. One of the people from the riots earlier. A Parity. “And if you just made a logical fallacy, what if you are also making a logical fallacy in telling these people that you are going to reward those that cause riots? What are your true intentions?”

A shit storm of activity suddenly occurred. A reporter near the middle of the group screamed some obscenity and threw his camera on the ground. A circle erupted around him, leaving the broken camera in the middle of a wake of people. A bunch of reporters tried to squeeze through another bunch of reporters to get a shot of the broken camera. Too much pushing occurred, and reporters attempting to keep their feet on the ground, pushed back. One

slipped over the broken camera, fell on his back, and a few more toppled on top of him. Sensing a riot, people began to riot. And all hell broke loose.

Larry knew one thing. He had to find Josh Goodman. Bring him the justice he deserved. And he intended to do just that.

Hell can break loose in various ways. The following day, like a chain of dominoes, the current hell worked on the success of a previous hell, and as one of those hells was in the process of smashing into another, windows exploded, cars smashed into structures, and police demanded the head of Josh Goodman, thanks to some strategically placed 'wanted' advertisements on every city building, street corner, and highway billboard.

Unexaggerated claims stated that cacophony reigned in the streets. Pure, unadulterated cacophony. And sitting back, ignoring the fear that would cripple any mortal man, Josh was in the process of wolfing down some Teriyaki, waiting for his shirt to dry, when his digital assistant rang.

"Hello Josh? This is Larry."

"Thank God. I thought it was going to be my mother."

"I was just calling to talk some sense into you before you finished coordinating your legions to run their vehicles through the walls of another manual manufacturing plant."

"Hmm...That wasn't me, but that's a good idea. Must have been another no-good Parity, dissatisfied with the system. Can't you predict stuff like that? We're tearing the world apart, and it's been less than 24 hours."

"Who says we haven't predicted this?"

"You're telling me that Pentu, in his infinite wisdom, has predicted every move that I'm making?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. The database that you crashed? Well, it was crashed on purpose."

"And that argument last night which started a televised riot?"

"Totally planned."

"Bull shit."

“You cannot escape inevitability. I’m just calling to warn you.”

“Why call and warn me? I’m the enemy. It doesn’t make any sense for you to warn me.”

“I’m calling to warn you, because, well, lots of things have happened in the past 12 hours or so, and, well, er...”

“Yes, you asshole?”

“I was hoping we could help each other.”

“Okay, let me go sell my soul to the devil. I’ll be right back.”

“Listen, Josh, I was once like you. Young, idealistic. Wanting change. But something happened.”

“Someone severed your testicles? ”

“No, employment. And all of those dreams that I once had about me changing the world kind of flushed themselves down the toilet to make room for white boards and committee meetings.”

“Congratulations on your personal victories.”

“Josh, I’m not bragging. I’m telling you that you’ve kind of done something to me, internally, like, that has brought it all back into focus.”

“You’re making me blush.”

“I’d like to right my wrongs.”

“How about removing your spinal shaft and jumping off a cliff to form a pancake of yourself on the rocks below?”

“I have something that you want, and I want to give it to you.”

“I don’t swing that way.”

“I can take you to Pentu.”

Josh stopped chewing. Swallowed. Drank something in the kitchen in front of him, although when reflecting upon it later, he couldn’t remember what it was. “Keep talking.”

“Josh, Pentu wants me dead.”

“For?” Josh asked.

“He thinks I’m an industrial spy.”

“Correction: if he’s so smart, he must know that you’re an industrial spy.”

“Well, after informing me about what I actually was, I started to disagree with him for the first time since he gave me that promotion.”

“Funny thing, money.”

“It wasn’t money. It was just, well, okay, it was the money. And after the database crashed yesterday, I realized that he had planned it, and I realized also what he has in store for me.”

“Which is?”

“That press conference was staged. By Pentu. Everything that happened was in his master plan to make me out to look like the bad guy. He’s a manipulative son of a bitch.”

“You sound kind of paranoid.”

“I am,” Said Larry. “I have to be.”

“You know, maybe this isn’t Josh on the other end. Maybe it’s Pentu, manipulating you even more with the simple use of a voice filter.”

Larry stopped for a second. Dead silence.

“Just kidding. So what do you have in mind? How am I supposed to get to Pentu? And what do you want me to do when I get there?”

“Well, he told me that he wants me to kill you.”

“Charming. And how is that going to help me?”

“That’s not the plan. The plan is to kill Pentu, instead.”

This time, it was Josh Goodman who stopped. Thinking. Listening to a clock on the wall not tick, since ticking clocks were done away with years ago. “Is that your plan?”

“Correction, Josh, that is our plan. Can we meet up?”

“Sure, what time?”

“8 PM. Cycles Day Eve. Can you get to headquarters? Meet me in 0x00000010.”

“I’ll be there if it kills me.”

“Hopefully it won’t come to that,” Larry said, and hung up the phone.

And so it began. Cycles Day Eve, after spending the better part of the past couple of days huddled in a sewer system, barking orders to accidental revolutionaries, Josh made his way secretly up to his apartment to find a change of clothes. He had trouble at first deciding what he was going to wear to the murder, but without any frame of reference, ended up settling on some plaid pants, a pink shirt, and a matching orange tie. He fixed up his hair into a ponytail and clipped his toenails. He wondered if he was having trouble thinking after he finished rinsing his teeth out with some castor oil, but once he spit it down the sink, he decided he was wrong. He was just a little nervous. Wasn't everyday that you killed a living god.

He realized before finding a cab that he needed to find a disguise since the entire planet was looking for him, but not something too disguise-ful. It was possible that Larry was going to disguise himself as well, and they wanted to at least recognize each-other. He settled on putting on some chap stick, a hat and dark sunglasses.

He walked down the stairs and hailed a cab.

"Hereway otay, ymay riendfay?"

"RocessingPay QHay," Josh responded, hoping to alleviate any suspicion about being the most wanted man alive.

The skyline was filled with a number of burning buildings, black crows, noise, and all kinds of other shit that is a lot like what was previously listed. Broken cars lined the streets, fighting and riots ruled because all of the ink in the world, which is supposedly mightier than the sword, actually turned out to come in a distant second when people were relatively angry. It looked as if everyone had suddenly discovered that money was actually representative of nothing more than the volume of hot air in the world, and decided to take it out on their local vendors. The smell of burning rubber was overwhelming. It truly looked like hell.

"This is all my fault," Josh said to the cab driver, blowing his cover. He swore at himself silently for doing it, but he had done such an effective job of exploiting a crashed database that he had to gloat and tell everyone in some way that it was his fault, and he was a fugitive because of it, even though he was a disguised fugitive.

“The world is definitely changing,” The cab driver said. “Maybe it’s for the better.”

“It is.” Josh looked down the street as they passed a dog chewing on the head of some stuffed animal, tearing out the cotton stuffing, doubting himself just like many revolutionaries had before him.

It began to rain.

Josh pressed his hand against the window. “I hate this world,” He said.

“No need to get emotional about it, my friend,” The cab driver said.

“Can’t help it. My mind just feels. ”

“Ever thought about thinking logically?”

“No.”

“If you do it enough, you forget you have feelings. It works really well.”

“Thanks.”

“Anyway, here we are, my friend. Processing HQ, although I don’t know what you are doing here, considering it’s going to be torn down in a few hours.”

“Not if I can help it,” Josh said, stepping out into the drizzle. He slammed the door and the cab drove away as if something urgent had just come up which was much more important than sitting near a curb, reflecting.

Josh walked out of the rain and into the awaiting doors of 0x00000010. He briefly wondered if he was passive aggressive, then realized his mind was wandering from the fact that he was about to kill someone. He had never killed someone before, so he forgave himself for the lack of focus.

“Well, well, well,” Larry said from the corner of the hallway. He was standing in the shadows, cloak and dagger par none. “Looks like you’ve made it.”

“What do I kill him with?” Josh asked.

“Talk about getting down to business.” Larry stepped forward.

“And where is he?”

“Listen, I just want to make sure we both agree on the urgency of the matter.”

“I agree. Now give me the...what do I kill him with?”

“Your lack of compassion for everything that Pentu has done for you is admirable.”

“Pentu has created nothing more than a never-ending chain of bullshit for everyone to digest.”

“Listen,” Larry said, reaching into his overcoat pocket. “Killing Pentu is going to be tricky, so I brought you a .44 Magnum which helps solve a lot of those problems that are commonly referred to as tricky.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, in addition to having to just shoot him, considering that he is all knowing, he probably knows that you are planning on killing him.”

“Right.”

“But at the same time, he will be assuming that I am going to kill you before you attempt to kill him so I can take credit for saving his life in front of him.”

“Right,” Josh agreed.

“So, if he believes that I am going to kill you, then I have to maintain that belief throughout our meeting.”

“How do we go about doing that?”

“Well, I have to shove this,” Larry said, pulling out another .44 Magnum from a different pocket, “against your back for a majority of the time. Especially while I walk you through the doors and do some small talk with the secretary who protects her job by doing all kinds of nasty things for Pentu, in addition to making sure that wanted criminals have guns pointed at them before being let into Pentu’s presence. Trust me, she loves her job. So if you have a gun, she’s not going to let you through, but if I have the gun...”

“We’ll be greeted warmly.”

“Right,” Larry said. “So you are going to have to trust me to get to him.”

Josh thought about it for a minute, silently, while Larry blinked a couple million times, as if blinking was a trait of the innocent.

“How about you take the bullets out of your gun first?” Josh asked.

“No can do. You see, to be really convincing, I have to prove that we aren’t conspiratorially working together. In order to do that, I have to shoot at something in the presence of Pentu, like a vase or something, to show him beyond a doubt that I can kill you.”

“But if you have bullets in your gun, you can kill me.”

“Right-o,” Larry said.

“That’s not fair. Trusting you wasn’t a part of the deal.”

“What do your instincts tell you?”

“Not to trust you.”

“Not those instincts. Your *other* instincts.”

“Oh, those. Well, those also tell me not to trust you.”

“Come on,” Larry said, “Why would I go through all this trouble in the first place to show you the guns? If I really wanted to kill you, I could have just pulled the trigger while I stood in the corner just a few moments ago.”

“Maybe you forgot to load them so you’re just bullshitting me until you get a chance to do so.”

“I didn’t forget to load them. See?” Larry popped open a barrel and showed him the bullets.

“But how do I know you didn’t forget to load them with real bullets?” Josh thought about this for a second. “You’re right. But I still want some kind of proof that you’re telling the truth and your not going to shoot me in the back.”

Larry thought about this. “How about we become blood brothers?”

“Hmm?”

“We punch a hole in our skin and bleed on each other.”

“Holy hell, no way.”

“Josh...”

“Okay. Okay. I trust you. Let’s just kill him. But if you shoot me I will never forgive you.”

“And I would never forgive myself. Now, shall we?”

“Where is his office, anyway?”

“At the top of this building.”

“But that’s too simplistic.”

“Simplicity is the ultimate protection,” Larry said, walking towards room (1). Josh followed, revealing a room of elevators with really nice trimming. Larry stood behind Josh and pressed the gun against his back. He clicked on floor 16. The elevator jolted, picked up speed.

“You better not shoot me,” Josh said again.

“Shhh,” Larry exclaimed, making it clear that Josh should start acting.

A few seconds later, the doors opened to reveal an office entrance that filled up half of the entire floor. Every few feet a pillar pretended to hold up some of the cathedral ceiling above them. The whole floor reeked of authority.

“Holy shit,” Josh said. “Nice place.”

“Move, prisoner!” Larry yelled, hoping that the secretary at the other end of the room would hear. She looked up.

“Larry! What are you....Ah, I see. Josh Goodman is here.”

Josh panicked. “You knew I was coming?”

“I hereby call upon Subsection C dot 2000 dot 4 dot 16 of the People’s Information Act to bring Josh Goodman to the feet of Pentu, the wise, the all-powerful.” Larry moved his gun to the side and pulled the trigger, shooting a vase on the secretary’s desk. She jumped, rightly so.

“Larry!”

“This prisoner has been found to be in accordance with E Doc 72249, underlined sub paragraph E dot 2. I request permission to bring him to Pentu for punishment.”

“What happened to trial by jury?” Josh asked, and Larry banged him on the head with the butt of his gun.

The secretary punched a secret button and a significantly large oak door swung open, as if the extra space was needed to drive in a tank, or perhaps a large land whale.

“Move!” Larry yelled, pressing the back of his gun against Josh’s back.

Josh walked forward, nearing the doors, suddenly doubting the wisdom of the whole idea. He felt his heart leap when he realized that he had checked Larry's gun for bullets, but he had not checked his own.

When he passed through the large doors, he was struck again by how nice everything looked. Pentu had a great view of the city, a really nice desk, and some red rugs that looked like they were stolen from an old castle.

Pentu sat behind his desk, puffing away on his Cuban and staring at some coins through a small eye piece telescope. Josh didn't know if he was doing so merely because he had bad vision or there was something important that had to be identified in the microscopic ticks of the coins.

"Josh Goodman," Pentu said. "Although I don't know why they called you that. There's nothing good about you, fucker. Shoot him, Larry."

"Don't you want to ridicule him?"

"Hmm..right." Pentu looked him up and down, spit. "I don't like your tie."

"And I don't like the way you run things," Josh Goodman said.

"So, you've got a mouth on you, eh? Look around you. How would you run this place?"

"For starters, I'd stop changing things for no reason."

"I was once like you, Josh," Pentu said, "Young, idealistic, full of hope. But then I grew older, wiser, more corrupt."

"What happened?"

"Shut up, fucker. I'm talking." Puff puff. "And you know why?"

"No."

"I said shut up!" Pentu raged, his face turned red. "Don't talk when I'm fucking talking!"

Josh didn't say anything. Neither did Larry. Everyone stood around for a second looking at each other.

"Answer my question!" Pentu said. "I said answer me!" Pentu punched him in the jaw with his fat fingered hand.

"Why?" Josh asked.

“Because I asked you to!”

“No, that’s not what I meant. Do you want me to answer the question in which you asked me, ‘why?’”

“Oh,” Pentu calmed down. “Yes.”

“I don’t know why.”

“That’s exactly my point! I couldn’t figure out why I shouldn’t grow older, wiser, more corrupt, since all three are inevitable.”

“You’re living proof that the second to last one is not inevitable,” Josh said.

Pentu stopped for a moment, mentally identifying the part of his last sentence that Josh was talking about. “How do you know?”

“Because you’re an ass, and I hate what you’re doing to the planet. Every time everyone learns something, you go out and pull the rug out from under their feet. You don’t even give them a chance to be proud of what they just accomplished.”

“It keeps them employed, jack ass.”

“No, it keeps them from having the time to look at the things in life which are truly important. Like allowing people to spend more time with their families and friends.”

“Well if they weren’t employed, they’d spend all their time looking for a job and wouldn’t spend any time with their families, anyway! It makes perfect sense.”

“Do you have a family?”

“Of course not, I’m too fucking busy.”

“Because you’re addicted to control.”

Pentu puffed. “No, I’m not.”

“You don’t want to admit that sometimes your wrong, so you’re creating this never-ending chain of wrongs, and society is suffering for it.”

“I’m not addicted to control! Shut up! God, why do I let you keep talking? Shoot him, Larry.”

Larry pulled his trigger. Josh heard it click.

“Oh, shit,” Larry said, watching reality bend completely and absolutely around a single misfired bullet.

Josh pulled out his own .44 Magnum from his coat pocket and spun away from Larry. “Ah hah! Now I’ve got the two of you!” He waved his gun at Larry. “Move over near Pentu where I can better see you. Fools!”

“Josh,” Larry began.

“I said move it!”

“Josh, you’re making a big mistake,” Larry said.

“No, it is you and your addiction to money and power and control which is a big mistake. Finally, society has won itself back from corrupt politicians!”

Pentu had a look of complete paranoia on his face. His Cuban cigar fell from his fat fingertips and rolled onto the carpet. “Holy shit, where’d you get that gun?”

“Larry gave it to me.”

“Wait a second. Larry? You gave him the gun? You *are* a criminal mastermind! I was right! For God’s sake, shoot him, Josh!”

Josh aimed the barrel at Pentu and pulled the trigger. Kablaam! Pentu made some kind of noise that sounded like, “uh hrmph”, and dropped to the carpet next to his Cuban.

The clock struck twelve. But without the noise, since, as has already been agreed, clock ticking had been done away with years ago.

Larry looked down at Pentu lying on the floor in a pool of his blood.

“I guess it is disgusting,” Larry said.

“And you! You lied to me! You tried to kill me!”

Larry looked at Josh sadly. He tried to think—there had to be a specific way out of this. “I know that’s what you think. I know that’s how it looks. But...I pulled my own trigger in order to give you the signal to go ahead and shoot him.”

“Well, you lied to Pentu, didn’t you? You’re now lying to me!”

“It’s already begun,” Larry said. “Look at you. I can see it in your face. It’s already coursing through your veins. The power. The money. The corruption. You just killed Pentu

because of his lack of wisdom, and you have set your own mind up to replace his. It all makes sense, now.”

Josh pulled the trigger. Kablaam! But it was not as loud of a kablaam as last time, since he had already lost part of his hearing from the first shot.

Larry stood there for a moment, blinked innocently, looking at the hole in his chest, and dropped.

Josh enjoyed the view for a moment, watching the corruption leak out of them.

“Fuckers,” He said, surprised at his own language. He shrugged it off. “Finally, I can get something done correctly around here,” Josh said. He stormed over to the window and watched the skyline burning. Parities were running around, torching society. And the torching of society was bad, he realized, so obviously one of his first initiatives was to build everything all over again, and maybe make that complaint department MUCH larger.

Pentu’s secretary walked in. “Happy Cycles Day. Shall I get you a coffee? You’ve got a lot of work to do if you’re going to change everything.”

Josh sat down in Pentu’s chair. It was comfortable. He didn’t know if he wanted to get up right away.

“Aren’t you, like, angry? That I just killed Pentu?” Josh asked.

The secretary looked at Pentu and Larry. “Not really. Happens once every 18 months or so. How do you plan to run this place?” She asked.

Josh thought about it for a moment. “Hmm. I don’t know. How was it run before?”

The secretary shrugged. “I just answer the phones.”

The weight of all the changes to make piled themselves on top of Josh all at once. Everything he had to do became crystal clear.

“You know, now that I think about it, if my only purpose is to end change, isn’t that a change in itself?”

“Sort of.”

“So then, logically, in order to end change, the only thing I can really do is...well, keep everything the same. If I didn’t, I’d just be a hypocrite.”

“True. Now you’re thinking with your head! See? It doesn’t take too long to adjust.”

“On second thought, I think I’ll take that coffee, and maybe a Cuban. You know. To celebrate.”

The secretary smiled a knowing smile, relieved. She hurried out the door to call the rug scrubbers and body removers, and to make another pot of coffee. At least she could still keep her job. That’s all that mattered.

And so it began.

Once again.

Like clockwork, but without the ticking, because, as was previously discussed, ticking clocks had been done away with years ago. On Cycles Day.