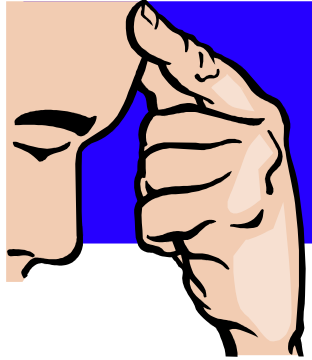


Pormé Jackel



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Pormé Jackel had always felt different and aloof – no one knew. For him every day and each moment he experienced was like a movie; two-dimensional action on a flat screen for others to watch. He performed, but did not experience life in any meaningful way. All the actors in his drama of life were in a way an allusion. He was a make-believe person of normal proportions, appropriately dressed and apparently oriented in time and place. He lived in a virtual reality but was physically real.

He had secret desires and aspirations. They just never materialized, never moved from an itch in his cranium, until that faithful day when feeling and knowledge became manifested. His apartment was standard, a Communist's delight. It consisted of a shared bathroom down the hall, a kitchen-living room combination and a cubby-hole for a bed. This was unit number Fifty-seven, on the fifth floor. The view from his window was of the Metropolis Train Depot and industrial area beyond Center City. What more could a worker ask for?

It was the same day in and out. He arrived home from his job at precisely 7:38 PM. He was a widgets inspector and worked Monday through Saturday. Sunday was for laundering his work outfits, a standard issue for workers employed at the Bolts and Nuts for Man and Machine Factory. The factory was located off Center City and to the north. Everyday the Metropolis Train whooshed him to work and back in the evening to his home in Range 12 West.

His single load of clothing for the week consisted of tangerine colored jumpsuits for work, underclothing, socks, a single set of fleece nightwear worn for exercise as well, a dish- and bath towel, and washcloth.

Sunday was also for cleaning his apartment. Good citizens knew how to show appreciation for satisfaction in life. “Clean your place on the day of Balance and Health.” These strict words were set down for worldwide harmony. Pormé was compliant and strove to be good. He followed the “Dictates-of-Life” precisely according to his understanding, and he fit in. In primary training and secondary destiny determination; everything was sufficient for him to move along with the other developing citizens in the normal succession.

His family line, well such was never discussed; it was not real. After the cataclysmic event and World Unification, ideas of individuality such as family history were a joke and long forgotten. Any idea of sovereignty on any dimension was strictly classified out of existence. Such ideas were no more than loose sheets found in errant books. Something out of place and forgotten long ago.

Pormé made it a point to sit erect while on the train and even privately while at home. It was necessary to be at one’s best performance. He kept his body clean and exercised at the prescribed times to be ready and able.

On rare occasions he would see a worker slumped in his seat on the train ride home. He considered the reasons why. How could they not be sitting upright? He knew that it was incorrect to think about others. It is rude and interfering, and is where wicked belief resides. That is the normative value to ensure harmony, health and required satisfaction.

But a glimmer of what could allow for slumping crept into his “subconsciousness” as an image below regular thought, and it was not about widgets and duty. Were the slumpers ill and becoming unbalanced? This thought occurred to him as one of the reasons. Another time the idea or thought was that they were concerned about their performance. Possibly they were being considered for medical incarceration for Reorientation Training and Treatment (RTT) and somehow knew about this in advance.

As a widget flaw detector his eyes were trained to see flaws in metal piece parts. There were thousands of similar workers at this factory. He recalled the time a worker

went missing from his place in front of a scanner on a conveyor belt located just a cell away from his own. For days the widgets went by on this conveyor belt without a worker in attendance.

The technological scanners are electromagnetic (EM) ultra sonic flaw detectors. They operate along the conveyor after each worker. The widget flaw detector workers looked at the widgets and attempted to identify damaged and flawed ones. The scanners pick out all the rest that the workers did not spot. All widget flaw detector workers obtained low flaw identification rates. Pormé could spot one flawed widget to reject in seven of all that were flawed in a group of one hundred widgets that passed by.

There was no pride in his accomplishment identifying one in seven rejects, it was expected, and that was all. It was merely performance and continuation of assigned task and of being healthy. Pormé had no reason to consider anything about his work, performance or accomplishment. Everything in his life was planned, except for his errant thoughts, like why people slump. He was trained from a youth to be a flaw detector.

When the worker went missing the conveyor continued to run. It operated as if the worker were in place in front of the scanner. This created a gnawing thought at the back of his head. Pormé just wondered about this. He watched the widgets go by him with serious concern.

He never did discover what happened to the missing worker, because eventually another flaw detector worker filled the empty worker's spot along the widget conveyor. There had never been any discussion with the missing flaw detector or the new one. Why would there be? They worked in different cells. There would be no reason for direct contact with a worker from a different cell.

He could see just where this missing flaw detector had stood, and the new one now was. Bizarre ideas occurred to him about the missing worker. One was that that worker just ended. That was all. He left his station along the conveyor to return home and just ended.

These thoughts about the missing worker occurred to him sometimes in the late afternoons.

The widgets went by to be analyzed by his human eyes and the EM scanner device. The scanner had a near one-hundred percent statistical average for picking out all

flawed widgets. He would space out for a moment on these rare afternoons. Then he didn't see the other workers, widgets or factory. They were gone, no longer in his focus, abstracted below other "thoughts."

What an empty place thought was. Normally there were no thoughts, because that would cloud his awareness of the widget quality control function he performed of being alert and ready. All his training was to focus his sight and attention onto widgets and to know them completely, as completely as the unaided eye and thought could.

Another idea that came to Pormé was that the missing flaw detector had fallen down and not gotten back up. Or that a Medical Dispatch Unit (MDU) had recovered his body, to fix it or spread the remains in the woodlands as fertilize. The next day there would a new flaw detector to replace the missing one. There was no one to tell or ask about the previously missing worker. What would be the purpose? Who would he ask?

All factory workers were allotted one day a month to attend to outside needs. Most details of a citizen's life were taken care of in the normal course of events at the factory. Doctors and nurses visited his factory for checkups and for inoculations. Any changes, rearrangements or appointments were communicated through mailboxes located at the factory. That is where he picked up his monthly card for the train and found out about anything else he needed to know.

The building where he lived was twelve stories high and had a main entrance and back patio area for outside activities. Large oval lights illuminated all four sides of the building. The only thing that distinguished it from all the other buildings that looked the same was its number. Range 12 West was affixed to each side of the building. Routine behavior and activity filled every moment and each day.

Beyond the patio was a path going from Range 12 West to the main walkway and was only frequented by animals. The area was overgrown and unmanaged. The patio behind the building was used for the early morning exercise period and evening bending and jumping activities. He never missed a day. One evening after activities he got disoriented and when the other citizens headed home he just walked ahead and onto the animal path.

Walking along in the closing darkness of that summer evening, he stumbled on something just to the left side of this wayward path. He ended up on all fours and had to

feel his way upright again, but not before finding and picking up the object that caused his fall. He could not see it very well in the darkening evening. It was an orb that was cold and hard, and felt like metal with a cross on top. He turned around and followed the light from the building ahead and held the orb by the cross on its top. Everyone was already in his or her place as he entered the building. The elevator straight ahead was open and ready for his ride up to the fifth floor. After getting off the elevator he walked along the corridor to his apartment alone and unnoticed.

In the apartment he looked more carefully at the object. It was strange and archaic with old foreign words encircling the center of it, but they were obscure. The object was a round orb with a cross similar to the letter t on top. It was about the size of a grapefruit and of a strange metal. He noted over the hours and days following having found it that the more he touched it or picked it up the shinier it became. After a number of days he wondered what to do about it or with it. There was a simple process for any thing that came up in life. He could leave a note in his mailbox at the factory for the Directorate.

There was a small shelf at the far end of the mailroom that everyone passed on their way in and out of the factory. On the shelf there was a pencil and paper holder with a single sheet of paper waiting to be used. Everyone had the privilege of communication and knew about the shelf located between the in and out doors. There never seemed to be a need to communicate. But this shiny earth shaped metal thing with a cross on top was out of place.

That was the thing to do. Leave a note in his mailbox to the Directorate. The following morning as he entered through the mailroom corridor on the way to his cell and station, he stopped and wrote a note and put it in his mailbox.

Found hunk of metal.

What to do?

Pormé Jackel

That evening on his way through going home he picked up his mail. There was an answer to his request for direction. It read as follows:

Deposit at: Recycle System, 302 Old Way, Center City.

Use next allotted day.

Directorate

The next allotted day was more than a week away. He continued to handle the metal globe so much, that it began to radiate a silvery light. So he kept it stored in his cloth bag. Finally the allotted day came. He was off to walk to Recycle System located in Center City down on a side street, the Old Way to deposit the object there.

He carried the object in the cloth bag and traveled from Range Twelve to Range One and then onto City Street Ten in Center City that headed east. As he walked the thought of the missing flaw detector at the factory came up. If the worker was not there, why was he there? It was difficult to understand, to even think about. After walking along with an empty feeling he came to Old Way. It was on his right side.

At the corner of City Street Ten and Old Way is a yard with five or six trees and some other plants. It served no purpose. The un-built on yard did however provide an open vista of the street ahead. Old Way was lined with ancient buildings. They were mostly made of stone. Recycle System was located in the most unusual building of them all near the end of the dead-end way. He spotted the tower of the building. This building had odd stonework that went up to a peak making a tower at one end of the building.

As he turned down Old Way there seemed to be a strong wind coming from the other end of the road. This breeze made him feel light and less connected to the road. The thought about the missing worker was closing in on him. He did not understand. He was here, that worker was gone and nothing had happened. Everything continued on. Why was he here, or at the factory? The bag with the object was drawing his attention during this “inner conversation” about meaning and purpose. As he got closer to the building he noted an obscured picture carved into the rock as a relief. The words beneath it said: The Light of the World.

At that instant the bag burst into flames and the picture above the words became clear to him. The picture was of this object in his bag that had burst into flames. As his realization opened up about the worker and his purpose in life and that he was not alone,

he also burst into flames and spontaneously combusted. The silvery glowing orb fell out of the burned up bag. Now it was on the ground in front of this strange stone-temple building with a flickering flame above it and a tiny pile of ashes to one side. Pormé Jackel's last thought before combusting were of the Light of the World. He was gone from here and free.

