

I Leon drive drives into downtown Boston, and after half an hour Dr. Hooper can see me him. I he sit sits on a gurney in an examining room, behind a yellow curtain. Jutting out of the wall at waist height is a horizontal flatscreen, adjusted for tunnel vision so it appears blank from my his angle. The doctor types at the keyboard, presumably calling up my Leon's file, and then starts examining me him. As he's checking my his pupils with a penlight, I Leon tell tells him about my his nightmares.

"Did you ever have any before the accident, Leon?" He Dr. Hooper gets out his little mallet and taps at my Leon's elbows, knees, and ankles.

"Never. Are these a side effect of the drug?"

"Not a side effect. The hormone K therapy regenerated a lot of damaged neurons, and that's an enormous change that your brain has to adjust to. The nightmares are probably just a sign of that."

"Is this permanent?"

"It's unlikely," he the doctor says. "Once your brain gets used to having all those pathways again, you'll be fine. Now touch your index finger to the tip of your nose, and then bring it to my finger here."

I Leon do does what he the doctor tells me him. Next he Dr. Hooper has me him tap each finger to my his thumb, quickly. Then I Leon have has to walk a straight line, as if I he am is taking a sobriety test. After that, he the doctor starts quizzing me him.

"Name the parts of an ordinary shoe."

"There's the sole, the heel, the laces. Um, the holes that the laces go through are eyes, and then there's the tongue, underneath the laces ..."

"Okay. Repeat this number: three nine one seven four -"

"- six two."

Dr. Hooper wasn't expecting that. "What?"

"Three nine one seven four six two. You used that number the first time you examined me, when I was still an inpatient. I guess it's a number you test patients with a lot."

"You weren't supposed to memorize it; it's meant to be a test of immediate recall."

"I didn't intentionally memorize it. I just happened to remember it."

"Do you remember the number from the second time I examined you?"

I Leon pause pauses for a moment. "Four zero eight one five nine two."

He The doctor is surprised. "Most people can't retain so many digits if they've only heard them once. Do you use mnemonic tricks?"

I Leon shake shakes my his head. "No. I always keep phone numbers in the autodialer." He goes to the terminal and taps at the numeric keypad. "Try this one." He Dr. Hooper reads a fourteen digit number, and I Leon repeat repeats it back to him. "You think you can do it backwards?" I Leon recite recites the digits in reverse order. He The doctor frowns, and starts typing something into my Leon's file.

I Leon am is sitting in front of a terminal in one of the testing rooms in the psychiatric ward; it's the nearest place Dr. Hooper could get some intelligence tests. There's a small mirror set in one wall, probably with a video camera behind it. In case it's recording, I Leon smile smiles at it and wave waves briefly. I he always do does that to the hidden cameras in automatic cash machines.

Dr. Hooper comes in with a printout of **my Leon's** test results. "Well, Leon, you did ... very well. On both tests you scored in the ninety-ninth percentile."

My Leon's jaw drops. "You're kidding."

"No, I'm not." **He** has trouble believing it **himself**. "Now that number doesn't indicate how many questions you got right; it means that relative to the general population -"

"I know what it means," **I Leon say says** absently. "I was in the seventieth percentile when they tested us in high school." Ninety ninth percentile.

Inwardly, **I Leon am is** trying to find some sign of this. What should it feel like?

He the doctor sits down on the table, still looking at the printout. "You never attended college, did you?"

I Leon return returns my his attention to **him Dr. Hooper**. "I did, but I left before graduating. My ideas of education didn't mesh with the professors'."

"I see." **He** probably takes this to mean **I Leon** flunked out. "Well, clearly you've improved tremendously. A little of that may have come about naturally as you grew older, but most of it must be a result of the hormone K therapy."

"This is one hell of a side effect."

"Well, don't get too excited. Test scores don't predict how well you can do things in the real world." **I Leon roll rolls my his** eyes upward when **Dr. Hooper** isn't looking. Something amazing is going on, and all **he the doctor** can offer is a truism. "I'd like to follow up on this with some more tests. Can you come in tomorrow?"

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The Neurologist-in-chief, Dr. Shea, has taken over **my Leon's** case, presumably because **he** wants to take the credit. **I Leon** scarcely **know knows him**, but **he** acts as if **I Leon have has** been **his** patient for years. **He's** asked **me Leon** into **his** office to have a talk. **He** interlaces **his** fingers and rests **his** elbows on **his** desk. "How do you feel about the increase in your intelligence?" **he** asks.

What an inane question. "I'm very pleased about it."

"Good," says **Dr. Shea**. "So far, we've found no adverse effects of the hormone K therapy. You don't require any further treatment for the brain damage from your accident." **I Leon nod nods**. "However, we're conducting a study to learn more about the hormone's effect on intelligence. If you're willing, we'd like to give you a further injection of the hormone, and then monitor the results."

Suddenly **he's** got **my Leon's** attention; finally, something worth listening to. "I'd be willing to do that."

"You understand that this is purely for investigational purposes, not therapeutic. You may benefit from it with further gains in your intelligence, but this is not medically necessary for your health."

"I understand. I suppose I have to sign a consent form."

"Yes. We can also offer you some compensation for participating in this study." **He** names a figure, but **I Leon am is** barely listening.

"That'll be fine." **I Leon am is** imagining where this might lead, what it might mean for **me him**, and a thrill runs through **me him**.

“ We’d also like you to sign a confidentiality agreement. Clearly this drug is enormously exciting, but we don’t want any announcements to be made prematurely. ”

“ Certainly, Dr. Shea. Has anyone been given additional injections before? ”

“ Of course; you’re not going to be a guinea pig. I can assure you, there haven’t been any harmful side effects. ”

“ What sort of effects did they experience? ”

“ It’s better if we don’t plant suggestions in your mind: you might imagine you were experiencing the symptoms I mention. ”

Shea’s very comfortable with the doctor-knows-best routine. I Leon keep keeps pushing. “ Can you at least tell me how much their intelligence increased? ”

“ Every individual is different. You shouldn’t base your expectations on what’s happened to others. ”

I Leon conceal conceals my his frustration. “ Very well, Doctor. ”

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The visiting doctor’s name is Clausen, and he doesn’t behave like the other doctors. Judging by his manner, he’s accustomed to wearing a mask of blandness with his patients, but he’s a bit uncomfortable today. He affects an air of friendliness, but it isn’t as fluent as the perfunctory noise that the other doctors make.

“ The test works this way, Leon: you’ll read some descriptions of various situations, each presenting a problem. After each one, I want you to tell me what you’d do to solve that problem. ”

I Leon nod nods. “ I’ve had this kind of test before. ”

“ Fine, fine. ” Clausen types a command, and the screen in front of me Leon fills with text. I Leon read reads the scenario: it’s a problem in scheduling and prioritizing. It’s realistic, which is unusual; scoring such a test is too arbitrary for most researchers’ tastes. I Leon wait waits before giving my his answer, though Clausen is still surprised at my Leon’s speed.

“ That’s very good, Leon. ” He hits a key on his computer. “ Try this one. ”

We they continue with more scenarios. As I Leon am is reading the fourth one, Clausen is careful to display only professional detachment. My Leon’s response to this problem is of special interest to him, but he doesn’t want me Leon to know. The scenario involves office politics and fierce competition for a promotion.

I Leon realize realizes who Clausen is: he’s a government psychologist, perhaps military, probably part of the CIA’s Office of Research and Development. This test is meant to gauge hormone K’s potential for producing strategists. That’s why he’s uncomfortable with me Leon: he’s used to dealing with soldiers and government employees, subjects whose job is to follow orders.

It’s likely that the CIA will wish to retain me Leon as a subject for more tests; they may do the same with other patients, depending on their performance. After that, they’ll get some volunteers from their ranks, starve their brains of oxygen, and treat them with hormone K. I Leon certainly do does not wish to become a CIA resource, but I he have has already demonstrated enough ability to arouse their interest. The best I he can do is to downplay my his skills and get this question wrong.

I Leon offer offers a poor course of action as my his answer, and Clausen is disappointed. Nonetheless, we they press on. I Leon take takes longer on the scenarios now, and give gives

weaker responses. Sprinkled among the harmless questions are the critical ones: one about avoiding a hostile corporate takeover, another about mobilizing people to prevent the construction of a coal-burning plant. I **Leon** miss **misses** each of these questions.

Clausen dismisses **me him** when the test ends; **he's** already trying to formulate **his** recommendations. If I **Leon** had shown **my his** true abilities, the CIA would recruit **me him** immediately. **My his** uneven performance will reduce their eagerness, but it will not change their minds; the potential returns are too great for them to ignore hormone K.

My Leon's situation has changed profoundly; when the CIA decides to retain **me him** as a test subject, **my his** consent will be purely optional. I **he** must make plans.

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It's two days later when **Shea** calls.

"Leon, you have to come in for an examination. I've just been informed: adverse side effects have been found in patients treated with hormone K at another hospital. "

He's lying; **he'd** never tell **me him** that over the phone. "What sort of side effects? "

"Loss of vision. There's excessive growth of the optic nerve, followed by deterioration. "

The CIA must have ordered this when they heard that I **Leon** had withdrawn from the study. Once I **he am is** back in the hospital, **Shea** will declare **me him** mentally incompetent, and confine **me him** to their care. Then I **Leon** will be transferred to a government research institution.

I **Leon** assume **assumes** an expression of alarm. "I'll come down right away. "

"Good. " **Shea** is relieved that **his** delivery was convincing. "We can examine you as soon as you arrive. "

I **Leon** hang **hangs** up and turn **turns** on **my his** terminal to check the latest information in the FDA database. There's no mention of any adverse effects, on the optic nerve or anywhere else. I **he do does** not discount the possibility that such effects might arise in the future, but I **he** will discover them by **myself himself**.

It's time to leave Boston. I **he** begin **begins** packing. I **he** will empty **my his** bank accounts when I **he go goes**. Selling the equipment in **my his** studio would generate more cash, but most of it is too large to transport; I **he take takes** only a few of the smallest pieces. After I **he have has** been working a couple of hours, the phone rings again: **Shea** wondering where I **he am is**. This time I **he let lets** the machine pick it up.

"Leon, are you there? This is Dr. Shea. We've been expecting you for quite some time. "

He'll try calling one more time, and then **he'll** send the orderlies in white suits, or perhaps the actual police, to pick **me him** up.

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The taxi stops; I **Leon** pay **pays** the driver and walk **walks** up to the apartment building. The electric lock on the door opens for **me him**. I **he take takes** off **my his** coat and climb **climbs** four flights.

The door to **Reynolds'** apartment is also open. I **Leon** walk **walks** down the entryway to the living room, hearing a hyperaccelerated polyphony from a digital synthesizer. Evidently it's **his Reynolds'** own work; the sounds are modulated in ways undetectable to normal hearing, and even I **Leon** can not discern any pattern to them. An experiment in high information density music, perhaps.

There is a large swivel chair in the room, its back turned toward me him. Reynolds is not visible, and he is restricting his somatic emanations to comatose levels. I Leon imply implies my his presence and my his recognition of his the other man's identity.

"Reynolds."

Acknowledgment. "Greco."

The chair turns around smoothly, slowly. He Reynolds smiles at me him and shuts off the synthesizer at his side. Gratification. "A pleasure to meet you."

To communicate, we they are exchanging fragments from the somatic language of the normals: a shorthand version of the vernacular. Each phrase takes a tenth of a second. I Leon give gives a suggestion of regret. "A shame it must be as enemies."

Wistful agreement, then supposition. "Indeed. Imagine how we could change the world, acting in concert. Two enhanced minds; such an opportunity missed."

True, acting cooperatively would produce achievements far outstripping any we they might attain individually. Any interaction would be incredibly fruitful: how satisfying it would be simply to have a discussion with someone who can match my his speed, who can offer an idea that is new to me him, who can hear the same melodies I Leon do does. He Reynolds desires the same. It pains us them both to think that one of us them will not leave this room alive. An offer. "Do you wish to share what we've learned in the past six months?"

He knows what my Leon's answer is.

We they will speak aloud, since somatic language has no technical vocabulary. Reynolds says, quickly and quietly, five words. They are more pregnant with meaning than any stanza of poetry: each word provides a logical toehold I Leon can mount after extracting everything implicit in the preceding ones. Together they encapsulate a revolutionary insight into sociology; using somatic language he the other man indicates that it was among the first he ever achieved. I Leon came to a similar realization, but formulated it differently. I Leon immediately counter counters with seven words, four that summarize the distinctions between my his insight and his Reynolds', and three that describe a nonobvious result of the distinctions. He Reynolds responds.

We they continue. We they are like two bards, each cueing the other to extemporize another stanza, jointly composing an epic poem of knowledge. Within moments we they accelerate, talking over each other's words but hearing every nuance, until we they are absorbing, concluding, and responding, continuously, simultaneously, synergistically.

Many minutes pass. I Leon learn learns much from him Reynolds, and he Reynolds from me him. It's exhilarating, to be suddenly awash in ideas whose implications would take me him days to consider fully. But we they're also gathering strategic information: I Leon infer infers the extent of his the other man's unspoken knowledge, compare compares it with my his own, and simulate simulates his corresponding inferences. For there is always the awareness that this must come to an end; the formulation of our their exchanges renders ideological differences luminously clear.

Reynolds hasn't witnessed the beauty that I Leon have has; he's stood before lovely insights, oblivious to them. The sole gestalt that inspires him is the one I Leon ignored: that of the planetary society, of the biosphere. I Leon am is a lover of beauty, he Reynolds of humanity. Each feels that the other has ignored great opportunities.

He Reynolds has an unmentioned plan for establishing a global network of influence, to create world prosperity. To execute it, he'll employ a number of people, some of whom he'll give simple heightened intelligence, some meta-self-awareness; a few of them will pose threats to him. "Why assume such a risk for the sake of the normals?"

"Your indifference toward the normals would be justified if you were enlightened; your realm wouldn't intersect theirs. But as long as you and I can still comprehend their affairs, we can't ignore them."

I Leon can measure the distance between our their respective moral stances precisely, see sees the stress between their incompatible radiating lines. What motivates him Reynolds is not simply compassion or altruism, but something that entails both those things. On the other hand, I Leon concentrate concentrates only on understanding the sublime. "What about the beauty visible from enlightenment? Doesn't it attract you?"

"You know what kind of structure would be required to hold an enlightened consciousness. I have no reason to wait the time it would take to establish the necessary industries."

He considers intelligence to be a means, while I Leon view views it as an end in itself. Greater intelligence would be of little use to him Reynolds. At his present level, he can find the best possible solution to any problem within the realm of human experience, and many beyond. All he'd require is sufficient time to implement his solution.

There's no point in further discussion. By mutual assent, we they begin.

It's meaningless to speak of an element of surprise when we they time our their attacks; our their awareness can't become more acute with forewarning. It's not affording a courtesy to each other when we they agree to begin our their battle, it's actualizing the inevitable.

In the models of each other that we they've constructed from our their inferences, there are gaps, lacunae: the internal psychological developments and discoveries that each has made. No echoes have radiated from those spaces, no strands have tied them to the world web, until now.

I Leon begin begins.

I he concentrate concentrates on initiating two reinforcing loops in him Reynolds. One is very simple: it increases blood pressure rapidly and enormously. If it were to continue unchecked for over a second, this loop would raise his blood pressure to stroke levels - perhaps 400 over 300 - and burst capillaries in his brain.

Reynolds detects it immediately. Though it's clear from our their conversation that he never investigated the inducement of biofeedback loops in others, he recognizes what is happening. Once he does, he reduces his heart rate and dilates the blood vessels throughout his body.

But it is the other, subtler reinforcing loop that is my Leon's real attack. This is a weapon I he have has been developing ever since my his search for Reynolds began. This loop causes his the other man's to dramatically overproduce neurotransmitter antagonists, preventing impulses from crossing his synapses, shutting down brain activity. I Leon have has been radiating this loop at a much higher intensity than the other.

As Reynolds is parrying the ostensible attack, he experiences a slight weakening of his concentration, masked by the effects of the heightened blood pressure. A second later, his body begins to amplify the effect on its own. Reynolds is shocked to feel his thoughts blurring. He searches for the precise mechanism: he'll identify it soon, but he will not be able to scrutinize it for long.

Once **his** brain function has been reduced to the level of a normal, **I Leon** should be able to manipulate **his** mind easily. Hypnotic techniques can make **him** regurgitate most of the information **his** enhanced mind possesses.

I Leon inspect inspects his Reynolds' somatic expressions, watching them betray **his** diminishing intelligence. The regression is unmistakable.

And then it stops.

Reynolds is in equilibrium. **I Leon am is** stunned. **He the man** was able to break the reinforcing loop. **He** has stopped the most sophisticated offensive **I Leon** could mount.

Next, **he** reverses the damage already done. Even starting with reduced capabilities, **he** can correct the balance of neurotransmitters. Within seconds, **Reynolds** is fully restored.

I Leon too was transparent to **him**. During **our their** conversation **he** deduced that **I Leon** had investigated reinforcing loops, and as **we they** communicated, **he** derived a general preventative without **my Leon's** detecting it. Then **he** observed the specifics of **my Leon's** particular attack while it was working, and learned how to reverse its effects. **I Leon am is** astonished at **his** discernment, **his** speed, **his** stealth.

He Reynolds acknowledges **my Leon's** skill. "A very interesting technique; appropriate, given your self-absorption. I saw no indication when "Abruptly **he** projects a different somatic signature, one that **I Leon recognize recognizes**. **He Reynolds** used it when **he** walked behind **me Leon** at a grocery store, three days ago. The aisle was crowded; around **me him** were **an old woman**, wheezing behind **her** air filter, and **a thin teenager** on an acid trip, wearing a liquid crystal shirt of shifting psychedelic patterns. **Reynolds** slipped behind **me him**, **his** mind on the porn mag stands. **His the man's** surveillance didn't inform **him** of **my Leon's** reinforcing loops, but it did permit a more detailed picture of **my his** mind.

A possibility **I Leon** anticipated. **I he reformulate reformulates my his** psyche, incorporating random elements for unpredictability. The equations of **my his** mind now bear little resemblance to those of **my his** normal consciousness, undermining any assumptions **Reynolds** may have made, and rendering ineffectual any psyche-specific weapons of **his**. **I he project projects** the equivalent of a smile.

Reynolds smiles back. "Have you ever considered - " Suddenly **he** projects only silence. **He** is about to speak, but **I Leon** can not predict what. Then it comes, as a whisper: "self destruct commands, Greco? "

As **he** says it, a lacuna in **my Leon's** reconstruction of **him Reynolds** fills and overflows, the implications coloring all that **I Leon know knows** about **him**. **He** means the Word: the sentence that, when uttered, would destroy the mind of the listener. **Reynolds** is claiming that the myth is true, that every mind has such a trigger built in; that for every person, there is a sentence that can reduce him to an idiot, a lunatic, a catatonic. And **he** is claiming **he** knows the one for **me Leon**.

I Leon immediately **tune tunes** out all sensory input, directing it to an insulated buffer of short-term memory. Then **I he conceive conceives** a simulator of **my his** own consciousness to receive the input and absorb it at reduced speed. As a metaprogrammer **I he** will monitor the equations of the simulation indirectly. Only after the sensory information has been confirmed as safe will **I Leon** actually receive it. If the simulator is destroyed, **my his** consciousness should be isolated, and **I he** will retrace the individual steps leading to the crash and derive guidelines for reprogramming **my his** psyche.

I **he** **get** **gets** everything in place by the time **Reynolds** has finished saying **my his** name; **his the other man's** next sentence could be the destruct command. I **Leon** **am** **is** now receiving **my his** sensory input with a one hundred and twenty millisecond time lag. I **he** **reexamine** **reexamines** **my his** analysis of the human mind, explicitly searching for evidence to verify **his Reynolds'** assertion.

Meanwhile I **he** **give** **gives** **my his** response lightly, casually. "Hit me with your best shot."
"Don't worry; it's not on the tip of my tongue."

My Leon's search produces something. I **he** **curse** **curses** **myself himself**: there's a very subtle back door to a psyche's design, which I **he** lacked the necessary mind set to notice. Whereas **my his** weapon was one born of introspection, **his Reynolds'** is something only a manipulator could originate.

Reynolds knows that I **Leon** **have** **has** built **my his** defenses; is **his** trigger command designed to circumvent them? I **Leon** **continue** **continues** deriving the nature of the trigger command's actions.

"What are you waiting for?" **He Reynolds** is confident that additional time will not allow **me Leon** to construct a defense.

"Try to guess." So smug. Can **he** actually toy with **me him** so easily?

I **Leon** **arrive** **arrives** at a theoretical description of a trigger's effects on normals. A single command can reduce any subcritical mind to a tabula rasa, but an undetermined degree of customization is needed for enhanced minds. The erasure has distinctive symptoms, which **my his** simulator can alert **me him** to, but those are symptoms of a process calculable by **me him**. By definition the destruct command is that specific equation beyond **my his** ability to imagine; would **my his** metaprogrammer collapse while diagnosing the simulator's condition?

"Have you used the destruct command on normals?" I **Leon** **begin** **begins** calculating what's needed to generate a customized destruct command. "Once, as an experiment on a drug dealer. Afterward I concealed the evidence with a blow to the temple."

It becomes obvious that the generation is a colossal task. Generating a trigger requires intimate knowledge of **my Leon's** mind; I **he** **extrapolate** **extrapolates** what **he Reynolds** could have learned about **me him**. It appears to be insufficient, given **my his** reprogramming, but **he the man** may have techniques of observation unknown to **me Leon**. I **Leon** **am** **is** acutely aware of the advantage **he Reynolds** has gained by studying the outside world.

"You will have to do this many times."

His Reynolds' regret is evident. **His** plan can't be implemented without more deaths: those of normal humans, by strategic necessity, and those of a few enhanced assistants of **his**, whose temptation by greater heights would interfere. After using the command, **Reynolds** may reprogram them - or **me Leon** - as savants, having focused intentions and restricted self metaprogrammers. Such deaths are a necessary cost of **his** plan.

"I make no claims of being a saint."

Merely a savior.

Normals might think **him Reynolds** a tyrant, because they mistake **him** for one of them, and they've never trusted their own judgment. They can't fathom that **Reynolds** is equal to the task. **His** judgment is optimal in questions of their affairs, and their notions of greed and ambition do not apply to an enhanced mind.

In a histrionic gesture, Reynolds raises his hand, forefinger extended, as if to make a point. I Leon do does not have sufficient information to generate his destruct command, so for the moment I he can only attend to defense. If I he can survive his Reynolds' attack, I he may have time to launch another one of my his own.

With his finger upraised, he the other man says, "Understand."

At first I Leon do does not. And then, horrifyingly, I he do does.

He Reynolds didn't design the command to be spoken; it's not a sensory trigger at all. It's a memory trigger: the command is made out of a string of perceptions, individually harmless, that he planted in my Leon's brain like time bombs. The mental structures that were formed as a result of those memories are now resolving into a pattern, forming a gestalt that defines my his dissolution. I Leon am is intuiting the Word myself himself.

Immediately my his mind is working faster than ever before. Against my his will, a lethal realization is suggesting itself to me him. I he am is trying to halt the associations, but these memories can't be suppressed. The process occurs inexorably, as a consequence of my his awareness, and like a man falling from a height, I he am is forced to watch.

Milliseconds pass. My his death passes before my his eyes.

An image of the grocery store when Reynolds passed by. The psychedelic shirt the boy was wearing; Reynolds had programmed the display to implant a suggestion within me Leon, ensuring that my his "randomly" reprogrammed psyche remained receptive. Even then.

No time. All I Leon can do is metaprogram myself himself over randomly, at a furious pace. An act of desperation, possibly crippling.

The strange modulated sounds that I he heard when I he first entered Reynolds' apartment. I he absorbed the fatal insights before I he had any defenses raised.

I he tear tears apart my his psyche, but still the conclusion grows clearer, the resolution sharper.

Myself himself, constructing the simulator. Designing those defense structures gave me him the perspective needed to recognize the gestalt.

I he concede concedes his Reynolds' greater ingenuity. It bodes well for his endeavor. Pragmatism avails a savior far more than aestheticism.

I Leon wonder wonders what he the other man intends to do after he's saved the world. I he comprehend comprehends the Word, and the means by which it operates, and so I he dissolve dissolves.