**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. “ Iwas in the seventieth percentile when they tested usin 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 mehow 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. ”

\*

**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 mewhat 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.

\*

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.

\*

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**.