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Manus by Anjali Sachdeva, a summary by Christian Rangel

Anjali Sachdeva is an American author and Pittsburgh local. Sachdeva has taught writing at the University of Iowa, Augustana College, and Carnegie Mellon University, and worked for six years as the director of Educational Programs at the Creative Nonfiction Foundation. She is currently a lecturer at the University of Pittsburgh. In her short story collection, *All the Names They Used For God*, Manus tells an interesting story of an alternate world. In the story, Aaron, our narrator, lives in a future where a globular, otherworldly species has taken control of Earth and its inhabitants. Aaron works at an architecture firm tasked with constructing supplementary housing for ‘the Masters,’ the name they give to the authoritative galactic beings. For the first time in a while, he spends time with his ex-girlfriend, Yvett, who was recently drafted to be “forked.” The Masters have initiated a draft system that calls someone up to be ‘re-handed.’ Basically replacing their hands with fully functional metal ones, that most people feel resemble forks. Yvette is someone who has always been an indomitable person at heart. She always wanted to control everything and fight for what needed fixing. This fundamental part of Yvette is what ultimately pulled them apart. Aaron was complacent. He often liked to let things be and usually viewed the draft as something that everyone would eventually have to go through. That is until he faced an impromptu forking appointment from the masters looking for Yvette, who was unexpectedly wanted

for evasion. His neighbor Lou brought him to a hidden warehouse where people came to donate their hands and where ‘hosts’ came to have them surgically attached to their bodies and display them in a showcase sort of way. There is where Aaron saw what had become of his ex-girlfriend. While most people have only given their hands, the warehouse had a special event showcasing different hosts with various body parts attached. He saw that they all belonged to Yvette and finally realized the lengths people would go to in the fight for control.

Two Perspectives

I’ve written two passages below. The first narrative is crafted from the viewpoint of an individual well-versed in the nuances of this species, conversing with someone similarly knowledgeable.

In contrast, the second narrative will be seen through the eyes of someone witnessing these extraterrestrial beings for the very first time, directed at a listener who will never have the chance to observe them directly.

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I entered the building just as I would any other day. The main structure served as a glorious monument to Art Deco-style architecture. The lobby is like a symphony of geometrical elegance, lined in polished brass and adorned by colors of ebony and gold. The Ideation Assembly is rather fond of this brand of architecture, making great efforts to integrate one of their spacecraft just atop the tower. Blending the building’s design of vibrant angles and patterns with the cold, curvilinear design of their ships. I give my ID to the security guard. “What they got you doin this time,” the guard asked. I gave him the usual reply. “Ah you know, just spreading the fabric’s influence on the human race as per usual, nothing too exuberant this month.” “Alright, Bill take it easy,” the guard

says as he sends me off. I head to their elevator, positioned in the middle of the hall a few feet away from the main elevators. After some small security measures, well if you can call biometric scans, facial scans, voice recognition, and a key code that changes every month, 'light.' My job is not that complicated, I work as a city planner and the main liaison between the Ideation Assembly and the council. I was just one of the lucky few governmental workers that they had tasked with this role. Well, I wouldn't say I feel lucky. They're pretty creepy and inherently secretive about everything. Hence the strict security. I'd love to have someone else take this job, but that's impossible. I was hand-selected for this duty, and by the fabric's will, I must comply. We all know what happens when you defy the orders of a hyper-intelligent galactic religious idealist group such as the Ideation Assembly.

Of course, in the 12 years since we as a species collectively accepted them as our authoritative leaders, there have been multiple rebellions that have popped up here and there. Long story short, the defiers never met a peaceful end. The fabric's might was swift and painful. Most of us feel that this is a small price to pay for the continued prosperity of our race under the guise of our reclusive overlords.

Ideation Assembly city governmental consulate #337-APA 9th ward. "God, could they be more fastidious?" The elevator rises. After 38 floors, the doors open up to half dome of silver, cut in half by a wall with a small square window with electrochromic glass. The room echoes from the clatter of my boots as I make my way to the window. Beside it is a small screen greeting my arrival. "Hello, Bill, an Ideation Assembly minister will be with you momentarily." A familiar sight. God for as many times I've been here, you think they could at least put a chair up here.

The glass unfogs itself as the minister appears. I recognize her, she's one of the usual staff. Well, she appears female from our context, but their biology is still a mystery to us. They are always wearing a cloak, white with somewhat of a silk shine to it. The edges are lined with sophisticated patterns of purple and gold. Somehow representative of the fabric that holds the universe together. She removes her hood. They are hairless beings with skin as smooth as polished marble. Their color is a pale blue, almost capturing the essence of glacial ice. Apart from their eyes, their faces looked eerily similar to ours. This must have been how the Homo Sapiens felt, locking eyes with a Neanderthal. However, as we lock eyes again, I can't help but feel an overwhelming sense of familiarity. Like we've met somewhere outside this ship before. I know it's an impossible thought, but it's always strange nonetheless. "Hello Bill, did bring copies of city ordinance 373APA091882?" she asks. "Yup, got em right here for ya." I reply. "Exceptional, here are this month's reports. I trust you will deliver them with the utmost care." She says. This is usually when the glass fogs, and I depart back down, eager to escape this metallic shell of concealment. But this time felt different. I started vocalizing the beginning of a question I had yet to formulate in my mind, and this seemed to have grabbed her attention. "Uh, wait..." I pause. The Assembly has very strict rules of engagement when it comes to any human interaction. I continue regardless

"Why do I get the feeling that we've met before." A couple of seconds pass as she stares at me with idle contempt. Her lips curved into a subtle grin as she said to me "Goodnight Bill. May the Fabric's will bind you." The glass fogs.

Part 2

“Alright, alright, what’s all this commotion about.” Shouted Officer Blimford, his face knotted with irritation. “I saw it, I know saw it, and I know what I saw.” Pleaded the young man, his fearful eyes red with desperation and darkened by the depravity of a restless night. “Listen, Blimford, I got no idea what this guy’s talking about. He rushed in here, rambling on about some kind of 8-foot-tall beings with four arms, two faces, and eyes resembling the space or something. Look I don’t what kind of trip this guy was on, but we might need to hold him here ‘till he cools off a bit.”

“NO NO NO, you’re not listening, there were more, I swear, there were more of them surrounding the big ones, they looked just like us, but they were all dressed in the same weird robes with these cryptic patterns, it looked alien I swear” the young man cried out. Officer Blimford gives Officer Utgurd a nod. Officer Utgurd pulled out his handcuffs. “Now, kid, this desert has a funny way of making people a little crazy. You’re not the first wacko we’ve gotten in here, so why don’t you come with me, and we can help ya out.” Exclaimed Utgurd.

The young man glanced down at the floor. His fingertips met his temples as he crouched down to his knees. In a much quieter tone, he pleads again, “no , no no, no I was with other’s, other people. I’ve seen what they do, I’ve seen what they can do to someone who defies them.” the young man slowly reaches his hand for his pocket, his hand clutching a revolver as he points it to his skull. “I did not defy them,” he declared just before the bullet-painted room with his brains.