

Chapter 1 – There's something in the water

[long rambly desc to set the mood]

“How do you choose to look at the world?”

“How do you construct meaning in your everyday?”

You do it the way everyone else does. You do it through your window to the mainstream – you know it all through all of places you've been, every tactile pleasure you've had, every wound you've grazed, every frustrated thought you've had

and from all of the plasma screens you've been acclimated to in your everyday.

you do it the second you're born and they immediately pencil you in to have you travel around to learn who you are and how to live with others.

The human brain is a powerful muscle. That is its biggest strength, as well as its most susceptible vulnerability. Throughout history, we've shown that our brains create their own truths as much as they evaluate others.

First a thought comes. Then

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All that could be heard after that was the faintest sound of clapping from the one person sitting in the back row. From where they stood, her applause was almost inaudible.

“Wow”, she said.

“You must've used every single word in the thesaurus for this one.”

That was her way of saying she liked it.

Franco gave their one-woman audience a gentle smile, followed by a long bow.

It's got to be nice, slow, and expressive. Do it too quickly, or too casually, and the illusion is broken.

It was a clear day on Ketamaia. A rarity, if anyone had ever seen one. Most days of the month, you would expect to see the gutter system full of rain and

“”

“”

“back in the day, superhumans roamed the earth and everyone was in awe of them.”

“They what?”

“Yes. People used to call them ‘rock stars’.”

“What the hell are you talking about.”

“Franky, now's not the time.”

“Wait, wait, I'm going somewhere with this.”

“Are you *an historian*?”

“Troubadour.”

“Oh! I did not realize a government worker was among us!”

“So that's why that guy with the sunglasses is eyeballing us from across the street.”

[They always compromised what they wanted to watch/etc.]

“Perhaps one day you will stop that disrespectful talk and recognize my superior intellectual prowess.”, they said, while walking in the direction of the lodge room desk.

“Oh shit! Franky’s busting out the thesaurus again!”

“Okay shut up for a second. I need to call my .”

“You remembered to send in your time and date for the show?”

“not yet. I’ll do it in a bit.”

“you need to do it before morning. They only come for the mail once a day out here.”

“I know.”

“”

“so?”

“Hey Mr. Intellectual. Night lasts 2 hours on Ketamaia.”

Franco sat up.

“...really?”

What’s a “meme”?

Well-

Your first voyage usually says a lot about you.

Franco was born premature, so they had theirs a bit later than most kids.

At age 6 they were a year behind on all of the other kids in their town. At school, everyone was talking about how Mathias from across the river had gotten bitten so hard by a penthesilhean caterpillar that it left a big mark on his arm. Little Franco got scared, because one of the kids at school told them that all bugs were poisonous. They had never even seen what the caterpillar looked like, and they already knew they hated them. Franco had to be dragged across the floor kicking and screaming by their mother because they refused to leave the house and get on the shuttle. It took the combined strength of her, her sister, and the neighbor to un-pry them from the doorway.

When they

Because as they later figured out, humans owe certain things to one another, and it's only when it's done

Here we have the average shut-in, who has no means of exploring his universe because he was denied the right. He was born in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and silently perished in the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Though he was granted the will to survive, he was born in a system that was unwilling to grant him the means to thrive.

As he grew older, he had no way of distinguishing between the real and what it is he had imagined was real.

Every day, he looked down at his own hands, used his hands to

His mind became his cage, and he slowly broke down from the inside. He dreamed of going far, far away for most of his life, but all of the opportunities he needed were meant for someone else.

“from the ones who waded through the earth’s oceans a few centuries ago because their tombs seemed to have been made there by those who came before, way before they had even been born into it

To the ones who were welded from the lead that forms our beaches and flows freely through our canals of ketamine, the primordial soup from which nature brandished its

To those whose theatrics shook the human population through the advent of modernity and all of its trappings, keeping them alleviated as the jaws of its rapid death machine created struggle and competition that threatened to tear them apart.

They, who sung of the links between their love and the world-famous with the charisma and sophistication of superhumans; with an allure so irresistible that it sometimes killed people.

She was slowly changing, and Franco wasn’t ready for it.

But they chose to not say anything about it.

This was going to be the big one.