

## PRAISE FOR ASHER BLUMENTHAL

Perni "Oh my my my..."

euryan "The worst thing humanity has ever created"

bradye21 "A true cult classic"

Jordan\_Haeland "A hateful experience"

MovieAddict2016 "Wow, this brings back memories. Too bad nostalgia doesn't defend the realization of awfulness. What a stinker."

Wizard-8 "Talk aboutchutzpah"

HAL9000-11 "at least there's no sequel"

clifforddx2000 "one of the worst [books] to ever graze my retinas"



# A PARADOXICAL ESCAPE

ASHER BLUMENTHAL

© Asher Blumenthal, 2024

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any mean, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

This is a work of fiction. Names, character, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination, or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.\*

For permissions, contact: [blumenthala@beloit.edu](mailto:blumenthala@beloit.edu).

To view my extremely outdated blog, along with the pdf version of this book, please go to:

[www.asherblumenthal.com](http://www.asherblumenthal.com)

\*and you can't prove otherwise!

A sadist is a masochist who follows the golden rule

— THOMAS CATHCART



*Pity the reader.*

:(





*“For anyone wondering why:  
This books is proof that we are all equally alone, equally scared,  
and equally afraid of one another.”*

*Or something like that, idk...*



*The author would like to extend heartfelt gratitude to those dedicated readers who, despite Amazon's exorbitant prices for the hardcover edition, opted to splurge on the book—a gesture that is especially appreciated given a modest school teacher's income.*

\*\*\*

*The author has truly read too many satire novels as research for this book, and now they find themselves trapped inside a cage on a foreign alien planet designed for the entertainment of this strange species while eating a bowl of uncooked spaghetti. What has humanity come to?*



*When is this book supposed to start?.*



# A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear reader,

This book started as a joke.

I was reading a lot of books for school, and after a while, they all seemed to kind of blur together. Not because they were bad, but because they felt they were doing the same thing. Same structure, same kind of characters, same tone. Something weird happens, people act detached or confused, and by the end you're told it was all a metaphor for something much bigger; lifeless stories rephrased as a metaphor.

At some point I started wondering if anyone actually liked reading this stuff, or if we all just pretended to. So I decided to write something that followed the same formula, but as a parody; something intentionally basic. A fake version of the kind of story they call "literary fiction," where not a lot really happens, but everyone pretends it means something.

And then, without meaning to, I kept writing. The joke turned into an actual project. I started working on it after school, then during breaks, and then whenever I could. It was

fun. It6 helped me make sense of all the stuff I'd been reading, and why it felt so weirdly hollow sometimes.

This book is satire, but it's also kind of a satire on satire. It plays with the usual beats—strange events, distant characters, “deeper meaning”—but mostly to point out how repetitive and predictable those things have become.

And while I do appreciate your purchase, let's be honest: The money will probably end up with some corporate executive. The paper likely killed a rainforest, and the ink might even cause cancer. Even if you're reading this online, your device is probably powered by something non-renewable. And the damage is already done. People are going to keep buying books, no matter how carefully you plan otherwise.

In short, we're all going to die. Hopefully you get to finish this book before that happens. To try to help your odds, a real linguist might try to play with semantics. I, not being a real linguist, just made the book short, changing the equation entirely. Problem solved

I'm not trying to prove anything here. I just wanted to make something that I thought I'd find funny.

Anyway, thanks for reading it. Or even just opening to this page. That's already more than I expected.

—Asher



# ONE

Wigwilligan Hemsworth the Third, the Second. How the hell did you get a name like that?"

The clerk looked at him, askance. It was a simple question. Living on a pathetic blue marble in the vastness of space leads people to ask such questions. It certainly led Wigwilligan to. After all, questions had brought humanity to the top of the food chain. They had pulled the first humans from their caves and set them beneath the stars. Not answers, no. Answers were dead ends—finality in neat packages, (meant to kill wonder). But questions were the spark, the pulse, the heartbeat of progress.

Questions didn't care about comfort; they shattered easy illusions and dragged people kicking and screaming into the unknown.

But this story takes place long after that age of discovery—after the thrill of finding everything and realizing there was nowhere left to go. Even after unlocking the secrets of the universe, we found no way to escape it. No way out, no new frontier to conquer. We were trapped on the same 510 million square kilometers we started with, with no exit sign in sight.

Wigwilligan's gaze drifted from the dull office tiles to the clerk—a pale, middle-aged man with eyes that sparkled with a hope eager and heavy with expectation. This wasn't pure hope; it never was. It was aspiration shot with expectancy, a fragile façade, teetering on the brink of collapse. Pure hope could exist, but when laced with expectation, it no longer aimed for possibility—it bred delusion.

As Wigwilligan stood there, grappling with the weight of his own frustration, he found himself falling back on the same tired explanation he was already sick of:

"Well, my father was Wigwilligan Hemsworth III," he explained, his voice steady despite the underlying frustration. "He wanted to name me after himself." There was a brief, thoughtful silence before Wigwilligan paused, realizing how much practice it took to keep his voice steady while saying something so absurd. He took a deep swallow and added clumsily,

"Instead of his grandfather, like he was."

The clerk turned his neck thoughtfully and looked at him with a certain face one might make after taking twice the amount of prescribed laxatives, watching the prequels to *Star Wars*, or being told their flight had been delayed and they would have to stay the night in Fallujah, but was also somewhat intrigued.

"I see."

the clerk responded. Then, after a brief, thoughtful pause, "Well, he certainly achieved that."

Except he didn't see, not really. Nobody ever did and Wigwilligan should have known this by now. He clenched his fists beneath the desk, feeling the familiar itch of frustration crawl up the back of his neck.

Wigwilligan's gaze flickered back to the clerk, who was now furiously typing away on an ancient computer, the keys clacking in a rapid staccato.

The clerk's gaze was down, fixed on his screen, oblivious to the awkward silence stretching between them. Wigwilligan felt a strange urge to say something, anything, if only to break the stale rhythm of the whole exchange.

He took a breath, feeling his pulse quicken. He hadn't meant to say it out loud, but the words tumbled out anyway, barely above a whisper

"Doesn't it bother you?"

Wigwilligan blurted out.

The clerk froze mid-keystroke, glancing up with a quizzical look. "Does what bother me?"

"The questions. The names. All of it. Doesn't it ever get under your skin?"

The clerk blinked, clearly thrown off by the sudden shift in conversation.

"I... uh... I'm just doing my job, sir."

"Exactly!"

Wigwilligan slapped his hand on the counter, the sound echoing through the quiet office.

"You're just doing your job. And I'm just here because of this stupid name, and none of it—none of it—means anything!"

He could feel his pulse racing now, a dull roar filling his ears. The room seemed smaller, the air heavier, suffocating. (The world felt like a coffin someone forgot to nail shut.) The clerk was staring at him, wide-eyed, clearly uncomfortable. But Wigwilligan didn't care. He was past caring.

Always the name. The goddamn name. Wigwilligan Hemsworth the Third, the Second—what the hell kind of name was that? Across the desk, the clerk shifted, uncomfortable. He opened his mouth to speak but thought better of it. (The lights buzzed too loudly, the walls leaned in like curious onlookers.) Wigwilligan's vision tunneled. His clothes felt like

they were suffocating him. He tugged at his collar, but it didn't help.

"Sir...?"

The clerk's voice was small, cautious, like he was standing on the edge of a minefield. Wigwilligan couldn't take it anymore. That name—it was a curse, a weight he never asked to carry. His whole life, he'd been defined by it, tied to a father who wasn't a father, to a history that wasn't his. And now, here he was, justifying his existence to some faceless bureaucrat who didn't give a damn about him.

"I—can't,"

he muttered, choking on the words.

The clerk blinked.

"You can't what?"

"I can't—do this."

"Do what, sir?"

The room was shrinking, or maybe it was just him, shrinking inside his own skin.

. His breath came in short, desperate bursts.

"I have to go."

he said, standing abruptly, the chair screeching across the floor.

"Sir! Wait!"

The clerk's voice rose with alarm.

"We haven't even started—"

Wigwilligan didn't hear the rest. The door swung shut behind him as he stumbled down the hallway. (The air was no better, but at least it pretended to be.) He broke into a sprint, not caring who saw, not caring if they thought he was insane. He just had to get out.

He mumbled something under his breath as he passed the secretary, who glanced up, startled. A man next to her lowered his newspaper, and exchanged confused looks with her, but neither spoke. Wigwilligan didn't wait for a

response. He shoved through the revolving doors like they owed him something, ignoring whatever stupid thing they'd say next.

Outside. Freedom.

He slammed through the glass doors and stumbled onto the sidewalk. The rush of air did nothing. His heart was a jackhammer in his chest, his lungs burned, his head spun, but he kept moving—past the crowds, past the noise, past everything. He didn't know where he was going, only that he needed to escape.

"Mr. Hemsworth!"

A voice called behind him. The clerk, waving something, chasing after him. Wigwilligan's feet slapped the pavement in frantic rhythm, a rhythm that matched the pounding in his head, faster now, faster with every step. Closer, the clerk was getting closer.

But Wigwilligan didn't look back. He didn't need to. He knew whatever the clerk had to say didn't matter. Nothing mattered. They were always stupid, these people. Always saying stupid things. He pushed harder, his legs stretching, his body almost floating now, the streets blurring around him. Colors, shapes, everything smeared together like a dream he couldn't wake from.

The clerk was still there, though. His voice chased him. The city chased him.

"Mr. Hemsworth!" The words tangled with the hum of the streets, with the sounds of the world closing in. Run. Just keep running. Faster now. Too fast. His legs moved like machines, but his mind was slipping. Skipping. Glitching. Thoughts came and went too quickly to grasp. Faster. Faster.

The sidewalk narrowed beneath him. The buildings stretched taller, their windows like eyes. He could feel them watching him, feel them leaning in, trying to hear his thoughts. Everyone was watching. Everything was closing in.

Wigwilligan was supposed to be free. He didn't owe anyone anything. He was free—but there was nowhere to go.

The city rose against him. The sky, dreamy, desaturated. The voice in his head telling him he had to run. But he couldn't. It was louder now, louder than its ever been, but he had already left, and was no longer free. He had already gone.

## TWO

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was null and void, aside from the occasional microbe that swam across this sea of nothingness looking for food. And romantics wrote odes; and the young wrote songs. And in the heavens, angels whispered.

And in Room 3W, Wigwilligan waited.

It was not a room of comfort, nor a room of joy. It was just a room. The walls were bare, and the bed that he slept on did nothing to cradle him. Every day, between 9 and 12, a man came.

The man wore a tan jacket. He always brought a guitar, but never took it out of its case. Wigwilligan knew he had a guitar because he could see it through the glass, if he pressed his face to it enough and squinted. The man asked questions. Some were questions about things that didn't matter. Some were about things that also didn't matter.

The woman came after the man, but only if there was time. She stood. Sometimes sat. Sometimes did nothing at all. Wigwilligan did not know what to do. He tried not to make noise. He didn't know why, but he thought it might help.

After the questions were over, he was free. Free to do whatever he wanted for the next twenty-plus hours. But there was nothing to do. The room didn't change. The walls stayed the same color. The bed stayed the same uncomfortable shape. He got books sometimes, but they usually took them away, so he never had them long enough to read. In fact, he could never even remember how he got them. Only that he probably did have them.

There was nothing but time in there. Too much of it.

He looked down at his hands again. Small now. Pale. Clean. They didn't shake. They hadn't carried anything too heavy—though he wouldn't have known that then. At that age, you think you've seen it all. You believe the worst has already come and gone, because you have no idea just how much worse things can get.

He was seven, tapping a pencil against paper, trying to write about life before he had lived it. Trying to write anything—to prove he was still young, still full of something worth saying; that what happened to him hadn't changed him, hadn't worsened him. That it wasn't for nothing.

We think, when we get older that there's some hidden meaning behind our experiences. That this life we claim to live so fully has been there—forever. That it will never go away.

He is forty one now, wondering if there is still time to change; drowning in the self-made misery of the ones around him. Looking for something—who knows what it is. Just... looking.

The man cleared his throat. Someone asked him a question.

"Are you sure you're the person you say you are, or have you become what we need you to be?"

Wigwilligan swallowed. The man in the tan jacket was watching him, pen poised over paper.

"Have you experienced any confusion?"



“...Define confusion.”

The pen scratched against the page.

“Have you experienced paranoia?”

Wigwilligan exhaled slowly

. “That depends. If they really are watching me, does it still count?” More writing. The man did not look up.

Wigwilligan’s fingers curled into fists.

“Are these real questions?”

The man finally glanced up.

“That depends. Are you giving real answers?”

The room felt smaller. The walls closer.

“Do you understand why you are here?”

Wigwilligan’s throat felt dry.

“I was... looking for something safe.”

The man nodded, as if this was a perfectly logical mistake.

“And yet, you ended up here.”

“That wasn’t my choice.”

“No?”

“No.”

The man smiled faintly.

“Interesting.”

Wigwilligan clenched his jaw.

“What is this place?”

The man tapped his clipboard, considering.

“It is a place where we determine things.”

The man’s voice was patient. It had been patient for a long, long time.

He decided he was done for the day.

## THREE

This was the point when Wigwilligan had started to believe he was losing his sanity; His family had always considered him crazy, far beyond the point when they themselves had all moved to dilapidated retirement homes and acquired specially fitted diapers as part of their social security package.

He had thought himself crazy, not because their words had struck him true, but because he had actively chosen to ignore them; He had finally found himself living his own sense of life, with utter indifference to what the people around him said, and it was this judgment that ultimately caused every hardship he faced.

It certainly wasn't himself.

He had often thought of ending his miserable middle-class existence right then and there, but he realized that if he'd left, there'd be no one left to feed the cat or tend to its litter box--and so he stayed.