



[CHAPTER 1](#)

[CHAPTER 2](#)

[CHAPTER 3](#)

[CHAPTER 5](#)

[CHAPTER 6](#)

[CHAPTER 7](#)

[CHAPTER 8](#)

[CHAPTER 9](#)

[CHAPTER 10](#)

[CHAPTER 11](#)

[CHAPTER 12](#)

---

# WIPE

**By John Reyer Afamasaga**

eBook

ISBN: 978-0-9803486-1-3

(c) 2007 John Reyer Afamasaga

Copyright Certification ID = DS98E -- Certified on 19/10/2006

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States & All Territories License. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/>

CONTENTS

\* CHAPTER 01: Page 3

\* CHAPTER 02: Page 9

\* CHAPTER 03: Page 14

\* CHAPTER 04: Page 30

\* CHAPTER 05: Page 44

\* CHAPTER 06: Page 64

\* CHAPTER 07: Page 75

\* CHAPTER 08: Page 85

\* CHAPTER 09: Page 86

\* CHAPTER 10: Page 91

\* CHAPTER 11: Page 101

\* CHAPTER 12: Page 105

**CHAPTER 1**

WIPE (TO WIPE -- )

A seven year old orphan's fear ...

She can wipe condensation, but not the snow outside the window.

Polina Rada was on the back seat of a teetering car, wrapped in her bed clothes, a leather jacket, and her mother's winter coat. Her parents kissed with their eyes shut tight to burn calories as they cocooned their Polina to keep her warm. The car creaked, and Mr Rada accepted that the only position he could assume at that time was that of a father concerned about the transfer of his remaining body heat to his baby daughter.

John Page smiles as the receptionist walks by, but on realizing where she is heading he sneers. Then he settles back into his seat with his hands behind his head. She disappears into the office. The door, then the blinds, close.

Alexvale stood at the doorstep of the house next door. He could see his mother, but her voice was then only inside of his head, "If you don't give the car back, Alexvale Rokov III, it will fly away with you inside it. And when the gas is finished, it will then turn into a large bird, bigger than any plane your father has traveled on, and take you away to somewhere no one will find you."

As his hand pushed down on the ornamental gold doorbell for a third time, the door opened and the butler appeared. At that point his mother came to the hedge and sped up the process. "Alexvale has something of Deepak's he would like to return," she told the butler.

Alexvale put forward the silver car. His hand flattened and his heart saddened as he watched the white gloves of the frumpy man take the toy up, up, and away. The door shut, his mother smiled, and Alexvale turned and walked back down the street to his house.

If these three worlds were to ever meet and entwine for the benefit of just one of these people it could be by coincidence, by fate, or even by communication. Their dialogue, the revelation of the mind's highs and lows, but driven by what? We often ask. It is fulfilled by an event for the sake of a life being lived, or for the mere pleasure of an entity that is still not captioned in a single line that engravers would find fitting to put on a plaque of the event itself, framed, or written down, or even dreamed on pillows.

Polina had reached an age at which she had become aware that the sisters in her dormitory were her sisters by mistake and not through the seedling of love between two sensual adults. Hotter than usual from lust, a man must force plutonic pain upon the weaker of the two, pain that scars long, lifelike burns. Also, a girl needs intense pain to gain womanhood, and on attaining screams and newborn cries, she reneges on the responsibility or is forced with shame to give up before bond, that which is her flesh and his blood.

If she were cocooned, why then did she shy when two friends' heads came close to acting cordially in a casual photo taken in a moment of friendliness? Polina saw through the bare branches to the snow-covered rooftops. It was the day she would settle on the story the headmistress had given her. This was, "It was on the side of the road where you were found, Polina. Mama and Papa gave warmth in a horrendous storm, and through graces from places untouched by man's hands came the warmth and divinity's blood your baby's body required."

The disco mirror ball threw bits and pieces from the seventies at everyone. The décor required attention, as did the patrons everywhere -- yeah, even in his hair. The thirty-something mother-to-be again loved his hair. She needn't say, but she did, "John, I do love your hair."

He reminded her that he was there with that girl, the one with the drinks coming this way. "Here she is," the mock smirk out of the side of his face made no impression on the one in the leotard and tardy clothing stitched to confine rolls of flesh, which were ample enough to exist in their own right away from her.

Page sculled both his and his date's bourbons, bade the big babe, "Later," and took his girl's hand out and away from that place.

Outside the cold morning air hit hard, as hard as his girl, who was angry at him again. "John, those drinks cost half a day's pay -- you know that?"

Alexvale remembered Mr Hammer well from the last time they had met. He remembered his changing accent and his smile that was really a snarl turned upside down. Hell, Alexvale could even do the rotten smile in the mirror and the voices inside the closet. The door was slightly open; only the cat on the tips of its paws could manage to sneak in through the gaping gap without a sound. He could view Mr Hammer going through his mother's drawers. Even though he did not mean to understand how Mr Hammer invaded his mother, the kid knew that it was wrong when Mr Hammer placed his mother's belongings to his face, for when Mother called from the other end of the house, Mr Hammer quickly stuffed his tool belt with his mother's things.

The headmistress read out their names, their ages, and their dislikes. Alexvale Rokov III's curly blonde locks in the photo made Polina smile. His age made her put her head on that shoulder, then on this one. The young girls were encouraged to communicate with the Western world in English. It increased their chances of being adopted out and away from Russia. The headmistress kept a portion of the Wall that she had brought back with her from Berlin the year before in a glass box in her office. Each time Polina talked on the telephone to someone who, for whatever reason, felt that they should adopt a young Russian girl, Polina saw the events of 9 November, 1989.

"Through," Polina said. "The people could now see and were able to walk through -- not over, or around, or high up in the sky, but through. Eye to eye, with both feet on the same ground, boys and girls from the East and West could now look at each other." She recalled the headmistress's account of the magic conjured by humans for man and woman.

"Dear Alex, My name is Polina Rada. I live in Russia. I am 7 years old and I like the snow."

"Hi Poli, My name is Alexvale Rokov the third (3rd, III). Those who know me well can call me Vale. I like cars and hope that the earth's natural resources will have enough reserves so we won't run out of gasoline for the cars."

Page watches closely as the receptionist takes the cash and adds it to the already-thick bundle. She then stretches the rubber band with her thumb and index finger over the thick wad and places it under the counter. Inside the one-bedroom suite she places the rubber over him and they do business: 1-2-3-1-2-3-1-2-3-1-2-3-4.

The receptionist falls asleep, and when her reflection in the mirror close to her side of the bed reflects a deep sleep, Page gets up from his side of the bed without disturbing the peace. He stands in the foyer lobby behind the counter. The place is dark, the carpet behind the counter is still plush, unworn, and not torn. He reaches down as the front door opens and late-night guests stumble in, too drunk to know he's trespassing. He spots a roll of money under the counter in the hotel reception area and says, "Ah," the wad being so thick he can barely believe his eyes. Back in bed, he spoons with her and in the morning feeds her again.

The receptionist smiles at him and he smiles at her bosoms. The receptionist answers the telephone and smiles at him again, and again he smiles at her bosoms. "You may go in now, Mr Page," she says sweetly.

The office is clean. It takes a moment to get used to. The man's starched white shirt is bright, so Page's eyes

have to adjust quickly. The question seemed sharper than the words that brought the inquiry to his ears. "Why did you leave your last job, Mr Page?"

The elevator shaft echoes the age of the cabin as the cables do their best to heave the box to the third floor. The doors open and the receptionist smiles. Page's name has made a short list. Maybe it was because of its length; maybe the other candidates had received better offers elsewhere. Once again, the office is clean. The early morning sun shines through. The boss obviously thinks he's up to the task, as the rays mean little to him. He looks through them and meets the boss's gaze.

The sand from space is brown; the skin they looked for is naturally camouflaged. Flowing white headwear becomes brighter as the frame enlarges. Page blinks as the boss shows him his work. He laughs about the satellite surveillance gig to himself as he zeroes in on the coordinates.

Flowers for the receptionist cross Page's mind, but then she becomes the aggressor, so he sits back and relaxes. The boss is wary of him. He knows this by the way he talks to the receptionist without acknowledging him. Or does he just have a thing for her? Page listens to the boss's instructions and then decides to come back later. In the end it's easy. After two entire days of talking to her face and not her beautiful tits he was in.

They have a date that evening. He stops for a couple of drinks at a bar around the corner on his way to the location. The barmaid makes it clear to him, and then they're in the mirror, her apron the only thing on her as he bangs her rump hard. There's a knock at the door. He persuades her that it's part of the move, and she says, "Yeah," as he warms up for the first date with his new girl.

He is on time, we'll give him that. He also knows the barmaid in the joint. The receptionist pulls out her own seat. His appetizer is two more bourbons with two more beers. He believes he can smell something, then he smiles at her. The conversation is good enough, but he is seriously running out of general knowledge, so he has to make another move to intensify their connection. Within seconds he has his excuse; the girl smiles like she does on the telephone. She understands fully why a guy living with his sick mother would suddenly have to leave their dinner date.

Divinity looms large in the middle of the night and gives comfort during the day. Polina knows an angel from a pain. To sustain a journey from a starting place unknown to a destination to be designed, she looks for divinity in the eyes she meets and the lips that speak to her.

They introduce a three-year-old girl and her two-year-old brother at breakfast. Polina soon finds a way to make the walking baby smile and the little girl laugh. Soon the walking baby can be found by looking for Polina's brown hair, which stands shoulders above her friends'. The little girl begins to mingle with girls of her own age.

Polina cuts the sandwich in two. The baby shakes his head slowly. Polina then angles the knife to make a cross on the bread, which instantly makes him laugh. The baby eats. Polina feels something unlike anything she has felt before. She smiles, as she was content -- satisfied. She's tempted to give her own sandwich to him, as his plate holds only crumbs, the last of the food being in his cheeks. She decides to save her sandwich for later.

Alexvale rips open the envelope, contrary to how his mother has shown him to do it. Polina is fine, but down that day. The day before the little girl had found her new home in America. Her baby brother had cried all night long and Polina had run out of songs to sing him. Alexvale thinks about this as he follows his older brother to the store to buy his mother her smokes. The doors of the cars that line the street look inviting. He wipes his fingerprints on all of them on the way home.

The back door is locked. Funny that, because it had definitely been open when they'd left. He scoffs at his

brother's summation of their situation and shouts, "Mr Hammer! Open the door!" He shouts over and above his brother, who is peering through the frosted glass pane of the door. The door opens slowly. Mr Hammer peers through. It was his idea of a joke. Alexvale says, "It's our house -- my mum!" He glares from the bottom step.

Mr Hammer meets him with a grin that sours into a glare and says, "It's my job, guv'ner -- wind blows dust about the place. Got keep all doors closed."

"Closed -- not locked, you moron!"

His mother comes to the back door and asks, "Everything okay?"

Alexvale smiles, "Yes, mother."

The baby waddles, then he smiles and blinks at the same time. Polina smiles, too. She lifts the smiling baby up onto a chair so he can see out the window. The snow is there. The smile then flattens the corners of his mouth by the lips. His tongue flicks downwards as his bottom lip rises, causing his brow to crease and a lone tear to escape. This they share.

Alexvale's hand finds the door handle as his brother calls out, "Hurry, Alexvale! Mother said hurry." It opens and Alex hops inside. Then his brother stands outside of the passenger's door saying, "Alexvale, you are in deep trouble."

"What for?" is the only answer he can find as he sits inside the car waiting for someone to hop into the driver's seat. "Hop in and drive. Dad's let you drive before," Alexvale decides to elaborate on his concept.

The elevator opens. Page's tie is straight. His hair is cut short. The receptionist smiles and he smiles into her eyes.

## CHAPTER 2

### Part 1

"So, how's your mom?"

"I lied," Page answers. "I don't have parents, I dropped into divinity's dream of a perfect soap opera. It's been running since the first caveman made a move on his wife's best friend."

The receptionist laughs, and every time she walks by she ribs him with his bullshit. Her hand is soft and their fingers, his bony and hers fleshed, can melt. He pulls her hand, bringing her arm and then finally her body to him. The palm trees cast summertime over the walkway.

One month turns out to be a civil time to court, take her heart, and then move in together. Her place was more convenient. It was closer to their workplace. It had a view of Venice Beach and spare room for storing stuff. It also had a new phone number unknown to those who wanted to reach him to get in touch or just pester.

His belongings lie in one suitcase and a box, along with a sleeping bag there in the middle of the spare room. He laughs at them. She joined him to see what the heck it was all about and then takes his hand and leads him to the bed. On the way she sheds her stockings and blouse. Her skirt lifted and bra pushed down, she lies waiting.

She dresses in a special way one day. She'd awakened careless that morning, wondering why her body ached in a particular place. She'd casually patted her face with a sponge and then had closed her compact. During that day she visits the bathroom to freshen herself regularly.

Back at her seat, she is hot yet again. She pulls her panties to the side to alleviate the heat. She can see the wrinkled skin. Looking up, she sees her boss in his office. Looking around, she sees the new guy. He can see her backside, and only he knows that her short skirt is hoisted and sitting around her waist.

The boss begins to wonder what exactly the new guy is looking at. She is no longer content with her panties just to the side, so she wriggles herself out of them. The new guy gets up and stands behind her. She stops. They are just below her knees. He comments on how moist the wet patch is as he puts his hand down there so his fingers can experience the condition for themselves. When he brings them up they shine. She follows them as he puts them away again and returns to his seat. She then checks for herself and is unsure about how to feel and whether she can insert her fingers in the office.

The boss is walking towards her as she thinks of how the new guy did it. Her boss is standing there next to her. She looks up at him for suggestions, but her hand was doing a fine job on its own. Then the new guy is right there, too. She wants him to join in, but he was by then working on himself.

They hold hands on the way to catch the bus. On the crowded bus she faces the front, he stands in behind. The corners are smooth and the stopping is great. Their destination draws close and he has to come down.

He catches the last of the instructions and manufactures his gist of the conversation, "... like the way you always do it." The receptionist now sits outside the boss's office. Page has to walk towards his boss's office if he wants a face-to-face with his girl. From his desk he can see her side on.

The wholesome visuals and dialogue for all the family on the screen do not lessen her enthusiasm as she kneels in front of him and does as she pleases. The usher showing a couple to their seats does not see, and when she is done she finds her purse, the one she has been looking for in the dark.

The top drawer of her desk is now full of them: lace ones, silk ones, clean ones, and spare ones. He watches her open the drawer as their boss leans over her shoulder pretending to consume figures on the screen. His short email, which brings their faces around at the same time to where he sits, his eyes on his own screen, says, "Hi. Finishing early today. See you at dinner. John."

He paces as he waits for her. Dinner is done, ready for when she walks through the door. The lock turns and the door pushes wide. She looks relieved as she washes her hands and he smells her neck. Sniffing for whatever he can find, he comes down and lifts her short skirt, discovering that she is wearing some clean ones. "I thought you had on a pink pair, babe?"

She laughs and asks what's for dinner. He pushes thoughts around the place, replaces anguish with angst, and concentrates on doubt as he whispers what has been installed in her ear.

## PART 2

Polina, as one of the older ones, has her own room. It's tidy, with posters and a radio. The baby wanders in and out of the room all afternoon, saying "Lina, Lina," which can be heard in and around where she roams smiling and talking with the new entrants.

Alexvale's letters pile up. His mother is home but never there. His father is always away on business and his brother is always doing the right thing. Polina squints every time she comes to the name Mr Hammer.

"Mr Hammer now lives in the garage," Alexvale explains. "He eats with us and goes to see his wife when my father comes home."

Polina returns from her afternoon class as the baby walks out of her room with a startled look upon his little face and says, "Lina!" The look on his face says mischief; the body language of his stubby limbs still manages to say doubtful.

The letters lie scattered, some torn, some screwed with a tiny foot print marking the anger at the moment when he'd stood on paper and twirled hard, left then right. Polina comes out to the hallway. In the distance the baby is walking away, the afternoon sun lighting his right side as he steps. His tiny fist is open and its dodgy digits stretched once, and as he rounds the corner they stretch again. Polina walks back into her room head down. She kneels down and collects the letters.

Polina talks with a woman on the phone. She has long accepted her situation and has, in rejection, managed to find fuel to keep her going. She varies her approach from call to call. Polina realizes to herself that the brown-washed Polaroid on her file that the potential adopters view catches her in a peculiar light. She wonders if her replies were too structured or her responses too eager and too timely for someone looking for a natural addition to their family home. Polina thinks of the actresses in the magazines she reads, the ones who feel that the young starlets get all the good roles.

Polina puts down the phone as the call comes, "Lina? Lina!" His hand holds a piece of paper up to her, one of the pieces that stuck to his sweating palm as he tore Alexvale's letters.

"Come here, you little baby," Polina offers as she bends her knees to be at eye level with him. Then the tall girl stands and faces in the opposite direction, toward the courtyard. The baby waits till Polina kindly touches his right shoulder, pushing it back and making him turn. They then face the same direction. He puts his right foot forward. She waits to see if his left one will follow. It does and so does she.

They sit side by side on the swings. His swing goes forward as hers comes back. When he motions a notion with his head, or sometimes with his eyes, or just with repeated kicks in the air with his short legs, Polina



hops off hers to push his further, making him go higher. Then she finds the seat of her swing still moving, but sideways and a bit forward, without real aim or direction. Polina settles the seat by holding the rusted chains and sitting herself once again. Then she begins to swing, till he requires another nudge, push, burst of energy, or just encouragement.

### PART 3

Alexvale finds great pleasure in his news for his mother. "Mr Geez's girlfriend is in Mr Hammer's room, Mum."

His mother, implanting valuable iconic influential and manifestodial information, says, "Oh, Alexvale! You have your father's imagination and my brain. Now, tell me what would that tart be doing in my garage -- huh, Alex? Tell me!"

Sunday brunch is uncomfortable, elbow to elbow. Dad is at the head of the table and Mom is at the foot. Mr Hammer sits opposite, the bourbon still prevalent on his breath. Next to him is brother, and Mr Geez's girl is sitting right there on Alexvale's right. He can see her brown legs; her nightclubbing dress is extraordinarily small. Her braids looked shiny. Later on, outside Mr Geez's girl leans back against the house as she puffs a ciggie.

"You know," Alexvale tells her, "you can smoke inside. My mum smokes inside." He stands in front of her.

"Your mum don't much like me, does she, Alex?" is how the sexpot replies.

Alexvale still stares, then he unleashes, "She does! She says you're a tart!" He feels proud that he has just delivered his first in-ya-face insult, relying on naivety to bring him a smile plus deliver a message. He is ready for his next one, but he waits till he had the plot. "You like music?"

Mr Geez's girlfriend nods, her confidence rebuilding itself. "I like black music."

Alexvale nods. He stands on one foot, his back against the wall. "I love your hair," he says. "Makes you look like Stevie Wonder."

Mr Hammer comes out the back door and walks past Alexvale. Mr Geez's girlfriend follows him.

Inside the house the tapping from his brother's room reminds Alexvale of Polina.

The little baby is one of the first to be put up on the orphanage's new website. Polina isn't down about it. Even though the baby cannot understand, he knows he's important. Polina had been with him when they'd taken his picture using a brand-new digital camera.

Mr Geez's shop is closed, so Alexvale waits. The cars line up. Alexvale knows one will be open, so to pass time he skims his hand along the doors, pulling up a handle every so often, up and down the street. No luck today, a thought brought about by Mr Geez arriving in his Mercedes. Mr Geez opens up the shop. Deepak from next door is coming up the street. Deepak's hands are by his side.

**CHAPTER 3****PART 1**

Page's questions are simple but in rapid succession. Eventually they mount, amounting, taking their toll, infecting everything, tainting windows, and blocking doorways. They play obstacles for her one minute, then they are a ramp to nowhere the next. "A simple yes or no would be good, babe."

She just rolls over onto her other side. He waits for morning to right his wrong, and when she opens her eyes and realizes it's him she groans, but then she smiles. Then she allows herself to moan. In the end he gets tired and blames stress. In the next instant he's in the bathroom on his own. She lies awake waiting for a coffee, two days late by then.

Page stands in his new office. She eventually comes to join him. The last of the janitors, a middle aged man, still lurks. John notices that he holds his eyes low in his head, following her as she comes in. "You wearing any?" he asks as he pulls her skirt up. The janitor has nowhere else to look. She shakes herself clear of him and leaves the building.

As Page studies each line of her email, a noise awakens him from a state. "What are you still doing here, Page? That woman of yours must be wondering where you got to."

Page stretches his neck and turns, speaking as he does so, "Have to?"

The boss, who is in casual clothes, relaxes. "Yeah -- got to. Shouldn't you be home with her?"

Page recomposes himself and smiles easily. "Sorry. Yeah, I should be going, shouldn't I, boss?"

The boss nods. "You want a ride?"

She moans because she has been fast asleep.

"Yeah, he just brought me home, and he knew exactly where we live, babe."

She replies, "Yeah, Hon," in deep-sleep tones.

His hands are already in places. The rest of him does what he wants and what she cannot account for till she awakes just as he has done his bit.

"John, I did love your hair." The single mother sits on the couch, her legs crossed. When she reaches for the bottle of bourbon her nightgown covers zip.

"Had to cut it -- Got a new job, got promoted, gotta play normal and boring." He tips a glass of bourbon down his throat.

The phone rings again. This time the music in the background is hard and heavy. She hangs the phone up and comes to sit next to him on the couch. "That's the third time tonight," she tells him. He changes channels, and each time she agrees with him he flicks to another one.

The path widens, then it narrows as the receptionist comes to her senses. Then their paths veer off in different directions, his to the same old ways and hers back to yesterday. He finds a smaller place with one bedroom, an oven, and a fridge, and she remains in the same place till she cannot wipe the smell of him from the bed.

## ANOTHER SORT OF PLAYER

Kevin Zealand drives with his top off and the top down. The convertible purrs in time as tuned revolutions combine and each piston rises to the head of the block and falls back as the next comes up. To his left and then to his right the oncoming drivers show their rage in the way their bodies stiffen as they apply maximum pressure on their vehicles' horns. The convertible slides sideways; the front wheels say hello to a nearby curb. Kevin straightens. The car is insured, but his brow will never be without those lines, now deeper than before. The car being parked, Kevin hops out of it. Two women notice him and laugh. Kevin takes this in his stride as he carefully closes the door.

The park is full of poop from mutts running free and poodles on their leashes. Seated on a bench, he holds his book upside down, a tidy move that is picked up by a woman bending over to bag a turd.

That makes Kevin squirm. He jabs with, "Why don't you let the shit be, or potty train the thing?"

"Why don't you learn to read the right way up?" the woman, Ms San Fe, counterpunches quickly, which surprises him, as her head sees him that way down. Then she explains, "The pooch isn't mine; it belongs to my boss. He's away at a conference," as she smiles in the sunlight.

Kevin muscles up, as he genuinely needs to stretch his torso. "Conference on what?"

"Video games -- boys' stuff."

Kevin makes mental notes of shit no one else would care to remember: "Boss on conference -- June -- summer -- dog has funny-shaped tail ..."

She thinks as she walks, one piercing eye winking and the other genuinely squinting from the rays of the sun. Lower to the ground, the one on the leash lunges forward, yanking her arm. The one sitting on the bench she left behind comes up by her side. She already knows he's only an extra. She negotiates her entry into the traffic as a DJ states the obvious on a local radio station, a concept she's now beginning to understand. Still, she reminds herself that it is all just a fallacy. Then Elvis sings, "Well, it's hard to be a gambler / Bettin on the number / That changes evry time ..."

She's in there, his convertible alongside her sedan. She has to smile to seal the deal; then she allows him to tail her for awhile as the King of Rock & Roll sings, "That she's a woman through and through / She's a complicated lady, so color my baby moody blue."

The traffic lights cascade for her. As she sees a gap, Agent E. Presley sings, "Well, when Monday comes she's Tuesday / When Tuesday comes she's Wednesday / Into another day again / Her personality unwinds ..."

Her pink toes step on the pedal. As the gas burns, her vehicle stays straight and Private Elvis Presley sings, "You're like the night and day / And it's hard to say / Which one is you."

Ms San Fe wipes the bottom of the cup she delivers to her boss's desk. The last message on the phone from Kevin makes her smile. The boss stretches the sleeves of his starched white shirt, a sign that all he needs is the coffee. She places it carefully on a coaster from the conference, turns the handle so he can take it without looking, and leaves him be.

Kevin knows that this one's a killer as he hangs up the phone. The king of the losers in the chat room, PAGE1, reckons he's got the answer. The room is called, "GAME LADY KILLERS". K-MUZO makes an appearance and then leaves.

With most of his face in the rearview mirror, the woman in the Mercedes behind him wants to know more. He knows this, so he lets her drive by slowly. His foot on the accelerator wears a snakeskin boot. The manicured toenails on the brake pedal are pink. The silver convertible pulls over to the curb. Kevin never doubts his gut feelings. He pulls up too, and straightens his stuff as the 40-something lady moves first.

He just waits. "Ouch" he says as she comes close, the silver reflecting off the car's metal shining on her round breasts, which are unaccompanied and perfect without moral support. Their tips look thick and good to eat.

Page chews the burger, his moustache taking the mayo. It takes a while for him to clean it. The little lady coming his way smiles at him. Something inside him tells him that he has shit on his upper lip, so he wipes it clean.

Today she had been in a delightful mood till she realized what was happening in the cubicle of the unisex toilet. Page had managed to get her knickers in a twist around one ankle. He'd been with her and inside her, talking it up, and she'd said, "Fuck's sake, John! You've done it again!" She'd left the place as he'd pondered where he'd gone wrong.

Back in his office, his work is done. He smiles at the shredder as he checks through the history on the web browser. He goes to a page that is in today's, yesterday's, and probably tomorrow's. He stands and takes a deep breath. The boss acknowledges the receptionist's sneer, which he copies and relays back to her, then smiles at his reflection in the glass door.

It's finally lunch time. The boss is in a good mood and orders fast food to be delivered for his employees. Page smiles at the idea and thinks back a couple of days.

The company had secured a government contract to monitor every networked gaming console on the planet. Page had watched the boss explain the success and reiterate to the employees their importance, how he appreciated their efforts, and how their efforts had been fulfilled in the securing of such an important contract.

As Page had listened he'd focused on the team that had been chosen to work on the project. His name had not been mentioned, and he had slipped from the gathering without alerting them.

In his office now, Page watches them eat happily as he finds the logon screen to the secure server. The boss, now heightened in the eyes of the rest by the carbohydrates and sweet chili, glances his way, but Page is confident that the tinted glass does its job and prevents him from seeing the expression on his face as he uses User Id: Head' and then enters password \*\*\*\*\*'.

The eight lights that feature above the rest must be servers of some sort, he tells himself. He writes down their IP addresses. Only numbers -- no biggie, he thinks. The good guy in the next office is ready to work as the second hand sweeps the break to an end. Page hurries, scribbling off the last address. Then the door, half open, swings to its maximum wideness. It's not the boss, just one of the new geeks. Page has a courteous smile for the boss, who walks towards his door. He folds the numbers in time before the boss enters and says, "Going to eat something?" Page holds up a half-eaten sandwich from the morning as his answer. The boss turns and leaves. Page dumps the leftovers in the wastepaper basket.

Polina smiles for her friends, who had thought among themselves to take her to the movies in the hope it would take her mind off of Baby. Inside the complex and walking briskly through the middle, Polina is tall and proud. In stride the friends make their way to the other end of the shopping mall. One of Polina's friends suggests they use the clean restrooms at the department store, an idea that Polina follows even though she does not need to go. The girls walk in single file down to the back of the store. Polina notices an outfit while walking past the children's department and looks the other way. Going past the furniture Polina sees a living-room suite that young boys would love to climb. In the TV section, her friends vanish one by one into a

hallway from which old people with scarves and hats come and go.

The theme in mono creeps from behind Polina without notice. She is just within the vicinity of where the chugging rhythm populates her young membranes. She most naturally leans for support on the stand made to suspend the controls in mid-air. The wide plasma screen's insides breathe as if they are her lungs. Doves fly. Polina finds the way they flutter their wings comforting. The music, now stereo, draws her close to what she is now making in this suspension of a warped dimension.

Network cables and zillions of strands of fine glass shoot data and transmit her neural message and innocent energy. WIPE is about to take its base environment from Polina Rada. The sales clerk is on his way. The friends fight over who will leave the restroom first and Polina now finds the controls mold to fit to her delicate hand.

The doves have long ago flown back into the magic top hat. The sprinkling snow, not yet a blizzard, comes from the left. Its progressively piling nature fills the screen. A baby cries. The friends have agreed that the shortest of them should go first. The sales clerk is still making his way to the window shopper.

The music is fantastically prominent in Polina's head now. The sound of her friends returning to her provides a seamless transition for her senses, as if they were always coming to get her. They laugh at the young man, whose his name-tag is upside down, as they collect her, and off they go. The screen is a snow-white-covered landscape. The wind is now blowing the snow into a blizzard; nature's process has accelerated. The backs of Polina and her friends are a blur for the clerk, who turns to the screen. He looks closely at a black car teetering on the screen. A baby is screaming from it. The clip is clipped by its creative team and a flash of bright and brilliant light clears the frame. The word WIPE splashes on its own page as the guy looks for a trademark he cannot ID. The horns zigzag a trill downwards as the theme song stops. The shop intercom calls his name and he looks up into the security camera.

Alexvale laughs to himself, but out loud so he can hear for himself that this is real. He laughs at the music the owner of the brand-new Range Rover listens to. The briefcase he sat on could well house a melting, smoking tape-recorder giving orders to perform a mission impossible, like the gap he now eyes in between the school bus and the semi trailer. He could never counter the drag of the games his brother played, but he rolls with the swerve of the four-wheel-drive, ignoring the blasts from the cars he leaves standing, some performing horizontal acrobatics to avoid a pileup of metal on the M1. Alexvale adds another "Ha!" to his haunting laugh. Through the daylight he dreams that the bus driver is a woman, her eyes wide as the kids' point. The semi trailer will never, ever jackknife. Alexvale now prays while the back of his getaway vehicle swings left, as natural ability takes over to straighten the once-looming disaster into a zoom into the yonder.

Page stands beneath a lone street light, his head down. The light from above extends no farther than above the eyebrows; below that is only darkness. Leaning against a lamppost at three a.m., he is five and half hours from logging onto the LAN in the land of rats that hug pavements and race along gutters. With traces from the needle in his veins, he holds down the chemical effects on the banks of his brain as its stagnant waters rise again. A hooker in fishnet stockings that he wants to rip, although all wet, stops his hand from doing nothing she hasn't felt before. Page believes that he really needs it now. Still leaning against the post, Page hands her the cash. Then he walks. He doesn't even want his change.

The alarm clock tolls bells that ring phones to cause grievous harm inside Page's head. Already he's on the wrong foot as he hops out of bed, bang-smack into the innocent wall which stands beside it. He mutters, "Ouch! Shit!"

The coffee cart and its customers can smell what he ate earlier that morning. The lady who usually says "Hello" to him looks down and to the south end of the street. He tends to the coffee with one hand and to a cigarette with his other. The polystyrene container warms too quickly, burning him somewhat. In the process

the ash of the cigarette blows grey light dust into him. He brushes it from the black of his trousers, but it sticks, so he rubs it in. The lady who usually greets him with a cheery, "Good morning," the lawyer who wakes him up, just about everyone feels like shaking their heads at his day, wrong and not on song. He admits to himself that they must be thinking, "When's it going to end?"

The elevator is full. The man in front of him is clean and smelling as if drowned in eau de toilette. The only thing that takes him from the here and now is the round butt in the face of his crotch. He looks down at it as it leans against his body when the elevator comes to a floor.

Everybody looks to the floor today. He walks through the lobby as an image he will retrace soon, till he finds breath to breathe out the misery he is about to be given. He makes a quick visit to the men's room and discovers that the amyl nitrate bottle still has fumes enough for a hit. He does it as he looks beneath the partition to see underpants on the floor. Bringing his head up fast, he adds to the buzz as he is paged over the intercom to the boss's office.

The white sleeves are stiffer than usual, as the wife who ironed them wished more than ever that they be starched straight. The sun is an accomplice to the accuser in this scene. The delivery is cumbersome in consideration of the laws that define a fair dismissal. "You got caught, John. I'm sorry. An audit would show your workstation as a breach point of entry." The words deserve a yawn at best, as his next look wants to know what his final paycheck will total. The boss stands and leaves the room, giving him space to digest the news. The blinds cast lines across his face. He wonders if they understand his reasoning. Then he yawns.

The Samoan stands still. Page looks at him in the polished stainless steel. The elevator stops and the one with the roundest butt comes in for something both males could relate to. The elevator doors open. They walk behind her to the front doors. The security guy nods and jobless Page replies in the same manner. The barista in the coffee cart looks too big to be in there. The traffic looks too fast to be on this street, and the sun is still blessed with the task of lighting all this shit. Page stretches and yawns and believes that the money is already in the bank.

The receptionist has come down to commiserate, but his only look for her is to obliterate the past, something she does not get, as he stubs the butt of his cigarette on the ground where he'd thought he was rid of her.

Off comes the same colored tie. Page still knows the same down and away route to the bar that knows his demeanor. The door opens and the ones who have a head start push up their glasses to let him know he is still welcome in the place. The juke box, the place's color, and its rotunda menu roll around again. T-Bone is about moan, the piano ivory and ebony tinkle his senses as he shakes his head fast to weed the bad shit from up there. Now his elbows find their resting place on the bar. The barmaid's smile is nice above the bevy of bounce. They hang just right as she leans forward to slide him one on the house. Out the window he recognizes the walks of those returning from their lunch hours. The buzz is warm now, probably like how Elvis felt in Vegas. Page nods his head. He's always known the lyric is about him. The barmaid makes eyes and he knows they have to be at him as the juke box continues to flood the bar, now just for the two of them.

This freedom of sorts turns out to be short-lived. Yes, the money is in the bank, but in the darkness of the apartment only the ajar fridge door and the computer monitor provide buzzard-heated light, though dim. It is stifled in quantities as he puts his nose into the numbers on his piece of paper. The fight with K-MUZO in the newly released WIPE is a kick that has now clawed him closer to the only other light in his life tonight, his machine. Page feels for the growth on his face. The five o'clock shadow on K-MUZO's graphically portrayed likeness is real on the screen to which he is stuck. He is full of questions for the character who has just coined the phrase "WORLD WIDE". His fingers tap keys. On screen they size each other up and down.

PAGE1: Where u come from?

K-MUZO: Always been here, just WORLD-WIDE now.

PAGE1: Good to know you...

K-MUZO: 2mrw, is another life 4 u, my friend - SOHO PAGE1

The IP 13.24.33.3 returns, alias KEV MUZO. Page is now confused, as he was in the boss's offices. The left and right eyelines collide. Looking at this face front-on he would say they're cross-eyed.

The alarm clock has not been advised that he is no longer required to wake for work. He walks over and taps the thing to stop it and yawns, arms wide, and climbs into an unmade bed to sleep away the coming workday.

That evening he is back in front of the screen. WIPE has caught on. Blogs and places question the origins of what feels like another phenomenon. PlayStation is originally accused of the murderous intentions of an attack that has slaughtered all comers. Then X-Box is blamed for the way it monopolizes its business relations through many licenses on almost every connection on earth. In the end they conclude that the Mastermind is a love child of East and West disguised to bypass corporate bullshit, megalomaniac mergers, and crazed marketing androids with their pea-brain ideas.

#### PART HANIBAL

Hanibal Ammer opens his grey suit jacket and the door to the office as he ignores the hand held out towards him asking for a shake. The one-time CIA operative is conscious of the time and his credentials as he listens to one of those briefs that take a meandering track by the way that the ego that relays the mission cannot differentiate the task from the job. So he sums it up as he goes, closed and quick, as WIPE is leaking, spreading, taking up space and huge chunks of market share.

A suit tells him, "WIPE's world-wide entry point is WIPEWORLDWIDE.COM."

"And Sony and Microsoft have denied all knowledge?" Hanibal responds. "Interesting."

"For the time being, yes."

"Time frame?"

"Seventy two hours -- 96 maximum."

"And?"

"Bring it in for packaging, Hanibal!"

Hanibal A, a solemn guy, sits in tourist class. He looks for the alcohol content on the label of the Singaporean beer and steadies the plastic cup holding his bourbon as the pilot apologizes for the turbulence everyone knows is way out of his control, "Ladies and gentlemen ..."

That's where his razor-sharp mind clips the audio and thinks of his neurotic wife who is back in his arms again. For seven weeks it has been bearable. Two of those weeks have been on the road for an insurance company and now for Company Y, which is a front for who-knows-who-or-what, but the money's good, so he's out of her hair again. Their only child is in a home for the autistic and his mother is in a sanatorium with TB. Life doesn't come more bundled with bad luck, and flaky value adds that amount to garbage in a heap.

Hanibal studies the color printout, but not before he steadies his right hand. The oversight of server locations

serving WIPE is owned and managed by a random selection of medium-to-large-sized web-hosting companies. The latest player to go WORLD WIDE is GEE LEEZ, aka LB Gee, who hails from Beijing, China. He is a lawyer with a handful of corporate clients. Also involved are three respectable businessmen who can be traced to narcotics in the Golden Triangle and the trade in humans across the former USSR, London, and Asia. Hanibal erases thoughts of the law and reminds himself he is there for a big payday.

Taxicabs the world over are the same, consistent, and comforting. Hanibal smiles from the liquor as he offers the driver advice, telling him, "Come to the Americas."

The driver understands his drift and says, "Yes," as he pulls up to an exclusive address in Beijing. Minutes later he delivers a door-knock that suits the insides of the building and the camera at which he smiles. The door opens and he steps inside.

The ringing phone is a dominating sound inside the gymnasium-size apartment. The stainless steel floor is soft to the touch of high heels. On top of the heels models parade about the place serving liquor and smiling with sweet, wet lips.

Hanibal steadies the liquor as LB Gee finishes another call. The handset finds the concave as the screen flashes an update. K-MUZO has completely annihilated the European Elite Conference, their three World Wide Champions in Action, Shooter, and Sports have all succumbed to the sniper from Kansas City, US. The Caucasian has come down from the tower of London with his rifle and is standing on the bridge. A car teeters on the cliff above London in the Siberian ranges. The cries from the black car and an occasional eagle the size of a Boeing 747 swoops down and collects corpses, singeing the fine hairs that line people's ear drums. The body the eagle takes on this occasion fights till the bird pecks its head, and then the human hanging by its torn arm spits its guts -- red, heavy, and horrifying. Hanibal takes a gulp and tastes the expensive drink till he feels LB at his shoulder.

The door is now the focus as Beck the Indie King is loud on the stereo. This is what he has to say, smooth just like the fucking beer, as Hanibal swallows a mouthful: "I prayed heaven today / Would bring its hammer down on me ..."

Outside the door they wait. They can hear the song too.

The one in the first picture says, "Love this song."

The one who smiles a lot says, "I saw him on the airplane."

The one who says wow says, "WOW!"

LB looks at the screen. Everyone else's eyes are on the door. GEEZ takes the remote and the 20-foot screen shows the visitors on the other side of the door. Armani, Charley Stevonsen, C S, with NIKE, and LMLA-ink in the orange mist look up at the security cam together with all of their marbles.

Beck sings on his own, "Something always takes the place of missing pieces / You can take and put together even though / You know there's something missing."

Metofeaz says into an intercom there in China, "Must-must-must be the fucking wrong house. We do-we do fucking really do fucking apologize, explicitly regarding the duplicity of the fucking way we appear in this scene. It is rather coinci-fucking-dentially, completely, and utterly, miserably fucking also accidental, huh?"

Jon Le Mac says, "WOW!"



Lazoo says, "Mmm ..."

Hanibal steps for the door. The screen is black now. The elevator closes. His head appears on the screen and now his body steps out into the entranceway. LB uses the remote to retrace the visitation, blank black-and-white TV fuzz from the 50s, 60s and some of the 70s is all that is in this wake.

The screen says, "Shhhh ..."

### A WOMAN'S PLACE

Santina Fenton takes a coffee brought to her by a tall young guy dressed in black, complete with apron. Next he delivers coffee to the suit seated beside her. The briefing room at the Kansas City FBI building is crowded. Seats are limited to the field staff and their handlers, with only standing space for the administrators and assistants.

A boss says, "It just so happens that we already have someone in the field."

Santina jots down in a diagram her new position within Company X. She draws the look on her boss's face in the form of Goofy and Donald Duck, keeping the lips turned down in the sadness of having to report to his secretary from now on.

Santina's apartment is tidy and orderly. The browns and greens blend, as does the lighting with the fading daylight. She researches her new assignment in honesty, as her computer screen displays all manner of characters and their overcompensating, heroic names, which are funny enough to keeping her smiling and laughing.

She sits down in front of her new wide-screen TV monitor. She now has in her favorites all systems of note according to the geek site. With three sets of controls, she feels the ears of the thing in her hand as she reads the instructions from the manual. She agrees with the symbols, but questions their formation.

Still, she then allows herself to be carried away. K-MUZO is WORLD WIDE, according to WIPE's leader board. His picture on the laptop screen says, "Soap Star Kevin Zealand of Kansas City" -- in her words, Player. She picks through the titles that the girl at the games outlet recommended, but she is being paid to find WIPE on screen.

The telephone call to HQ does not unveil anything suspicious. The Internet companies in Kansas City, Moscow, and London all say the same thing, "They pay their bills, so we host." Santina hangs up the phone. She presses the button to print out the contents of the white board and saves a copy to file. The picture of LB Gee from China looks familiar on screen, but not in a known way. She runs the check, prints the header sheet, and adds it to the board. By 3:00 a.m. her whiteboard has become a montage of anagrams and four-letter words saying that most guys don't have their screen names big and brash. One that stands out for its cheapness is PAGE1. She sees what time it is, takes herself to her bedroom, and puts herself to sleep.

The elevator opens her day in her new role. Her old boss is conveniently bent over the reception desk talking big to the receptionist, who now ignores her. Her march past tapers down to a saunter when he calls out from behind, "Well done! Wait up!"

His gesture is unpredictable as he turns the handle of her coffee cup to face her. She thanks him without hesitation. "I've had mine for the day, but if you would like, I'll sugar it for you and you can drink it."

He shakes his head, but before he could say, "Women!" she's said it. He goes out, leaving the door half-open.

Ms San Fe calls an assistant to her office. On the assistant's way out she asks, "Can you close the door, please?"

Santina dials the telephone as she searches databases. Her day comes to an end and finds herself doing what she did the night before.

Page paces the space of his apartment. He turns off the machine to give it a pause, collects his cigarettes, and walks in open, fresh air to breathe his plan and cement the highlights to come. He rounds the corner. An old guy mutters to himself as T-Bone in his head warms blue corners and brings out a beat in his cold heart. He finds a diner he has passed many a time but hasn't yet entered, so he stops in there.

He pulls his grey skullcap down so it is one eyebrow above the two dark eyes that look straight ahead into the empty diner. Bits of hair curl up where the cap ends. They're greasy and are starting to cling together. The waitress offers coffee. He is muddled in his reply and confused about whether to keep looking at the jobs in the newspaper in front of him, just drink coffee, pick the waitress up, or do all of the above at the same time.

"Mmm ... yep -- coffee's good, and you are too," doesn't sound right, so he pulls out a piece of paper from his pocket and begins to iron it flat with his wiry hand on the table top. He slides the newspaper to the side. The waitress reacts by standing there with her hands on her hips. She takes some chewing gum from her mouth. He sees this.

"Damn!" he says. "Just the coffee to go, please."

"Fuck!" It's quiet and the door is open. The fridge is always open. The carpet laid on the floor dirt is dim and sticky. Page gets closer and finds he has left his key on the outside. "How the fuck did I manage that?" He is grateful that in his absence no one was desperate enough to lug away the only piece of furniture he relies upon, his machine. He touches the space bar and the monitor speaks to the corners of its tube to wake it into playing WIPE.

The alarm clock, still not knowing what was going on, goes off. He reaches for it and silences it. He rolls back onto his side and sleeps some more.

She wakes and stands in a spot in her apartment that the sun hits every morning this time of the year. Now warm from standing, she cradles a cup while she opens the curtains. She wears only a sweatshirt. The back of her Lakers nightie is too short and too good. Even she says so in the reflection of the widescreen TV she looks back at.

At 3:00 p.m. Page is seated with a cup in front of a webcast explaining the latest Internet craze to catch pupils, principals, public servants, and now Hollywood producers. An expert on CNN swears on the life of his children that the hijackers will claim responsibility by the time the stock market closes for the day.

An anal analyst on screen, who says what he hears in his earpiece, says, "It's by far the most elaborate and well-thought-out strategy to date, but if they miss claiming rights for the sake of their shareholders today, they will be left with a falling star tomorrow morning, lost in the galaxy. They will stand up and make the most of the rally this afternoon."

The anchorman touches his ear for a word. His mouth says, "As we go to the break -- K-MUZO of Kansas City. Let's take a look at this character inside the latest thing to sweep the planet."

Page sips and lights a brown cigarette. K-MUZO lets go a shot, and PAGE1 takes the bullet in round one.

Page has the breathing patterns of K-MUZO figured out by 6:00 p.m. His pulling the trigger as he inhaled did

not affect the projection of his dummy bullets, which made mashed pumpkin of his target. No one ever got close enough, or ever thought to take him from behind. This annoys PAGE1 as he waits to see the head of a wannabe get blown away.

K-MUZO comes down the winding staircase from the tower. He pulls hard on the vest. The Velcro resistance rips a sound that cuts quick as the door creaks open and the London evening commotion hits the player's doomed hearing. It pans in circular Dolby left, then comes about right back to the spine and over his head to tap him on his chin. K-MUZO, now in a white tank top and ripped biceps, a rifle in one hand and a vest in the other, looks up to the animator, who looks down at him, and in the voice of all broadcasters acclaims, "K-MUZO, you are still WORLD WIDE." His hands go up in the air with his tools as the landscape tilts, a car teeters on a cliff, a Boeing explodes, an eagle transforms, and people squeal and cheer in the same way as when Hell opens and accepts the fallen ones.

LB Gee stretches his neck. The device in Hanibal's hand has a session which he is surprised to see.

PAGE1: Does the K-1Million take silver bullets?

K-MUZO: What's wrong with the dummy heads?

PAGE1: Thought you would want to remember the faces of your victims?

K-MUZO: Interesting...

PAGE1: Do test on me, in 3hrs

K-MUZO: Die will be done, again paper weight!

He needs more fresh air, so he goes for a walk. Passing a newsstand, he sees a promotional shot looking like him for a new movie. A bus passes him. Even the politician on the side of the bus has one of his lines. He smiles, as it's great to be certifiably, undeniably crazy as a motherfucker. Soon he reaches the park. When he finds the bench his cellphone rings. He isn't ready for his reply, but he lets it go anyway. "Actually," he says, "I can't afford it." He looks at the button he clicks to goodbye the dealer and snorts fresh air. The thought is scary and the feeling is lonely. A cigarette will do just fine. Tobacco, too, is coming to its end, someone tells him. A sign outside a motel says "Vacancy". It says a lot to him.

A fucking neon sign flashes, "A job / rent / a fuck / a hit / a job / a fuck / rent / a fuck / a hit / a fuck / a fuck / a fucking fuck ..."

He closes his eyes and flicks the light to free a flame that lights the cigarette and decides a fuck will wait till she knows how to talk with him after a fuck.

Inside a canister of some sorts, a voice says, "If such an entity existed, John Page wishes to be the one whose body it could use if it were to come down to this dimension to claim this hype as the clearing of its throat after a battle in another time, or as the end of a punch line to another joke it tells when it is bored of changing the course of events and pages in its memoirs. He walks again upright, still yet to step, but nonetheless it is in the right direction. The commentators, the dreams, the women, and their hurt in one handbag, come to him in his face. If he were to turn the other cheek, it too would be bruised. He must contain the barrage and channel its velocity for the purpose of taking a chance on a hunch which up till now has been paranoid ravings and mistaken looseness of lips disconnected by cord from the brain that never sleeps and only blinks to wink when it sees the line across your throat. Or maybe we gift him four birds in a jigsaw puzzle like in a dream."

Page looks back at the park bench. People flee. Birds and animals morph among each other. The people

coming towards him talk loudly, but he cannot hear a word. An engine's rockets blast the foliage. The park is darker than an author can describe and a painter can stroke. The warm blows heat in a flash and the animals are gone. The people 20 feet away talk of someone's stupidity. Page feels sorry for them due to the content of their conversation, as his hands find the ends of his pockets.

He finally stops looking over his shoulder. The big glass windows of the convenience store are bright and share light with the footpath and the cars in front of the store. Eventually Page steps into the light and then into the store itself. He does this by opening the front door, which has an "OPEN" sign advising him to do just that. The Korean kid hears the bells on the store door when it opens, but he keeps on combining. He has the volume turned down so the only audio is the clicks as his fingers flick, pouncing on the worn buttons and then slipping off to remount in turn, or together with the digits on his other hand.

Page waits patiently as he decides what he's going to say and how it was going to sound, a thought process a mind wasted on wickedness has never utilized. He tries finesse from the heart. "You like it?"

The boy pauses and turns to him. "Yeah. What you want?"

"Who you like?"

"K-MUZO."

Page buys a pack of smokes, walks lightly to the door, opens it, and exits without disrupting the flow.

He walks some more till he comes across a fast-food outlet. It is too radiant with its electricity and its ridiculous, fast-food radiating preservatives. The cook pats a meat patty with a tool made in Taiwan. Page orders by pointing and pays by handing over money. Then he sits down to have a shot at eating. The burger was meant to be eaten slowly, like the couple who didn't mean to make him feel like a lone person in the midst of a family, its members like two people holding hands or talking and listening with eyes, ears, and mind in the moment. The mayo gets him again. The woman in his way tells him, "Go like this," and licks her upper lip. He smiles a thank-you and is out of there.

She takes a sip of her beer and then feels the need, so she puts her hand across her mouth and for whatever reason says "Beg your pardon" to no one. The name is up there on the screen. The name belongs to a woman, she suspects, or just to a particularly bland man. PAGE1 had made it onto her board as a cling-on to K-MUZO. There's no picture. She has forgotten to wipe it off, but she knows it is there and that it will come off to free up space for the next person who goes WORLD WIDE. It could be a woman, she tells herself as she closes her apartment to go find dinner.

Page has been unable to get his hands on the theme music he needs for the exhibition match with K-MUZO. He never minds when he doesn't get what he wants anymore; he's never blocked when he is obstructed from a view of the obscured feelings. An orchestra now plays inside his head.

He takes shit about his name in the pre-match press conference. He takes two silver bullets in the match. The animals on TV are wild and free. The waitress's panty line is visible, and when she bows her head to pour the coffee he sees his hands controlling her. He lights a cigarette and thinks of the new environment as he dials reservations to reserve tickets for his morning flight to Kansas City.

## PART 1

Visions of a hairy drag queen with one leg on the arm of a leather recliner came caving in on S-O-MANTIC, a 17-year-old sexy model from NYC, as the duster ceases to rub against the board where PAGE1 sits. Santana Fenton sits down and brings the controls to her lap. She pretends to be PAGE1, the controls vibrating as he

walks alone along London Bridge. Up there in the tower is K-MUZO. The earth moves as its axis spins. To keep the point of contact focal, PAGE1 takes his first silver bullet. Santana holds her shoulder as her right hand grips the device in absorbing the shocking vibrations the shaking ground causes.

A worker zapped from the office is heading straight for him. She is now hoisted into the air, the back of her skirt's gravity is zero. She is wearing a g-string like the pair she owns. Santana wants to hold both controls.

PAGE1 dumps the receptionist face down, her waist-high skirt reveals a tattoo on one cheek. The clergyman in PAGE1's path pulls a blade, but PAGE1 is more concerned about the red dot on his heart than the knife's edge, which is slicing his cheek. He, too, is thrown to ground. She turns herself in for the night in the US.

L-SOMASTIC is a 23-year-old female nurse in South Africa. Hanibal says "WOW!" to her as he lifts his glass to pay her a toast. LB is in the next booth with his entourage.

The club plays Santana. His guitar whines wow-woe-whoa. The lava lamp is the size of a healthy baby giraffe. The caged dancer moves down too slowly. On the ceiling-high screen, the nurse and her needle walk the slippery floors of a hallway in a hospital for insane billionaires who have seen the silver-spoon spaceship. She shakes her hips -- hip, hip, Santana licks! Yeah. Hanibal shows his crazy, evil smile as drinks are served along with the guitar and vocal of 'Oye Como Va!' Yeah! Carlos, come! Come join Elvis and me like in the dream! LB takes the hand of a young actress from the Americas and leads her to the floor. When he gets there he does the 60s in pipes, winkle pickers, and a black turtleneck.

The alarm clock rings. Page sits up, grabs the clock, and resets the alarm to off. A quick check of the night's events shows that O-LO GRAM, L-SOMASTIC, and PLAZ-MANTIC have all gone WORLD WIDE WIPE, unisex, homosexual, heterosexual, and evolving. He still believes he has the key to decrypt the code, but how is he going to claim the rights? He drinks coffee, smokes cigarettes, and decides that the waitress in the café the night before is worth another look. Maybe this time his mind will come up with a question or conversation with the answers all ready. He reaches under the mattress for the piece of paper, his only luggage for his trip to Kansas City to confront K-MUZO.

Page, ruggedly handsome and feeling the best his body can feel, reaches for the back of the seat in front him to hoist himself to his feet. He pockets the magazine from the pouch. Inside its pages is his screen name, PAGE1, with which everyone seems to have a problem. As security measures hold up the line, small speakers still bring out the best of Santana in the lounge of Kansas City International Airport.

The bus ride makes him read some more. The names of the players who have gone WORLD WIDE, GEE LEEZ, PLAZ-MANTIC, S-O-MANTIC, K-MUZO, O-LO GRAM, L-SOMASTIC, comprise a phonetic rampage by a schoolboy in a huff, excited but fearful of the possibility that the next sign-on will grab the name with which he has dubbed his characters. Page, and his last resort tag PAGE1, thought this as he read the glossy magazine to its end.

The money-machine screen is green and dirty. He shields the side of it to view the balance of his account. The Kansas City lunch hour is greasy and calm. A cab driver pulls up as he thinks about hailing one. The driver looking up at him as he checks the back seat for wet patches and other sorts of stains is hustling him. Eventually he smiles and tells the cabbie, "You're good," as he opens the back door and puts himself in the middle of the vinyl seat.

The upmarket area still has a hint of malls and fast-food outlets. He can see the tower of the shopping complex three miles back from the table where he's sitting on the sidewalk opposite "BOSS CARS". The missing apostrophe bugs him as he looks for a guy who is blonde, six feet tall, built like Hercules, and has Brad Pitt's smile and swagger.

## PART 2

Top down, fresh from the poodle park, Kevin checks for shit on the brown Italians on the pedals. The stereo says shallow, hollow, but who gives a fuck when it looks this fucking good. The women say to hell with reality when he's in the fucking house. "Barry White, Barry White, it's all right ..." The gap is tight and there's just a twinkle in the Ray Bans he's wearing. The accelerator is flat, the wheel pulled tight, his foot off the pedal. He loosens his grip towards the way the Pontiac wants to slide, RPMs in the red. 'American Woman' is still sliding, making the back of the thing flick and warp Now.

Page sits. Of late he's been seeing Johnny Depp, Brando, and James Dean walking around and about when he needed to be John. The waitress brings him coffee with bacon and eggs. Depp tips his hat forward and slides left. The hat rolls from his shoulder to his finger tips. TB Walker and his colored girls back it all with a sugary blues. Brando rolls into an unforgettable delivery, an eyebrow thinks across a flat face as he tilts his head to the right to listen with his left ear in the sky. James Dean sits with his jacket still on and doesn't want to stay. Page knows he must keep on trucking; his last clean shirt is on his back.

The piano depends on the bass, the horns with their sax come now, an organ fills out wide as the convertible rounds a bend. The door of the convertible swings. Kevin catches it and pushes into the body of the classic. A barrel of beer in a gallon hat, he has his arms open to greet those walking on by. He does up the button of his cream suit and looks about the lot.

Page, on his first pack of the day, lights up and looks at the newspaper the waitress puts down on the table as she tops his coffee. There he was, K-MUZO in drag, daylight and in action as a mother without her children steps over the line and into Kevin's zone. The young mother twirls a lock of her hair, then pulls a handful behind her ear and says, "Mmm ..."

Kevin is ready with an approach. "Let the old man drive your wagon, you."

The young mother's hips change the leg on which she puts her weight. "Me?"

"Yes, you -- all about you. Sorry, your name was?" His appeal allows him to answer his own questions. "Ms for the day, ah?"

The young mother takes the form Kevin hands her.

Page sniffs and drags on the cigarette. Kevin hands the client a pen to go with the form, which she signs. Kevin looks over for the first time and Page marks the moment as he toasts the car salesman with bottled water.

Kevin sees more than the signature he's waiting for and looks across the road. Someone has a bottle of water pointed at him. He wonders if he could take the lid off the bottle at this range to use as the period at the end of a transaction.

Page thinks through the scene as his mind goes back to the park. He didn't see the spaceship, but he could still feel the afterburn of the engines, which blew the hell out of his body and the entire park. Kevin emerges triumphantly from the office at the back of the lot, his hand guiding the woman to her new Mustang convertible. He opens the door for her and ensures all of her curves are within the body of the automobile. Then he pushes the door into the car. He again looks over and makes it known that he is noticeable at this distance.

They share a smoke. Lazoo passes the thing to Le Mac, who passes it to Metofeaz, who flicks the thing as he looks the other way. The limo pulls up to the place where the maestro taps his toe. Now healed on his own, he

looks up at security cameras one, two, three.

Esai takes the picture from a hand in the back seat and tilts it in the daylight to get a better look at it. The faces change. The chauffeur wants a look, so Esai turns it upside down so he can see. He presses play on the stereo system and Three Colored Players sing 'How far is Heaven?' Los Lobos sing 'Climbing High to the Mountain Top'. Carlos Santana's guitar does the talking.

The music is ethnic but electric. The cactus juice drips from the guitar neck as their hands ring the bars to the keys in the vanishing point. Lazoo can see Le Mac on turntables, but the heroes have their weapons on straps hanging from their shoulders. He gets into the limo. Mr Santana is inside the limo, too. Lazoo the illiterate says, "Shhh ..."

Carlos says, "Lick this."

Esai opens the glove compartment and takes out a walkie-talkie. It's a bit dusty so he takes a cloth and wipes the thing. The chauffeur looks over. Lazoo points to the east. The chauffeur says, "Yeah."

Esai presses the orange trigger and Lazoo gives the okay, saying, "Go."

"You there?" Esai asks. "Cause we are definitely here, and now we too know why you want what it is that you seek, Embrae. Hey, what say you come around some time and we discuss the fee to deliver the face on a platinum platter, huh?"

Esai lets the orange trigger go. Lazoo presses the button and the partition rises. The stereo is in the red. The shoulders in the back begin together, the left one to the ground. Now the right ones sit up straight like good kids. As soon as the driver can see them he does the same. The shoulders belonging to the three in the back and to the driver go left-left, and then right-right. Esai can see them in the rearview mirror, so he does it, too. The whole of the LA Crew are now all together in a fucking convertible.

Lazoo says, "Shoulders, left-left, and right-right, ah? Smiles should be sweet, not like on the posters, man. Now that our heads are common, bow them a little, put them up in the air -- confidently, not arrogantly -- common. Now piece this shit together. Shoulders uh-uh -- I mean yep-yep, yeah! Now our heads bow and raise them to the east and look peacefully together. Hey, driver -- make the car join in."

"Yes, Boss."

"The left side," said Lazoo. "Lift-lift, yeah -- let me hear the air! To the west, yeah. Now the right side. Pump it, driver! Lift the right side of the car -- might as well put our hands up there too. Shoulders, uh-uh, now our heads bow-bow, lift-lift to the east! Yeah.

"¡Oye Como Va!" says Santana.

The driver says "Hey, Esai -- there he is!"

Page's eyes follow the car with two in the front and three in the back. Kevin looks over as the LA crew cruises by again. Page sits up straight in the chair. The waitress with her pad pays attention.

The driver, in his glasses and blue polka-dotted bandana, says to the man in the black silk shirt, "Esai, Embrae must've flown the coop to this hell."

The twin exhausts puff no clouds from the well-tuned engine to define silence as Kevin comes to road's edge. Parked 50 feet to his right is a carriage with colored people inside, as found in the middle and southern

regions of the Americas and on reservations scattered through out North America. Across the road some loony-toon escapee who's been eying him for half the day sits still. His favorite waitress, miffed at the action scenery on the door, steps out of her little suburban café.

The past is burned into the road, tread marks on the tarmac and black rubber in the air show up against the white cars and the wheelchairs on the sidewalks. K-MUZO comes along as Page slumps back into his seat. Taller than the lamppost down the street, his stride wider than the pavement, he follows the waitress into the café.

Page's eyes look straight ahead. He anticipates that the chit-chat from inside will be the same-old-same-old. Something beside him throws a shadow across the path in front of him and on his old boots. He drags the bottle of water to him and drinks. His voice clears its passage, still looking across the street to where it had come from, saying "K-MUZO, right?"

Kevin, cocky but charming, says, "You could say that, in the intimate light of an LCD, yeah."

Finding his bearings, mustering confidence, Page comes back, "PAGE1. Played you. Got WIPED."

Kevin shows signs of relief. With a hand across his forehead and a decent smile, he says, "So, you're a fan? Ah, got it. Had me worried."

Page is unprepared for the open reception and forgets the next lines. Instead, he goes with a bunch of his own. "Came to spend time with you."

For the rest of the afternoon Page watches the car lot as Kevin does deals and sells cars, mostly to women. The ride to Kevin's place is slow and relaxing. It goes past a billboard of Clooney pushing the Oceans franchise. The spaceship's engines still in the forefront of his mind, Kevin points out a good fishing spot in the park. They pull up to his place. The woman and her daughter next door call out to welcome Kevin home. Page takes little notice, as he is eager to see what sort of setup K-MUZO has installed behind the door, behind the fly screen.

Page stands in the middle of the room in front of the widescreen plasma TV, his dirty old boots on the cream carpet. "Only if there were a woman in the house," he lets go softly to himself.

Kevin is in the kitchen cooking the contents of cardboard boxes straight from the freezer. He hears something and says, "Excuse me?"

Page touches the black leather couch from a nationwide sale. "I said, this is nice, like a woman lives in the house."

Kevin smiles at what he thought he heard. His head comes around the wall on the other side. Page points to pictures on the same wall. "That's my ex-wife," he tells him. Page agrees with him by nodding his head. "That's my daughter," Kevin says.

Page winks one eye slowly and thinks with his lips.

Soon dinner is served. As they eat, the following is worthy of special formatting techniques, like the one used to present the same idea for those who prescribe on celluloid to enhance a vision. This format will be used again during the course of events as the scribbler sees fit.

KEVIN



(Smiling)

That's my daughter.

(Looks thoughtful, pauses)

That's my daughter, plus my wife, who was taken from me suddenly.

JOHN

So, your wife died?

KEVIN

(Amused)

Oh no, not that type of transportation.

JOHN

(Confused)

Transportation?

KEVIN

(Serious)

She was divorced from me, in a court of law. That's how she was taken from me, John.

Kevin cleans up the dinner he cooked as Page sits on the couch, ready with the controls in his hands. On screen is the replay of K-MUZO wiping PAGE1. Page now swaps controls. He thinks of the engines, the size of the actual ship, but nothing happens, so he picks up his controls and thinks of the crew aboard the bird-like craft. Still, nothing happens. The hospitable voice from behind the wall offers him a beer. "Just water," is all he can come up with. Now the logo shapes through the bulletproof vest of his host coming around the wall to play the game.

### PART 3

No one has heard of a .wamx file, or of WAMX100. Hanibal scans the executable and it comes up clean. He clicks on it. Nothing happens. He clicks on it again. Still nothing happens. He closes the lid of the laptop and attaches the cellphone's speaker to his ear. His pal at the patent office found the text in an attorney's investigative search from a few years back. The application never filed the instance still on record, and legally assigned ownership of WIPE's programming language, dotwamx, and all its properties to the person who created the documents in a court of law. A three-page overview and a couple of novice networking diagrams are printing.

O-LO GRAM, a 21-year-old singer and winner of a reality TV show in Sydney, Australia, sounds good. The tuning pitch is perfect. Hanibal listens closely to the melody and lyric, made up as he goes. He jots this down as he also notes the range of the mid-frequencies isolating the vocal track on the graphic equalizer. LB is on the stage in the middle of his living room. His right leg extends slowly past 45 degrees, and eventually his body forms an I, his head next to his ankle on the ground. Hanibal takes a call on his cellphone as the cmd

screen on the wall flies through data.

At Company X, Ms San Fe presents her plan. "PLANTOM-ZERO and HEX-V'L, the creators of the environments, must be the designers," she says, believing it herself with conviction as she projects WIPE's landscape onto the screen. Santana's presentation to the board is brief, as she wraps the session with the strategy: "We'll hire K-MUZO as our marquee man," says Ms San Fe. "Sooner or later the owners will step forward to claim him as we make him our own." On that note she squeezes the remote and smiles in the white light of the projector, now without an image.

Santana's handwriting is roundish. It gives away little about whether she leans towards the past or is oriented to a future which could be bright. She sees a good picture of a bad person in front of her. She remains professional as she marks the evidence "John Page" to exhibit on her board. The radio annoys her with 'I'm Falling in Love Again', an infectious ditty that will mark her, so she tunes out. The TV screen shows the very name. One of the controls on the table shakes. She stays away from it, well clear of the one that now slides on its own, one which she keeps an eye on from her desk. Her hand is now on a pad. It begins to be cursive on its own, angled to the right, italic. her heart still reminds her, "Do not! Reach there, go there, or even think of ..."

The control buzzes, then says, "Watch me slide."

The pen in Santana's hand says, "Where? Not even! Remember? Call and then fall. Not now!"

The control, almost at the end of the tabletop, goes, Buzz, buzzed buzz buzz.

On the paper in front of Santana come the words, "You know, how far? How well? You have come."

The space she chooses to look at says, "Buzz, buzzed, buzz, and falling now. Catch me, Santana," then signs off with, "Wishing Indiscreetly Piercing Eyes."

She sees it happen, and now she sees it on the ground, but only now the sound, Weeee, smash, crash, Buzz buzzed buzz, comes from the control.

In her sign-off she circles the first letter of each word to spell her fear, To Wipe.

"Two homo sapiens interact with a TV screen via cables connected through a console," Lazoo explains. "A system. Side-on we see their profiles, and as we roam the room we find it hard to break their focus till someone snaps their fingers with an idea good enough to drag these two from the insides of Kev Zealand's living room so we can further fill the future -- but we can. Hey, you! Yeah, you. Do a two-finger clap. Now!" Metofeaz's left hand marks the passage with an "!" as his right hand does the sound as ordered, Le Mac has the theme ready, as the next question, Lazoo already has the answer to...

"Let's go for a drink," Page says as he puts the controls down.

K-MUZO, standing in the middle of his crammed living room, becomes human again and responds, "Okay."

Page looks at Kevin as he drives through Kansas City. He feels good in the company of a male, for once. He can see the bar that Kevin, a native of these parts, is still trying to find. Playing with his facial hair, he says, "You know you're cool guy, don't you?"

Kevin smiles as he steers. "Why, thank you. You'd be fine in some decent clothes, too."

Page considers Kevin's reply and then decides to stay with the plan. "Can't afford them."

"There's this karaoke bar around here somewhere."

Santina decides she needs to walk, but the phone rings. Ms San Fe requests that a team of two work the bar and sit close to the subject, collecting information, which she will retrieve after allowing some time for herself.

A man with a dog on a leash passes her as her leggings stretch and her calf muscles, tight before she applied the leggings, loosen. A couple comes her way. The woman, shorter than she is, still manages to look down on her, her eyes into the chest of her man.

Inside the store the candy wrapping seems sweeter than the insides that tempt her. The magazine's glossy and a supermodel threatens to jump out of the cover and stand over her and in her way. Santina smiles at the little boy standing next to his mother, still in her apron, her waitress hat half out of the vinyl bag with its broken zipper, smiling a snarl. The young boy yawns as Santina places juice and gluten-free cookies on the counter.

A college student, her hair pulled back under the doorman's cap, pulls back the door to her apartment building. She pulls one earplug from her head and says, "That song." Santina can hear, "I'm falling ..." coming from the iPod's dangling speaker. The girl says, "Good evening again, Ms San Fe."

She waits for the elevator. The girl puts the earpiece back in place. Her body is moving slightly. The elevator door opens. Ms San Fe boards walks into it and pushes the button. The cat comes to the door to greet whoever, and when she sees it's Ms San Fe she walks away. Inside her apartment she catches up on the events thus far, loading the earplugs in the space above her lobes.

Kevin's back being turned, Page notices a couple at the next table. Their smiles seem freakishly natural. The rest of the patrons seem to be as stiff as usual, but these two give the impression of being real people. He nods at the guy, who is in denim and pretends he doesn't notice. Page plays with his shoulders as Kevin returns with a song-list, drinks, and a beauty carrying all of it. Page looks down as Kevin tips the waitress, then reaches for his pocket, places two bills on the tray, and takes his friend's money.

"See the legs on that!" Kevin seems overly enthusiastic to Page.

Ms San Fe sees the pictures side by side on her whiteboard.

"I'm straight," Page says. "Don't worry."

"Who was talking about dual citizenship?"

"I tell you I'm hetero so that doesn't stop you from trusting me."

Kevin takes a drink. It is as loaded as this guy's approach. Ms San Fe jots down on her pad the word "WEIRDO!" Her fingernails are colored blue.

Page moves his shoulders one more time, then realizes that Kevin has noticed him do this, so he counts to 15 before lets this one blow -- 13, 14, 15, and then says, "Look, bro -- this is about learning from you. You are like a Jedi Master now, you know that? Or not?"

They become and remain silent. Page drops his shoulders in disbelief, even unto himself, at the crap he has just flowed. He lifts the first shot glass and Kevin follows. Down with that one. Then he downs half the contents of the beer in his other hand, so that when they put the bottles back down the level is just above the labels. Page's label is peeled; Kevin's is untouched. The couple at the next table touch hands. The woman is laughing as she pulls a long strand of red hair through her teeth with the hand with which she is meant to

shake his relaxed come-on. Page picks up the second shot glass.

The sounds of glasses being smashed down on tables and Kevin on karaoke soon make Santana unplug. She feels like doing something else. The video recorder is heavy and dusty. She places it on the floor, shakes the wires in her right hand, and puts them to her mouth as she slowly crouches down to examine their input points at the back of the ancient machine. The videotape's weight is lopsided. The last time she watched it she believed she would never rewind it to its beginning. She can feel how the water carries her body. His chat is still inside deep and shy, but knowing. He picks her up in the water and swings her about him. He is truly in love with her in this frame. He whispers that they should disappear to their hotel room, but she says, "Wait." She wants to wait till he asks her properly with a kiss, better than the water.

Outside in the cool air, Kevin pulls his sleeves to their ends and then rubs his hands before forming them into a cup which he blows into, but soon he is warm. Page says, "Let's walk." Kevin thinks about the idea and then agrees. Page, the shorter of the two, walks on the side away from the cars. Kevin's arms and hands explain the situation to a carload of college students that pulls up. They joke and whistle. Page stands back as Kevin gives them the highlight of their evening, and in a zoom their convertible is tunnel-bound. Page looks at him, smiles, and says, "Let's go."

Then Kevin goes on with, "What else do we have to describe God's masterpiece?" The babble scrabble continues all the way to the doorstep of the one-bedroom house.

She runs the back of her hand sideways over her skin and in between her eyelashes so her eyes can see through the emotional waterfall. The smaller screen in the corner's gray borders says, "WIPE NEW LEVEL." The controls are still and silent, so she leans forward and takes them. K-MUZO is armed and dangerous. His back, walking away from her ripple effects, mounts little. The camera cartwheels down into the infested Thames waters and summersaults over an exploding Bentley, its passengers dumbfounded as they manage to clasp the eagle's feathers as it soars till their fingers cramp and release them to their nightmare. She recognizes his boots, noting the wear in the right heel as it steps into a slow stroll.

Page takes the single note from his pocket that his host put on the waitress's tray. He places it on the coffee table as he takes his controls and shakes its wire, freeing it from Kevin's. He seats himself and pushes a beer in front of his first fan, saying, "We play for your money, huh?" at the screen.

"Is that a question or an offer?"

Page, aware of his success so far, pulls back so as not to let the noose tighten too soon. "Just a suggestion. You've been kind to me."

Kevin looks at his profile and says, "Keep it, bro. Use it to get a cab and pick up a car in the morning."

Page, now at ease, commends Kevin for his accommodation. "Don't worry."

Hanibal follows LB into the apartment. LB, the remote in his hand, clicks on the stereo button, then moves to the network button as Hanibal points to the screen. In the body-length leather seat, Hanibal waves GEE-LEEZ to his side. On the screen the black car teeters to the Theme. If Tarantino were to recognize the riff he would send Samuel L Jackson with his fucking fro, complete with a bible chapter in dialogued verse, but he turns his head the other way and lets it slide. Hanibal's arms are down on either side of the sleek seat. LB takes note of the events that start to swell up there, now 40 feet high and never coming down.

She breathes with open lungs. The baby-like burst of tears has been good for her. The music brings her badge back onto her chest, which she just touches because it is her own and she can. Round and bold, the ends of them know an alert. He's been here before, she knows. PAGE1's head is down on the bridge, and she wants to

see his face. The dot on the ground in front of him moves backward then forward, the breathing pattern pulses.

A fuse is lit inside even women who wants love on this day, craving this grotesque, macho, bullshit oversized action. In the Tower, where heads rolled before the commoners on the streets below could afford cars and freehold homes, stands K-MUZO. He is here now. The finger pulls back. A click sounds and a fresh round farewells what he believes is the chosen one.

The camera-like features of the bullet show PAGE1 not knowing the coming of a silver one. K-MUZO stands tall in his window. A woman, dressed fully in wool, is hoisted in the air. She smiles down at PAGE1, but he knows her fate as the bullet knocks some sense into the back of her head.

Santina reaches for the cookies; their wrapping crackles. She increases the volume as the baby screams into a shriek. She no longer cares or worries about the car falling. She bites a cookie and picks up the controls.

PAGE1 walks into the nice man coming towards him with a smile, a briefcase, and a white collar, complete with morals, and stops. The man does not try to walk around him, but pulls something from his blazer pocket.

Santina, too, is ready. The man's wrist snaps and folds back into himself. PAGE1 pushes the blade further to staple the man's bicep into his rib cage as he bends down. The body folds over him, taking the second silver bullet.

PAGE1 stands. Kevin takes the bottle and puts it to where it blocks words. Page stands up and walks through Kevin's house to the bathroom, closes the door behind him, then pushes the latch to lock the place, where thinks, pisses, and thinks some more.

Meanwhile, Kevin is bemused by the unsportsmanlike behavior. As he takes another swig the word "bitch" comes to Kevin's head.

She gets tired of the reruns and switches off the TV. She picks out her outfit for tomorrow and the perfect pair. She finds an old pillow in her spare room and dusts it. Under her arm, already comfortable with it, she stops at the doorway into her room and places the pillow in the hallway.

Hanibal hands him the control from one of his hands, which has been out of sight till now. An executable in front of the replay action is on the screen: "page1wamxplay.exe". *The pointer is flying and trying not to be told. LB, then GEE-LEEZ, does a version of the Lazoo relaxation technique and breathes as an actor from the bellies of belief. Now he controls, and therefore hovers, the signal-sending epicenter over the "X-StationSpirit" file.*

Kevin finally says it out loud in his own home, "bitch" of his guest. Inside the bathroom John snoops. The medicine cabinet, without a lock he opens, two bottles stand out for him. These are some sort of antidepressant and some prescription pills. He shakes one them. The sound is loud. Then he opens the other one. He puts the bottles back as he found them and closes the cabinet door. The mirror is in his face as he turns out the light and returns to the living room.

Hanibal says, "One hundred and one, one hundred and two. Go, now," to GEE LEEZ.

PAGE1 is back on screen. K-MUZO steadies his weapon as GEE-LEEZ ghosts the courier from Hell. PAGE1 has made it to the steps of the tower. K-MUZO must be coming down the stairs as we speak. Hanibal gives the word. PAGE1's boot flattens the door as a harpoon flies towards him. He twists just the torso by the shoulders and the hip, followed by his neck then face, then bends and turns to see the missile pass; the smiling assassin behind him gets it in the forehead.

A woman in a tiger's suit comes down the stairs with two bodyguards. LB Gee's controls elevate PAGE1 into the air. He hangs from the wooden upside-down carousel in the ceiling. The Tiger Woman keeps walking the bodyguards beneath him. The one on the right's head lies on the ground as he holds wires that fuse from his open neck. PAGE1's feet are on the shoulders of the one on the left. He tries to pry them from his breathing passage, but PAGE1 twists suddenly. The neck twists too far and the head falls before the knees bend and then buckle.

Page reaches over and presses the sign for pause on K-MUZO's controls. He exits the room and shuts the bathroom door behind him. Kevin hears the drain as he drinks beer. Page returns to the room. He sits down and reaches over to resume their game, but not before he asks his new friend, "So your wife divorced you, or did you divorce her?"

Hanibal signals to LB that that would be all for now as he heads off to his hotel for the night. LB Gee, the lawyer, looks up at the screen where PAGE1 now has his hands in the air and K-MUZO's silver bullet exits the back of his head. PAGE1 bends, hands on his knees, as K-MUZO finishes him off with the butt of the K-1MILLION.

LB Gee says, "OUCH!"

**CHAPTER 5**

## PART ONE

The box remains tuned in and turned on, the controls like large insects buzzing around the table. The morning news has nothing to look at or any information that is of use to her. The morning meeting at HQ will detail for her world events about which she needs to be thoughtful. The finishing moments of this morning's battle are all too eerie and stirring for her as she readies herself to meet them in the flesh right after the morning meeting.

About the same time, as they are in the same time zone and town, and under the same smog, Page rolls over on the leather couch. His hand, reaching for a cigarette, finds one of the controls. The phone rings and he picks it up. He hears Kevin talking to the boy who washes the cars, saying, "Detail, young fella -- details. It's all about detail."

Then he hears the young boy say, "Thanks for the details."

Then Kevin talks into the handset. "Rise, man. The car is fucking lonely -- go get it. Swing by and let's do lunch. One hour."

Page sniffs and sorts the table as he puts down the controls, saying, "Yeah. Sure thing."

Kevin's car is surrounded by the LA Crew. Page's cab driver says, "You'll need a new paint job to wipe the grease off that baby now."

Page hands him the money without commenting. The driver asks if he'll be okay. He still has no comment as he tries to figure out how he is going to drive off in the convertible without any harm to his or the baby's bodies.

The leader seems to be the one whose name, Esai, is said most often. He says the name from five yards away. All five figures turn their heads; one body turns around. Five minutes alone with Esai and he is allowed to drive off to pick up his pal for lunch.

Inside the walls of HQ Kansas City, men and women cheer and whistle at the high hair, the heavy paint, the height of her hem, and the toeless high-fucking-heels she has on. She greets it all with a curtsy and a beautiful full smile, then sits down and back in the swivel seat and mounts those heels on the boardroom table, her legs exposed all the way to the tops of her thighs.

Hanibal is quiet as LB GEE introduces him to his clients. He is an interpreter today. All three of the businessmen look as if they can speak English. All three of them are quiet. One smiles, one stares, and the other one looks as if he's bored.

"This is Mr Hanning," says LB Gee. "He will bridge language barriers and also second-guess my strategy."

The one who looks bored says, "Wow."

The one who smiles says, "Yeah?"

The one who stares says, "Mmm ..."

Hanibal says, "Thought you boys don't do English."

"They're manufacturers, industrialists, capitalists, humanitarians, and environmentalists -- all in one," LB Gee tells him.

"Sounds like a very scary animal, if you ask me."

The one who stares rises to his feet and leaves without saying a word. The one who smiles does just that. The one who looks bored, Jon Le Mac, leans forward to show interest and says, "Rockefeller."

LB Gee notices that the one who left their table is now being seated on the opposite side of the restaurant at a table for one.

"They train you boys in etiquette?" Hanibal asks.

"He's spoiled," Jon Le Mac answers, "but let's keep that one to ourselves, y'know?"

"Do you require his approval?" LB Gee wants to know.

"Can't read or write," answers Jon Le Mac. "I do the paperwork."

This brings laughter to the table, which is now alive as they touch each other's glasses while Le Mac orders another round, saying, "This one's on us. Make it triple."

Lunch is good and Kevin is on his way back to the car lot as Page looks about the place in earnest. He approves of Kevin's porn collection, his music selection, and his weed, which he now blows out the window. Then he feels warm, as he finds himself in front of the screen again. He clicks on the icon for GEE-LEEZ.

LB Gee points up at the screen as Hanibal says goodbye to the two who had come back to the apartment for an understanding of how their investment was going to be capitalized.

PAGE1: PAGE1 MUST FIND THE WILDMASTER! WILDMASTER MAY BE A DOORMAN IN THE DOORWAY OF A SLEAZY NIGHTCLUB IN SOHO.

Hanibal immediately receives a call. He tends to it quickly as he motions with his free hand for LB to take the challenge. The call comes over the latex-like nodes he applies to the temples of his player, which are soft till they are sucked by the pores on LB's skin. He blinks as Hanibal brings up the program on the laptop. GEE LEEZ replies quickly, tapping out, "GEE LEEZ: IF U SAY SO ..."

Page does his shoulder exercises. Then he checks himself out by switching off the TV. He laughs at his reflection, dark and alone, and says out loud to the fucking turned-off TV, "You crazy fuck!" Now he sniffs and takes another puff of Kevin's weed, the look that he makes from his poor throat being burnt, he does not like. He switches the TV back on and replies to his opponent, "PAGE1: PAGE1 SMOKES EVERYTHING!"

The pavement is crunchy with all manner of shit down there beneath Page's boots. PAGE1 steps into a dark alleyway. An eagle swoops from a tower. The bird collects the citizens that cling to its wings and hug the tower, which topples. On the street in background people flee the place where the metal frame will land in one-two-three, and Now! Smashing sparks disperse chaotically, some finding PAGE1's hair. He is unaware of this as a skinhead has risen from the heap of bodies and is now gaining on the courier from Hell, heading for a place this side of the screen.

A rap star to his left jumps out at him. PAGE1 leans his torso to the right and extends his left leg. His heel catches the rap star in mid air. PAGE1 tenses the leg. The rapper is suspended for a moment in mid-air as PAGE1's heel and toe goes front to back on the star's head. He falls quickly to the ground, the skinhead right



behind him. PAGE1 grabs the prickly head. Leaning forward, the body comes to lay flat on the ground in front of PAGE1. The kneeling courier uses his right fist to break both sides of the skinhead's pelvis.

Hanibal watches his player closely. The program on his screen shows only murmurs as he reaches for the remote and lifts the volume 10-fold. This brings a sideways glance from the player, who is about to come out of the shadows.

A figure the size of Goldberg and then some lumbers out from a bar. The car parked in the middle of the alleyway's windows are steamy. A pair of breasts can be seen against the side window in the back. A car explodes overhead as an eagle collides with a real airplane. Then the man-mountain smashes a window, reaches into the car, grabs the male occupant, and chucks him on the ground.

GEE LEEZ taps the monster on the back. It dismisses the martial artist with an aimless swipe. GEE LEEZ has the arm and is about to break it when PAGE1 kicks him in the rib cage from behind. The Chinese rep feels it and turns. Then the monster receives an elbow to the jaw from GEE LEEZ, who is now walking towards PAGE1. As PAGE1 readies himself, the monster collapses. PAGE1 says something, and GEE LEEZ ducks down as the second bullet finds the chest of PAGE1. A woman in fishnet stockings, stilettos, a smile, and a smoking gun is now standing over the male and the monster. GEE LEEZ walks over and kisses her as he takes the gun from her hand.

Hanibal stands above LB Gee as he removes the attachments from his head.

Page is now alone on the couch. He clicks on the GEE-LEEZ link and a small screen appears.

PAGE1: K-MUZO CHLNG GEE-LEEZ TONITE.

GEE-LEEZ: I HATE GUNS!

PAGE1: BATTLE IN NEW WIPE LVL

GEE-LEEZ: WOT NU LVL

PAGE1: SNIPE "O" FU ... U R HUNTED BY K IN OPERA IN WESTEND ...

Hanibal selects the nurse from the various screens lined up. The sexy nurse with her South African accent has his attention, but still the question comes, "Another woman?" The billionaire is about to reach out to her, but she stabs him fast in his left eye. The syringe sinks seriously into and out of the back of his head. Its needle pokes and squirts its juice. Her short uniform hides nothing as she cradles his fall so his head does not bounce upon the slippery ground. Hanibal keeps flicking through the levels till he reaches a young actor in Hollywood doing his monologue.

Metofeaz watches her and puts his hand up. Lazoo says, "Mmm ..." Le Mac shrugs his shoulders. Ms San Fe applies her lipstick. Her car is in the distance, the car lot's even further away. Kevin walks up the steps to the office, his head in the newspaper. Ms San Fe's lips are in the mirror; the bottom one comes over the top one and then they reverse this action. Metofeaz steps, then begins to run. Ms San Fe rolls the canister and puts it away in her Prada bag; she is leaving the car. Metofeaz is running. Kevin is still as he reads the article in the entranceway to the office, Metofeaz in full steam. Ms San Fe waits for the traffic so she can cross the road. The waitress with gum in her mouth comes to the sidewalk; she turns her head right to see the scribe running towards her. In front of her is a tart, all made up. Across the road is Kevin, the guy she has a mad crush on.

The waitress looks up at the sun; as she does she squints. Metofeaz is moments away. The three birds sweep in formation, then loop perfectly. Ms San Fe looks left. The car has passed. Kevin straightens the newspaper;

the sound of the paper and then the writer arrives. The Dixie Chicks sing, "Hello, Mr. Heartache / I've been expecting you" over the car lot's speakers.

Kevin shields his eyes and looks up at the sun. Three birds dart up and away. Ms San Fe crosses the road. The waitress rolls her eyes and turns to walk inside. Metofeaz catches her hand and she stops, watching him who watches this.

The steel guitar fills the lot. Kevin knows the sound. The Dixie Chicks' melody, harmony, honesty, and sun is just like a Sunday morning. Some bird in the sky must be real happy today, for it gave him this one. He sees her when the fiddle makes the heart real warm. "Wow," said Ms San Fe. The walk is upright, but not tight. The bass line walks through her stride. Her calf muscles are tight and firm, but still supple and smooth. Her red nails shine as her right arm pulls the strap of her Prada bag up onto her shoulder. The rest of the strip is lucky to be on the line running down the front of her.

Three birds in the sky fly down and loop away. Santana steps with the piano, the left and right-hand counter going, "Never say if you're here to stay." The vibrato hits every nuance of a country mile, minute, and interlude. Ms San Fe passes by Kevin, who is now beside her and himself and by the code by which he will abide, which is "First-come-first-served," Kevin, caught up in the mood, can't help but skip, just once. Still, he is compliant as he catches his balance and his stride and keeps in time with the way those heels step and in synch with the solo middle eight. The cars, their hoods shiny, gleam and reflect a figurine come to life. He has first notice of her curves. He looks from the cleavage to her blue eyes looking up at him. As the lot never ends, he smiles back. Ms San Fe seems comfortable with the aid of the three female singers. She'd rather this band than speak meekly. The outro comes and the yardage ends as Kevin jumps in front of her, bringing this scene to a conclusion, along with the affairs of a woman's heart, and bringing the cycles of her mind into play.

Kevin smiles from ear to ear as he tries to guess.

"You won't be able to ..." says Ms San Fe.

"... a convertible?" he interrupts.

Ms San Fe tosses her long blond hair and then smiles. Kevin throws his hands out, moves his shoulders, and smiles his smile. Ms San Fe smiles and hands him a card. He holds the card and considers whether to remind her of the park and her boss's conference trip. Ms San Fe already knows her line if her role as a secretary should come into play, so he allows her to go on. His hands slowly unwind towards what was already coiled and a ready foil.

Ms San Fe says, "K-MUZO, I am Ms San Fe from Company X."

"Shit," Kevin responds. "This is getting out of hand. You're my ..."

"I'm not a fan."

"Hell, that only leaves us with groupie, then, right?"

"Nope, I'm not that, either."

Metofeaz walks back to the limo. The waitress watches him as she twirls her favorite strand. She accepts his invitation to dinner, and as she drives back to the X Company offices she reminds herself of her role, reiterating and initiating proceedings.

The spaceship's engines again blast the park, but this time only the meaningless conversation is blown away.

Their effect on the foliage is in reverse. Leaves flow back into the branches, and the grass is greener than before it had been burned to a cinder.

Page is in thought. A closing car door and two voices from outside awaken him from the park, which is not so dark anymore. WIPE is as muted but brilliant on screen as ever as the door opens and Kevin shows Ms San Fe into his home after a hard day's work at the lot. He looks up and over the couch and then back down at himself and his old boots. She sees the living room, the TV, and the controls and feels the job coming on. Page gets up from his seat. He welcomes Kevin home and says hi to their guest on his way to the bathroom. Kevin apologizes for his behavior and furnishes the place with more Dixie Chicks, a drink of wine for Ms San Fe, and two beers that he takes down the hallway.

The big hair is flat and pulled back, the mini is now jeans, and the little blouse a company t-shirt. The music is mellow but bright. Ms San Fe is relieved that the only feelings to come over her are in keeping with his aloofness, almost rudeness. She matches the pictures on the wall immediately to her research and continues to scour the place clean with her keen eye.

Inside the bathroom, which has its own acoustics and dynamics, Page hears a human for the first time in hours as Kevin tells him, "I'm a marquee player for X Company now." Page holds the beer up to congratulate him on a job well done. Kevin taps the neck his bottle against the one held towards him, then puts it down on the vanity unit. Page can see Ms San Fe through the gap through which the music slips into the cooler, tiled place where they discuss stuff. Page pushes the door into the wall.

"She says I look like Brad Pitt," Kevin admits modestly. With that he throws his hands up in the air and kicks the space between himself and Page.

Page takes a swig, keeps a straight face, and swallows the alcohol all at the same freaking time. Then he says, "You know that when Brad throws his arms in the air or kicks the dirt, he's pissed off. And not excited."

There is silence as Page looks at Kevin, and Kevin seriously thinks about his new friend's interpretation of his joy at becoming a professional gamer. Page feels that the quiet is obviously too dense and that his line has not made its intended impact, so he adds this to it, one-two-three, and, concentrating on being twice as aloof as before, says, "You've seen the Mexican, ah?"

Kevin is bemused by his friend's ability to spoil a moment and, towering over the shorter man, comes back with his own, "Pissed off?"

Page knows he has lost the meaning of the scene, so he adlibs at half the volume, in a different tone, and in a hurried manner, "Yeah, pissed. I caught it in a chat room. They say it down under and in other parts of the British Empire." Page goes on to pretend that the previous conversation did not take place. He opens the door slightly and can hear the music again, but he cannot see her.

Kevin, after remembering the point that stands out the most to him, says, "Come to think of it, John, you're absolutely fucking right on that count. Fucking-A, you're right!"

Looking for a glimpse of Ms San Fe, Page asks, "Right about what?"

Kevin picks his beer back up, looks in the mirror, and opens the cabinet door. He looks at his pills and then says, "About Brad -- he only does the body spastic when he's fucked off."

Page watches him as he looks at the bottles and grabs one. "Oh, by the way, you're to play GEE-LEEZ tonight -- new level. Oh, and also by the way, I tasted your weed. It's not bad -- quite good, really, come to think of it."

Kevin as K-MUZO laughs. "What fucking new level?"

"That's what LB Gee said when I told him, I'll explain over dinner. It will give me something to say."

Kevin, still with the bottle in his hand, is quiet as Page leaves the room.

Page can smell her the second he enters the small space. Kevin thanks someone at the back door for some parcels of steaming good food. Ms San Fe is in the way of the TV screen as he sits down.

He introduces himself, "John Page." His smile is awkward, but it's the only one he has now. He lifts from the seat as she bends slightly forward.

"Ms San Fe," she responds without a smile. It's just a name and her bright eyes. He finds no need to look below her neckline. She leaves from in front of him. Her perfume is light and sweet, which confuses him. Her strength and handshake are a mismatch, as her aura pushes forward something heavy that belies her choice of fragrance. He watches her filter through the small distance and onto where Kevin is waiting for her. She tips her wine glass forward as Kevin compliments her angle with the neck of the bottle.

She says, "So, are you going to have time to play for us and sell cars, both?"

"Of course. No problems whatsoever." Page's fingers on the controls click loudly enough for Ms San Fe to look over. Then Kevin advises them all, "Dinner will be ready in the near future."

"That's fabulous, Kevin," Page tells him, "and I'm off to the dunny."

"How appropriate," Ms San Fe observes.

Kevin elucidates. "That's the bathroom."

Ms San Fe responds, "Mmm ..."

The three of them eat. Somehow, Page's perception naturally encases the scene. He lends his viewpoint, a peek through the telescope, to its syrup. It is a telescopic scan of a seed that could have lost its meaning, or not found the ground most fertile, or not found the sun shower most wet with warmth and nutrition. It speaks up when most needed.

She responds before he foreshadows the principle of matters to come. "The reality TV thing has been such a horrible thing."

"It's cheap, nasty and easy to paste," Kevin agrees.

Page says, "So much so it's spread to video games, ah?" as he nods his head.

"Actually," she tells them, "we've signed a deal. Already the developers have assigned us, well -- not an exclusive yet, but we have rights to brand levels."

Page thinks and has a sip, not slurping, and places the bottle down lightly. Kevin looks down at his food. Ms San Fe looks at the pictures on the wall. Page relaxes his shoulders and allows himself to look at her. He doesn't know where it comes from, but he wants to see behind her eyes and under her blond hair. She accepts the thought and wants a drink of her wine. Kevin sees the eyeline across his path and pulls back for the sake of the contract he is going to sign later that night.

Page needs to smile, and requires something to smile about, so he says, "That's his daughter."

Kevin calls on skills from kills, not to impress but to thin the atmosphere. His knife in its air struggles to surge so it may cut through and hopefully slice. He smiles. Ms San Fe puts herself on the side to be and takes her cue. "Is that your daughter?"

Kevin is feeling easy about the smile he is now teething and responds, "That is life, and life is that, Ms San Fe."

Page urges him on from a seat far away from the setting he has to contend with. He gulps the beer, as an unstoppable habit takes over which makes him lean back on his chair. Kevin, warming into the good bits, notices the back legs of his dining suite's chair. Page moves back in on all fours, giving his friend a clear mind to paint this dinner light. His eyes come away from the profile of Kevin's magic and her eyes don't even find a need to dodge his. He looks to her like he's annoyed with her attention, in conflict with what she can sense in his scent.

"So, where's your wife and daughter?" she asks.

"They were taken from you," says Page. "Weren't they, Kevin?"

"In a matter of speaking, yes. They were departed from our home by outside influences ..."

"Influences?" Ms San Fe seeks specifics.

Page interjects, "Letter of the law sort of influences, right Kev?"

"Divorce by court of law," concedes Kevin. "Detached by the physical, but we remain attached by the umbilical cord of the universe, sometimes referred to as a love unlimited, Ms San Fe."

"Gets better every time, Kevin," Page tells him.

## PART 2

Ms San Fe helps stack the dishwasher. Page looks at the contract on the table, not as an adviser for Kevin but out of curiosity about how bullshit is enlightened in small lettering and how phrases fearful of interpretation spew their meanings back upon themselves even before they fulfill the line on which they are typed as fine print.

Together they talk of the possibilities and the highlights of Kevin's new career. Perfectly, Kevin brings up that night's battle with GEE-LEEZ, as he is again the servant fetching refreshments to lift the spirits and float on the cloud that buoys his team and himself.

She looks at the signed document and slips it into a folder marked "K-MUZO". Page notices the ring on her finger and its childlike charm, and asks her his only question for the night, "How old were you when you got that?"

Santina brushes the friendship finger and the gift upon it from someone gone but not forgotten. Kevin places a beer and a wine to the right of them. She swaps them, rightfully pushing his drink to his chest and he hovers the wine in front of her by the stem of the glass before he places it in between where her chest allows a place like a valley for it to rest.

With Kevin ready, Page no longer needs a reason to be heard, but he has promised. Ms San Fe is interested in

what may well be a ritual, skylarking, or just good, plain, old fashioned machismo.

Page studies the peelings from the label and admits, "New level. SNIPE O' FU. You hunt GEE-LEEZ in an opera in the Westend of London. They say it's hot. tuxedos, ball gowns -- that sort of stuff, y'know? They say this one lasts a long time."

After a moment of silence, Kevin asks, "That's it?"

Ms San Fe leans forward and asks, "Where can we find the trailer?"

Page ignores the heat she has brought into the room. "Oh, one more thing," he says. "Look out for ropes."

His new friend's shit was starting grate on his nerve endings, finding its way to the third layer of skin. Kevin scratches the side of his face, then stands and moves to set up the system for the battle. Page goes to the bathroom and Miss San Fe watches Kevin get ready to do his thing.

Page is back from the toilet. Kevin plays with the equalizer as Ms San Fe leans her chin on a hand, her other hand flat on the table. Page looks at it as she pulls it away towards herself and then cradles her elbow, which is supporting the rest of her. He exits via the front door for a cigarette.

Page brings Kevin a beer. A sense of relief has passed over him, as he has decided on how it is to be from here on in. Ms San Fe wants to say. She knows he doesn't talk about himself for long, so she pulls out her pad and begins to note some details about this situation. It all looks completely professional. Only Page could believe it to be otherwise. Ms San Fe tears the leaf from her pad and slips it into her diary, then looks at ease as she sees the room change.

Page's head is now in the cupboard. He finds chocolate and sweets and arranges them on a platter. He bites open one for himself, seriously diminishing the confectionary bar in one crunch. The side of his face is evidence taking shape of his heightened eagerness to please, hype, and make Kevin rise to an occasion he doubts even exists yet.

At the kitchen table, Santana can only just manage to conceal her amusement by sealing her lips tight, although they remain wet, glossy, kissable, and probably sweeter-tasting than the Jolly Rancher, grapes, and divine he kindly puts into K-MUZO's open mouth. Then he wipes his fingers on himself, and for extra care he shakes them there in the air, one-two, one-two, one-two-three. He would dearly love to feed her one, too, but by the time he reaches her he only has the plate for her to choose from. She takes one and he forgets that he's hard and uncompromising and a manipulative son of a so-and-so as he stands admiring the way she carefully unwraps it, then slips the lucky candy into her mouth.

She looks up and Kevin reminds his house guest, "Has anybody ever told you, John, that it's rude to stare?"

Page believes that Ms San Fe is okay with the situation, as he didn't mean any harm, and he says, "Sorry." He has his hand held out and she hands him the wrapper. Even that is now folded. He is a bit lost and puts the wrapper in his pocket, something that nearly makes Ms San Fe laugh. He directs an irritated, "What?" in her direction.

"Nothing."

The logo entertains as servers world-wide negotiate, using protocols to connect to HYPERLINK "http://www.wipeworldwide.com/"http://www.wipeworldwide.com and then to a montage of Star Wars, Spielberg, Lord of the Rings, and Harry Potter. WIPE has now loaded as Coke fizzes in London, New York, LA, Paris, Rome, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Delhi, Berlin, Johannesburg, Lagos, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Suva,

Sydney, Cairo, Baghdad, and Moscow. The event, a Lazoo of an idea, encapsulates the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Microsoft, Sony, Nike, and the Dow Jones have links. CNN and FOX place captions on the bottom of their screens also.

WIPE NU LVL -- Hanibal clicks off on his portable device as LB Gee allows him to monitor his brain power in the upcoming battle with K-MUZO.

Times Square comes close to a standstill, with only those joining the gathering moving. A flash of Jet Li on the screen makes them scream his comment. Jet Li comments on GEE-LEEZ, saying, "Bruce and Brandon would be proud to be a part."

Jackie Chan says, "I got a call for the next one, ha, ha."

Will Smith says, "I got the call too. It was one of those conference calls. Jackie was the one doing the heavy breathing, I just said yes and shut my mouth."

Sylvester Stallone adds, "The K-1 million looks an awful lot like Rambo's weapon."

"Hell," Donald Trump concludes, "these boys are egomaniacs, but hey, they'd be the pick of the apprentices, most definitely."

Inside the small Kansas City house things are warm as Page gives his fighter a neck rub. Ms San Fe watches and believes that this is all completely normal. The hype for WIPE on half the screen makes her naturally shiver.

The opera is quiet even when the large lady sings and a big, bearded man wings his tenacious and tremendous voice upon the trills of her eternal note. K-MUZO wheels his cello case through the foyer, the spectacles a fitting addition of his own. Page tentatively nods approval of this. He is aware that Ms San Fe is there as he drops his shoulders.

Two women appear from the back of GEE-LEEZ's long coat. Their skin is of paint, their veins glass wire. The blood in their veins channels colored lights. Guests applaud the genius conductor. In the balcony all three of them tap, too. Now a colored man built like a rock replaces the Chinese maestro on the podium. He taps the lectern with his baton and the orchestra looks lively. They play abruptly short notes with their talented hands, their mouths trained by the messages of their gifted brains.

GEE-LEEZ points to the room at the end of corridor and they immediately race their wake-colored light and haze, leading to the door. They morph right through.

GEE-LEEZ walks as he waits for the scouts to return. A spray of air and a gust of fragrant dust, and the scouts are walking with him, one either side. He listens to them and then they produce their weapons. Each has a shiny, silver pistol pointed at the side of his head as they walk.

Hanibal looks up at the screen. The women lounging in the room change legs and check their nails.

Page says, "It's up to you, bro."

"In the titties or the head?" Kevin asks.

Ms San Fe checks her nails.

Page looks around at Ms San Fe and asks in sign language if she would like some wine. She says she's fine

with a shake of her head.

The door is blown. A dummy bullet from the K-1Million has blown the carved wood to smithereens. The two scouts are facing the walls and run vertically till they meet upside-down in the middle of the ceiling, at which point they become one. K-MUZO's trigger finger is thick and heavy as it impresses itself to blow away the woman running at him along the ceiling, the purple-blue particles from her body fly and stick to the walls and ceiling, then they melt and teardrops drip down on him. There is no sign of GEE-LEEZ.

Ms San Fe uses her notepad as Kevin selects the silver bullets from the menu in the top right-hand corner of the screen. A figure is backstage. He makes his selection as Page brings him another beer and unwraps another candy bar. Kevin has his mouth open as he puts it into his own trap. Now he unwraps one for the player and points to the controls as he loops it in the air. K-MUZO is backstage as Kevin catches the candy in his mouth.

Backstage, K-MUZO's footsteps sound on the wooden floors. In front, the opera on the other side of the thick velvet curtains is thrilling. As Ms Zofen wipes a tear with the cloth JPS hands her, K-MUZO is aware of the curtain being pulled back. The people in the audience gasp as their culture fix is rudely interrupted by a gunman, who stands backstage. The soprano and the tenor flee. The conductor pulls the sword D-MILLENIUM-SHREDDER, or k-DMS, from the back of his tuxedo. Five violinists stand; their bows work in tandem with their bullets on either side of K-MUZO as he brings the K-1Million up to his face. One by one he picks the eyes of the musicians and pops a cap to silence each one of them.

GEE-LEEZ swings down on a rope from a balcony. K-MANTONIO, with the k-DMS in hand, is on his way. K-MUZO now has him in his sights as GEE-LEEZ grabs the Kid by scruff of his tux and sails onto the roof. Mayhem rules as the audience realize their evening at the opera has ended up over the top and they panic. Up in the balconies Lazoo, Metofeaz, and Le Mac stand to their feet and make their way quietly to the nearest exit. One of them has his hand in a loop, which says "Perfect!" to the gunman.

Hanibal is now back down. Around these parts, when he feels a breath in his heart he takes one. The suction cups on LB's temples move as the wave on his monitor is a calm sea of collection and soothing rhythms, never peaking or dipping to the floor of a trough. He sees the back of his player's head, as he is looking, seeing, feeling, and probing. Then, with a prod, the sod is gifted with the way he coordinates his hands, his eyes, and the snotty nose he sniffs as he comes into middle age. The offer is too good to be true. The crew has been scouring planet earth for talent, for the elite for the new world, a paradigm. He remembers the term "20PP", then he thinks of the animals he once thought to be beasts: manufacturers, industrialists, capitalists, humanitarians, and environmentalists. If he took away the "H" word they would be.

LMLA, the illiterate, is allowed to say this line, since the other two have other means of expressing it, "Or -- Me -- Idea -- Community -- Environment ..."

There is something about the way he sits. Ms San Fe knows this as the warmth deep inside cools. He stands up. Kevin's eyes are to the side and back to the screen. Page walks to the table where Ms San Fe is leaning forward.

GEE-LEEZ, on screen, is arriving on the floor of the stage by rope as Page says, "It was nice to meet you."

Ms San Fe is a bit confused at his random, out of place, but in time, comment. K-MUZO is on a platform above GEE-LEEZ. His scope has the master ready and ripe to pop in the top of his melon. Page steps, left foot first, past the couch. Kevin sees the wall and dismisses it as an attention-seeking device. Ms San Fe begins to giggle and believes all that she has read about boys. Kevin can just see his head behind his huge TV, and now, his bony hand holding the front of it, he still gets his shot off. The screen now only has blank, bland, black-and-white fuzz from the 50s, 60s, and some of the 70s.



The sounds in that room are of wires being ripped, footsteps, someone saying, "what the ...?", and a door slamming, BANG!

Hanibal pulls the cups from his player's head. LB Gee lays still on the recliner and looks to the ceiling. A model is next to him now, his hand rubs her legs till she bends her knees and stops him from getting anywhere. Kevin is on his feet and jumps to another position, raising his hands in the air as Ms San Fe speed-dials her cellphone. The driver of the taxicab on the corner is talking to someone on his radio.

Page opens the door and has his destination ready. He lights a cancer stick and says, "The airport of Aeroplanes, driver."

The driver, thinking as he switches on a money-making meter, confirms, "Airport?"

"Yeah, whatever ..."

Ms San Fe clicks goodbye on her phone and now focuses on the damage. She is accustomed to the emergency, she is calm and cool. "Do you have another set?"

Kevin nods as he tastes the beer, then swallows. He waits for a second, then opens his arms to her, asking, "You okay?"

She wonders why he has open arms and then realizes they were for her comfort. "Oh, yes, " she tells him. "I'm fine. It's you we should be worried about. Where's the spare wires?"

Kevin drops his arms and the beer. Not bothered about the mess, he walks to the bathroom.

Page pays the cab and he closes the door. He smiles and taps on the roof. A guitar on the runway comes into him. He can see his favorite clown. His mike is on. Robbie Williams sings, "There's no earthly way of knowing what was in your heart when it stopped going / The whole world shook / The storm was blowing through you ..."

Kevin opens the medicine cabinet. The space is empty.

Robbie Williams sings about Elvis and me: "Everyone around you was corrupted ..."

The sound of shit being thrown comes from the bathroom. Ms San Fe walks over to see what is happening.

Page looks up into the night and sees that Richard Branson has sent one of his airplanes over for sound effects. WOW! The belly of the bird covers the sky as the engines accompany the drum roll.

The best clown says, "I seen your daughter -- boy she looks a lot like you."

A woman in garb pushes a cart with luggage through the automatic sliding doors. Behind her is a husband with their children. Page snorts a tear for his only fear as he sniffs back the past.

The two descriptive, creative, and sensitizing bottles of the equilibrium that he desires and now craves are gone! The door is ajar; he kicks it shut. Ms San Fe is left standing in the hallway. She is caught somewhere in between a smile and a "pretty-pleeease" for Kevin to calm down. The real criminals are easier to contend with than the slippery, unpinnable players she is now in the midst of, and therefore involved with. Page is gone. She has digested his only half-spoken statement. Her marquee player is out of sorts, panicky, and beginning to become a genuine turn-off. She feels like saying, "Get a fucking grip, guy!" but she refrains.

The ThinkPad is there. The guy on the other side of it looks familiar. Maybe they'd met in an elevator or somewhere sleazy before. Who knows? He stares straight ahead. He has been like this for a while now. He gets up and walks to the coffee bar, where he orders coffee, looks over, and then turns his back. Another guy now sits down in his seat. This one smiles at him, then gets up and joins the other one at the coffee bar. The last one sits down. He looks at his old boots and nods.

A women's volleyball team, unusual for this time of the night and place, passes in front of him in their game uniforms. The guy next to him looks at their little shorts. The staring one's gaze is fixed on where Page looks. The smiling one swaps a smile with the captain of the sports team. Page still has his eye on the machine. The one next to him and the two at the coffee bar look like family.

His hand is now on the ThinkPad handle. The last of them gets up as the engines of the spaceship blast again. The airport lounge lighting goes red, orange, green, orange, green-red, and then green-green-green. The three of them are gone when white and normal light is restored. Page takes the machine.

Kevin's stride is wide and is, on the surface, calm. His presence now causes Ms San Fe to rub her right leg, feeling the butt of the cosmetic revolver. As he goes to the fridge for another beer she straightens her papers on the table. Pulling her hair back, she asks, "Shall we do it again?"

Kevin wants to say, "No," but she is already heading for the TV, and by the time he has jacked the beer, all he can see is her hand on the front of screen as she attaches the spare leads.

LB Gee has been in this state since the scene was cut. Hanibal can only now get through on the cellphone. His talk is in English, but no one in the room can understand what he is saying. He finally pushes 'end' and is once again applying the suction cups to the sides of his player's head.

WIPE's theme is chugging in. The text messages are sent and then barrels of characters are released in their packets, destined for gateways and ports on every page of an atlas. The audience pokes plugs into their ears and places muffs over their heads, as Kevin is the first to know that there is an error.

On a fucking little screen that must've been programmed less than a closing lash ago, the readout says, "EDM required, LEVEL WIPED."

Hanibal, quicker than before, pulls the plug. Ms San Fe is next to her player, has already attached a keyboard, and is typing at speed.

The system's architect says to the programmers, "A writer would not write this, for it be crass. An architect could not construct this, for it be too angular and steeped in evil, but when I speak it, a chance there is that it be done."

Page starts to feel from his core a force that had swelled since she had entered into the place, a sense of responsibility and an urgency to finish with speed and take the prize. There are three voices in the conversation. He counts the one that spoke to him. His message cuts through again. The system's architect says, "Yes, the one to kill has been given charge, and the one to break a heart has been told to tell. My idea is that we work as one, find reason, and take everything."

Page lifts from the seat and is going to go. He does go on, but since there is no one else with anything to say, he lets the system carry on with, "And if ever an opportunity to read pages of life is within a reading glass, wear it. If ever a child cries, cease it with a gift of truth. If ever a woman wants, give it, and if ever the Satans appear, burn the path he walked and flame the heart he felt. Strangle it dry, cold, grey, until it is the dust that is the dirt floor of this universe."

Fuck!, Page thinks silently. He still cannot rise, as the voice that was beside him wants to start, "Who made you," the voice of reason comes again.

Lazoo comes forward now. "As the love in the hand that writes," he says, "winds the words from the mouth that is, orders and wishes are written and asked. I make it my play so I can have for us one orphan, found, one man and woman love, and world-wide is wiped of pain from blood and brain rooted, incepted, and passed in veins to children not wanting what their forbearers care to be their fears."

Page thinks to himself, This is some fucked-up shit.

Now he can stand. The ThinkPad is his as far as he is concerned. He is stepping the rotating sequence of light bulbs above his destination's doorway. The internet café welcomes him as he frees his shoulders and holds the machine close.

### PART 3

Lazoo thinks of Genesis. Metofeaz thinks of Rozelle. Le Mac thinks of Luoshlishca. John loves Lotte.

The Rogue Traders' guitar player's fingers pluck sounds as their lead singer cries, "I'm falling, falling ..."

Ms San Fe turns out the light. On the way to her room she collects the spare pillow. The cat outside in the hallway looks up at her door. Ms San Fe shuts her eyes.

Across continents, above the clouds, and way beyond time zones we fly, and down there -- yes, right there -- we see her eyes can sparkle, her face is clear, her hair is brown, and her heart has never not been broken. We have limited powers, but the ones we own we use for good, right?

Polina Rada stands in deep browns freckled in lights from the massive screen. Her friends dance around her in a ring. Her head spins as the square is colored red by a revolution that has passed over. The speakers are high and bass-full for the Moscovites to taste sugar from the West as pure as it is sweet. The pretty Australian lead singer makes her head swing. Her hair sweeps the Northern Hemisphere as Polina's smile is once again contagious for her friends. Now changing direction, the planet spins on an axis, tilting like the angle her head leans. The singer sings, "I'm falling in love again."

Polina now begins to skip. Two of her friends lift the chain and it becomes an archway. She goes through families wrapped warm, their carols in their hearts, then past young couples and a female tourist who reaches out and pats her head, and who will remember this. As Polina continues through the center of Red Square, the procession begins. Her best friend looks to her and she looks to her next best friend. The love never ends as they turn sideways and join hands again. Baby is gone, but not forgotten; Alexvale writes each week. And one day they will come -- for her birthday or maybe for their Christmas.

Page hears the tails of the tune from the car passing. Ms San Fe's eyelids are at peace with themselves. Page flicks a cigarette butt a long way. The car passes again. The tune is also coming from the taxi that pulls up to where his old boot is tapping.

Polina, happy from her evening out with her friends, is even more content, if at all possible, when her eyes close their lids to rest her pure soul. In the morning she welcomes some sun in the window she's opening. She responds to the name PLANTOM-ZERO, a name she had never heard before in her life. Three handsome strangers stand down beneath the naked tree. The one holding a bunch of picked flowers sends it flying up to her. He wants to say some words he would have written if he could. The one with a smile like Vale's has a paper airplane, which he darts up and into her window. She catches it with the hand not holding her flowers.

The fatherly one, Jon Le Mac, then says that name again, "PLANTOM-ZERO, what more in the wall of time that has forgotten your ancestry do you desire that may delight all days until time wastes away in memory?" The one who threw her the flowers then claps lightly at the fluency of their treatment.

Polina closes the window and unfolds the paper plane to see what she will become.

Alexvale can hear something now that he could not have seen, even if it were there before he got into the Silver Range Rover. "Hey," he says. "I was here first!" He looks at the other two in the back. They both smile.

Jon Le Mac says, "Actually, HEX-V'L, it's ours, so that makes it mine."

The one with the hazel eyes opens them really wide to make them stay awake in the wake of what he's been hearing and feeling since the beginning of time. The one with the stellar smile looks for the boy's pulse around his neck and the headrest. Jon Le Mac continues, "An explanation for your involvement and I let you drive around the block once."

Vale, or HEX-V'L, beginning to lose patience, snaps, "You didn't need to even visit. I heard you!"

The cowboy boot is already out of the vehicle as the boy begins to cry. The speaker, new to sentences and two way conversations, has said the wrong thing. Already stepping, the players are running now.

The hostel room has four beds. Actually, it has eight of them. The bunks are all housed. The sheets are pulled up tight over and above their heads. The moans from beneath him were real good, better than soundtracks on the spare-time movies. The boss of LMLA to a new group of TRUFUNKSOLDIERS thought of all the bad guys in the books and films and came to the conclusion that "Satan and his hell is still by far the most convincing. The guy has a whole floor to himself. The water supply is not too plentiful; the air con unit is still out of order and the headcount per square mile is far too high, but, in a word, Satan is still the baddest."

The boy talk is strained through a mind washed in iodine and pain, then painted with brilliant thoughts which have mentioned that guy.

His leg hangs over the side. A hand grabs it. His normal demeanor would be to heel the thing that touches him for no reason, but he calls out, "Hey!"

The reply, "Come down here," sounds in language hot and husky. He lies down on himself and looks over the edge. He wasn't wishing for it. Even the moaning and groaning he had heard in between Satan and Ms San Fe couldn't tease him down there into a fantastic fantasy, once upon a time.

All the lonely boys in the world to themselves, under the mysterious veneer, say, "Maybe this is what Superman was like. Thank heavens Superman wasn't a horny guy -- all the lovely ladies would be up, up and away for ever."

Now a woman moans, and then another woman groans; they are under him. Maybe Satan was the one with the deep tones; maybe she was a good angel. By the way, she is now naked; he could see that she isn't bad at all.

Page lets go a good one for old times' sake: "Tomorrow I'll come down there and we can sort out your stuff, ah?"

He knew what he was saying, but he doesn't yet get the meaning. He turns over onto his back and starts to count down when he will be able to forgive himself for his wrong but right decision.

**CHAPTER 6****PART 1**

Ms San Fe closes the session immediately when she sees the names on another headline, this one in LA. The TV shows a close-up of the Ray Bans, then pulls back to show Alfario Steriazz, a reincarnation of all four, leaving the Compound, a New York club made famous by John Lazoo, the book. The footage of all three Pace Men disappears from the screen, now a story on WIPE. "Hanibal Ammer, a former handyman, seems to be the mastermind behind the worldwide online game."

Ms San Fe stares at the frame, takes a screen shot of it, and sends it to the server. Back within a minute, the printout is minimal.

The phone rings. The answering machine says, "Hi. Please leave a message at your convenience."

Someone holding the receiver also holds their breath. She wants that someone to speak, and he does, "Ah, this is John Page."

She pulls her hair back and picks up the receiver. She has done well to conceal her shock. Hanibal is furious, but only under the hood. As he waits in the line at the airport he calls in favors to track down some guy who he can't remember what he looks like, just the way he makes him feel. Hanibal is beginning to appear from beneath the thinning veneer, wouldn't we agree?

Page sits up straight as one of his bunkmates sits down next to him. He reminds himself that she has only agreed to see him for the information that he may have. Ms San Fe did not need the distraction. Page now sits up straight and forward as the anchorman retracts and apologizes for the story on Hanibal Ammer and repeats, "Hanibal Ammer deeply regrets any misconception that he may have eluded in presenting his Player GEE-LEEZ." Page sits back. The woman has given up already and has left for the dormitory room.

Hanibal and LB walk side by side on the granite floors. The automatic sliding doors shut behind them, but not soon enough to stop. Horns, sirens, and buzzers go off. The staff are happy to have Mr H. Ammer and GEE-LEEZ at the Kansas City Hilton for the remaining 24 hours. Hanibal changes the booking. Down at the other end of the counter, away from him, his player is making his own reservation. LB is polite and clear as he enunciates that as an adult he would like a room of his own, saying, "Yes, a room on the corner -- all windows, if you know what I mean."

The thought of another player running free and unaccounted for fucks with Hanibal's head. He calls out, "Game Boy!" His elbow's point dents the marble top of the counter as he turns to where LB is and continues and tells him, "We're on the 45th floor -- in the middle. No fear of bombs, ya hear! This is the United States of America."

The staff stand in a huddle. That bunch combine in less than a week what is at stake every second wasted. They go quiet. Their bodies suddenly step back from the counter and their fingers find each other behind their backs. The supervisor makes herself known through the door beneath clocks showing the time in New York, London, Paris, Rome and Moscow.

"Just like I said to my comrade," Hanibal says. "Forty-fifth, in the middle."

Hanibal, LB Gee, their technicians, the team who lug around their equipment, and their entourage check into 12 rooms on the 45th floor. Hanibal starts to give orders and then such details as the address of the karaoke bar, the profile of John Page, that Kevin Zealand will be easy to spot, and that Ms San Fe is vicious if she is cornered.

Page is already inside. Hanibal and LB are wasting their time in the parking lot. Santana and Kevin pull up in her car. He doesn't have to think any more, as his whole being has tuned and his person is a vapor that floats through the scene. Hanibal thought he smelled something, but it's just boots on the way into the karaoke bar. He grabs a tequila, downs it, and lays it on the bar so it can be refilled for him to lay it back again, which is what happens. The slam on the bar wakes Ms San Fe, as she is named, but she doesn't look. Page is waiting at the table, Kevin in bathroom. She takes the drinks, mounts them on the tray, and walks away from him in jeans and denim shirt.

The wagon wheels against the wall have been leaning there for a long time. The waitress come so close and whispers, "Are you here on your own?"

The guy nods and finds a smoking table at the back.

"Hello Mr Heartache!" The shrill voice fills the bar. Up there on the stage, for her work, Ms San Fe bellows out a tune. Page scoffs off the feelgood nature of the environment. Now the solo, Ms San Fe spares none as she dips her hips to the side. She faces the crowd. Kevin is in his wedding costume, unbuttoned to the top of his abdominal muscles. Page takes a beer from the tray. Kevin smiles and shakes his head at the audacity, then takes the beer from him and drags him to the floor. This makes Ms San Fe higher than the level of the note she sings. She has to wave goodbye as she loses it, then grabs the next, better, "Hello Mr Heartache, I've been expecting you." Kevin decides to rush this waltz move -- up down, up down -- and he throws Page. Page twirls like a doll. Kevin, holding his hand, seems tighter. Their arms are at full-stretched length, then the whole thing coils Page into K-MUZO. When he is in his arms, Kevin, really fucked off, snarls, "I put you up, not in a stable but on my leather couch -- and you pull the connection on me. What's that all about?"

His boot taps a different rhythm in the back corner of the bar as she comes down the steps of the stage. Faster and more rapidly, it rises in him till it reaches his throat. From a distance Page is fine, but Kevin will corrupt and have ill intentions if given reason, and he has already been baited with a bountiful display of chance.

"You're creating WIPE as you play," Page says.

"And if I was," Kevin replies, "is that my fault?"

"No, not at all."

"So why the wire-pulling, then?"

Both of Kevin's hands are ready to take a pad and pen from the figure in the corner of his eye so he can sign another autograph. Page watches this and smiles. Ms San Fe studies them in between their shoulders. Her trained eye notices another figure in the corner as she takes her drink and wets her lips without taking in a single drop. Page notices that the level of her drink still touches the bottom of the lipstick mark on the rim of the cheap wine glass.

The music changes and rhythm & blues becomes its basis. Kevin stands to the applause. The announcer introduces K-MUZO, "The fun-loving criminal." Kevin sees the stage stairs. The boots walk past the table. Page looks around but doesn't yet click. Ms San Fe looks up at Kevin, who follows someone in the shadows to the bathroom. The music still chugs, the horns filling and smoothing the gaps of space, the vocal going, "Barry White, Barry White ..." through the closing door. In front of the mirror someone is checking his features. Kevin stretches his face and massages his chin. He pushes his jaw towards the someone and then away. Still, his song introduces itself out there, where his fan-base waits.

Polina and her friends all hold their fingers to the middle of their lips. The screen in the square says "WIPE NEW LEVEL". The sweet groove that the Russian states want captivates their feet, which are stuck to the

concrete slab on which they stand. The bass line doubles, making the girls move their long skirts in the same way -- "Barry White, Barry White ..."

Alexvale stands with his feet on the ground and his brother on his way down to the Underground. Trafalgar square is jammed. The Coca-Cola sign seems happy with the way its red syrup spills onto the WIPE emblem. The music is here, too. Alexvale points as his brother becomes still.

K-MUZO opens one more button of the wedding shirt, the top button of the vest stopping the exhibition of more skin. The someone is gone, reminding him of a crowd waiting. The music comes louder through wide-open door. He notices that the arm of the closing mechanism in the corner is stuck. The door to the bar opens. Out there Santina sees someone exit, then takes her drink and fulfils one mouthful, which she swirls. Her insides become warm from the matured grapes. Page smiles at her. The intro breaks down the snare cuts as K-MUZO stands under the spotlight in a three-piece 70s suit with the wedding shirt unbuttoned to his waist. Kevin slides his right leg towards the stage, drags his left foot to the same spot, and claps, turns, and does the same again, beginning with his left leg. Two waitresses rush to him with a headset. Kevin lowers his head, the place darkens, and the music stops. The two waitresses put the headset over his head. WIPE comes up on a big screen. The lighting brings up a montage of K-MUZO. The spotlight stays on Kevin. The music kicks, Kevin throws his hands in the air and steps all the way up to and up onto the stage. "New LVL: SONG n SOHO".

Page takes a drink. Ms San Fe's body is aligned.

Hanibal takes the portable from LB and says, "Fucking hell!"

The three men in the same formation reminds him of the visitors in Beijing. The tap on the roof of the car now makes him check them out in the rearview mirror as they walk into the trees somewhere at the edge of the parking lot. Hanibal stands on the edge of the highway. A truck honks its horns. He can hear something taking place back in front of his car.

Ms San Fe is aware of the surveillance from the car. Page is somewhat shorter than Kevin, but somehow broader in every sense. Kevin takes off his jacket as Page scratches his neck at the state of his friend. Kevin swaps the jacket with the pad and pen, the middle-aged man happy he is all of sudden part of this play.

Kevin, slurring his words ever so slightly, half acknowledges the fan as he signs the autograph, "See PAGE1."

Page knows that Ms San Fe has remained as sober as a judge, viewing every line thrown under and over influence of alcohol and the simplicity its toxins allow the consumer to assume.

"And by the way." Kevin asks, "What sort of name is PAGE1?"

Ms San Fe remembers the first time she saw the name on the screen as Page stands his ground and replies, "PAGE on its own was taken."

The line seems natural to him and the sound of it fits Ms San Fe's ideal of the characterization she has had for him already in the profiles that matter.

Kevin comes back with, "As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted ..."

The guy by Kevin's side places the jacket and pad on the hood of the closest car. He loosens his necktie and begins to roll up his sleeves. Ms San Fe grins at the bald spot and the beer pot. Page notices him sidle up to his hero. His hero, in return, sprays spores of beer, bourbon, and Chinese food into all four of his eyes and says, "Fuck off, loser!"

The poor guy from the suburbs rolls his sleeves back down, collects his pad, and ensures that Kevin's jacket remains on top of the hood.

"I didn't interrupt," Page explains. "You went off on a tangent."

"An unselfish tangent -- about your name."

"Still a tangent."

Hanibal orders extra cash over the phone as LB studies PAGE1. Ms San Fe confirms the vehicle's license plate number and then checks it via her cellphone.

The cab arrives. Kevin opens the back door as Ms San Fe hops into the passenger seat and asks, "Well, you coming?"

Page opens the remaining door. He knows her profile as she remembers it. As the driver wants to begin, Kevin ensures that nothing comes of the ride. He reads the "No Smoking" sign as, "No Speaking."

## PART 2

Hanibal watches as the redhead falls asleep. He tops his glass and undoes the third button of his shirt. In the days leading up to the Berlin show he watched over one of signatories who the crumble relied upon. The truck on the highway reminded him of the living quarters he shared with his former boss during that special time of his career. The knock at the door comes as no surprise. The porter's shoulders are too straight and his chest is out too far to be in such a dead-end job. He delivers a message, which he announces concisely and only once. Then he exits the room, closing the door without turning to bow his head to the guest.

Holding up his glass for more, Page stares at Ms San Fe as Kevin begins to slump in intervals. He can barely see the figure of Ms San Fe pouring bourbon. She lets go a blastered burb and freely giggles to enjoy the moment. Page joins in, his being louder and longer than hers, then she lets go her last possible blooper and he choruses with his bellow as the finale. Kevin, now wide awake, senses something in the air and staggers to the cupboard in the hallway, where he produces bed linen for the leather couch.

Kevin is standing still when his head stops him from swaying. He flings the pillow, which Page catches. Ms San Fe, in the foreground, steps to the back.

"What I was meaning to say in the parking lot before I was interrupted," Kevin says, "was ..."

"It's all about the fans?" interrupts Page.

"Anyways -- no pulling anything out here tonight, okay?"

Page flings the pillow back to him as he is already walking for the room. Ms San Fe and Page are in the same frame of mind. She has reached in his direction, for whatever reason. Page takes her hand, as his body wants to be closer to hers. She needs the pillow and takes it. Page still has her hand. She has something to say, but the night has come to an end, so she takes the pillow and holds it to her. The lighting dims.

Page finds the edge of his side of the bed. Kevin does the same on his side.

Ms San Fe lies on her back, eyes still alight and into the roof and around the room. She thinks through the night and early in the morning before they awake she is gone.



Kevin downs his breakfast. There is little or no noise in the room, only the sound of children boarding a bus out in front of the house. The phone rings. He is close it and thinks, Maybe it's Ms San Fe, but he lets it ring. Page wants to know who it is, so he answers it. The voice is unfamiliar, but close by. Page assesses it and lets the conversation flow from the other end of the line. He hears some lines in it and assumes a position of power for a fleeting moment.

"Well blow bubbles," says Hanibal's voice. "Damn, you can even blow moiré. You're in the box seat, K-MUSIC, and the train leaves from here."

Page just says, "Mmm ..." He studies where she slept. He allows the voice inside the telephone to continue by agreeing with everything it has to say.

Inside the room Kevin shakes his dirty clothes. The piece of paper falls from a shirt pocket. Kevin dips his knees, and in one swift movement sweeps his hand to take the list for himself before it hits the ground.

"Look," says Hanibal. "let me liquefy the hi-fi, Kodak. Me, I represent Company Y. You are a symbol of my opponent."

Page says, "Ah?"

Standing in a towel, hair wet, trying to consume the talk, Kevin looks like he is really going to leave the house, giving Page some space.

Hanibal continues, "KIMONO, in business terms this is a corporate merger, made possible by your persons."

Page says, "Mmm ..."

"For \$100,000 you can retire both your thumbs."

Kevin is finally leaving as the sound of the washing machine clicks in and the taps open to fill the bowl. Page knows he will have to humiliate the moron on the telephone and maybe then demoralize him, depending on the price.

Kevin is smiling, almost laughing, as he leaves the house, saying, "Later. Oh, by the way, I washed your clothes. The cycle will complete itself in about 30 minutes."

The phone call ends abruptly when Page places the handset down to stop the voice. Kevin's smile is still wide and he closes the front door on himself. He remembers the piece of paper as the washing machine continues into its cycle. The bed is stripped and his clothes are inside the machine receiving a much-needed wash.

### PART 3

Ms San Fe puts things into perspective as she hangs up the phone. Already on the move, a team of two ensures that Kevin will be covered for the day. She quickly confirms an alias for Mr Hanibal Ammer. She wants to burb. She puts her hand to her mouth and then she takes it away. Page is on his way over. Last night had gotten away from her. She strips off the clothes she still has on and turns the shower head to run.

His leather Jacket and the new jeans and t-shirt should do him -- the old boots stay. He collects the ThinkPad from the pawn shop, but he forgets its power leads and has to go back and get them.

Moments earlier there was only the idiot. Now there are three more. They exit behind the curtain as Page deals quickly with the wimpy owner guy, saying, as he has to be to keep the flies away, "Where the fuck is the

power lead, you fucking idiot?"

One by one the three come back out from behind the curtain. They find pieces to look at while the guy searches through the box of leads and power packs. The one with all the methods in the world finds the volume on one of the stereos. The one noticing the woman who has entered, shaking the sign on the door, is on the outskirts of the shop making his way to the shop front, and the honest one says, "Tell him he doesn't need the power cord."

The owner still rummages, but Page gets the drift and says, "I don't need the power cable. It's okay. I'll just be going." He checks that the strap of the bag is lodged comfortably on his shoulder in case he has to run.

The same one reiterates, "Use it."

The owner handles a pack that looks right. Page reaches over and takes it from him, his head being still in the box. The door is open. The one speaking with the woman pulls back for him and the one with the remote control powers on a TV. With WIPE's logo loading, the theme music builds as Page steps out onto the street.

Ms San Fe straightens the table as she waits for the knock at the door. Page has been reluctant to meet her at her apartment, but in the end he has come around. She opens the door. He steps in. As he does so he checks the sides of the door, naturally, without seeming too suspicious. He puts down the machine as she puts a magazine over the top of her notes and her view of WIPE. As she exits to make coffee, he moves around the place, making sounds to let her know he is not snooping. WIPE is on the screen, the channels represented by a host of smaller screens. He selects a talk show in full swing, with security guards and feedback from the audience. Their baggage fills the room. Her ears perk up as she puts her chest out in front of her with coffee and cake as she reappears from the nowhere.

His natural inclination, which fortunately he holds at bay, slowly creeps up on him from out of nowhere. He asks, "May I use the bathroom?"

She puts down the coffee and cake, which he looks at. "Yes," she tells him, "You may use the bathroom, John."

The time in between her answer and her use of his own words add to the bunch of feelings in the house at that particular moment in time. He looks back over his shoulder at her, the coffee, the cake, and the neat room, which still has enough clutter to absorb awkward silence. The shapeless pile of papers in their own space on the table makes him feel better as he pulls out a bit of his t-shirt that has managed to tuck itself in. She likes the way his feet point out as he walks slowly on the worn heels of the boots he has not taken off, which has maybe been a good idea. She sees one of his eyes through one of the long strands of his dark hair as he turns to look at the food he may have needed. He is away once again, far enough out of her reach, as he heads down the hallway to the bathroom.

Inside four close walls, he studies his face in the mirror for the expressions for the day, remembering when to breathe to believe and when to say no to lift interest in the next anxious moment. He knows that she is the key, but for once it is good for him to have ulterior motives that will benefit both him and the parties who will help him capture the meaning of WIPE.

A sudden urge to be looking at her again marks the end of the apparatus moving suddenly. His hand jerks right and then left on the doorknob, making a loud click that signals to the owner of the apartment that he has locked the door behind him in her house, with only the two of them in it. He slowly pushes the button in and opens the door. She is there in the hallway in front of him. He has to comment or he will be forced to participate in the action her body has made possible by the way she stands smiling, so he says, "The lock is a button."

He stands facing the coffee and cake, as she stands front on and pleased that they are so close. He steps and puts one hand where it would normally scratch his head for an answer and gives her an indication that he is delighted that she would think to be so forward in her approach. He does this by placing his hand in the small of her back, and, after another step, it finds the top of her hip and then goes back again, guiding her through the center of her body to where the cream is melting from the cake that is to be eaten.

As the music sounded and he had already been given, chance, opening, foresight and now opportunity for "change." She sat on her side her legs tucked under her, skills at listening and methods at thinking and the business of analyzing without interrogating and alerting his honesty. He, he leaned back and opened his arms splaying openness, even if it were contrived at first till it rung true and eventually flowed in length and tune that the melody now blessed and together his spiel and the soul were music to her even if it were, "the best crap" she ever did hear.

PAGE

Me?

MS SAN FE

Yes you, John!

The spaceship rockets GREEN. Airport lounge, colored lights and portable computers, pawn shop people, their small money and weird friends, and lesbians who want men -- Nothing made sense, but here it was a new story for him. She waits.

"Well, it was an awakening, to be honest," Page explains.

"Do you use that would often?"

"Was -- or honest?"

"Honest, John."

He feels it is his moment, even if it were for her. His thoughts of Ms San Fe have not been for the reading till now. In his own way he works hard to let her know that she is worth the work. Finishing his cake, and waiting till he had tasted it, he says, "I was actually in a park -- just lost my job ..."

He yawns as he notices one of the stories on the cover of a magazine: "LMLA: Lazoo, Metofeaz, Le Mac & Afamasaga." She has vanished into the bathroom, leaving the bottle of wine, half a glass, and the door of the bathroom open. She flushes the toilet, making him want to go next. The article is splattered with pictures the graphic artist, a David Carson wannabe, has made more graphic. The three look like triplets. The one that morphs the best talks of Howard Hughes and his own spaceship, which is the biggest aircraft that money can buy. Closing the magazine to the left, he uncovers her notepad and her WIPE.

She closes the door and he rolls over onto his back. He lies there memorizing the way she sounds in the room through that wall. The door opens again and this time her present is a pillow, which she places on the edge of the bed when he doesn't reach out to take it. The door closes again, and this time he puts his hands behind his head. A second later she opens the door again, creaking it an inch to rest somewhat ajar and somehow open enough for a cat on the tip of its paws to be able to mosey on in there -- if there were a cat, that is. He reaches down for the spare pillow.

She lies on her back also, as work nags her head, then counts the hours since he stepped into her apartment

and she let go of her role as Ms San Fe.

The bed and its mattress sinks around him, cushioning and enveloping his body. He compares this with the rocking top bunk of the hostel and the two beneath him the night before. He has awakened in the middle of a dream about her. He grabs it again as he turns onto his left side, and then, just as the peace in him rests his shoulders, arms, and weary legs, the daylight takes it from him again. He rolls onto his right side, but the darkness is gone. All that's left is the soft bed in which he lies.

Kevin is in the highlands. The veldt is thin, but the chemical assaulting his senses up there in the clouds is thick, stinking smoke. The one with a red dress on delivers on her promise of a lap dance. Hanibal's eyes are closed and his mouth is crooked. The redhead dodges the cigar in his hand and its smoke as she bends down to whisper sweet everything in his now-pierced ear, the blood dry and cracked. LB, sober as the judge's right hand, smiles courteously as the two women, one under each arm, collate faces. LB tells them, "Kiss for K-MUZO!"

"Yeah man," they respond.

Kevin sees the light on the phone before it vibrates and rings with the tones of 'Big Audio Dynamite'.

Wandering through the empty apartment, he touches the coffee plunger, its freshness a fair way off now. He nukes the remaining cup in a mug like the one that stands half-full.

**CHAPTER 7**

## Part 1

The blonde depresses the button. The first convertible pulls up. Le Mac looks at Lazoo in the driver's seat. He takes an eternity, then he presses the power button on the stereo and Metofeaz, who hasn't said a single word to either of them for nearly 48 hours, smiles. On the stereo the horny fucking horn section, who can see Ms Aguilera's legs, play, Blah, blaaah, blaah, aah aah, while the bombshell sings, "Hey, yeaah-yeahh ..."

Metofeaz sings along with, "I, me -- yeah, me-me!"

Christina sings, "Ain't no other man ..." while the fucking funky drummer goes kick-kick, kick, kick.

Metofeaz, sitting side-on, can see Kevin in the far lane, and now the LA crew pulls into the next lane. He clears his throat and screws the lid back on a water bottle. Le Mac has him close up, and then she steps delicately, sexily, and all that, together.

Kevin's shades' gradient is orange, grey, blue. The suited suit and the sunshine know his wheels do not need a canopy, cover, or roof to come down over the head on his broad shoulders. The stereo is loud. Ms Aguilera, one of the Pro Mo Sho Hos, screams in midstream. His hand goes like a wave across his face.

The traffic lights are red. The LA crew crosses the middle lane. Esai's arm lines the top of the door. Kevin knows that ring. The driver says to the leader, "He thinks the lyric is to him, Esai." Kevin smiles.

Christina sings, "Ain't no other ..."

Esai says, "He can have it."

The driver of the last Cadillac, wearing a three-piece pinstripe suit, rests his arm on the wheel. His passenger, smiling, sings along, "Ain't no other man but you."

A camera is in the hand of the brain in the middle of the back seat. Their convertible comes complete with fins. The heads turn to the right as her painted toe in a high, high fucking heel steps out. She wears the hottest pants on the planet, their insy winsy bits of fabric only just hold the treasure. The sound track comes from the surrounding topless hunks of the metal. The passersby stop passing by to watch the mini-spectacular. The crossing traffic rubbernecks.

The beauty stops in the windshield of Kevin's Pontiac. K-MUZO's smile curves up at the corners perfectly. She turns to polish the hood with the seat of her hugging bottoms, then stands, her behind dirty. On the side, Esai has an A-list smile and says, "That's a lady."

The body turns away as his arm reaches and retracts. The drum track, the snare, the kick the kick, the snare, and the vocal, "Ain't no other man as true ..." waft through the air. The driver in the third vehicle is polite, but his eyes are on the cascading lights. She gets closer to the passenger with the breakdown, "Ain't no other ..."

She sees the camera. Its holder's lips are cute as outlined; she wants them to talk. The drums thud, the guitar riffs, and she rocks her head back. He now stands on the back seat. She stands on the ground with her longest nail in her mouth, thoughtful. He brings the camera down to her mouth. She kisses the eye spot. The view of the intersection is now cherry, the lights green-green-green. She holds out her hand. The other hand, without a device, reaches down to hoist her as she comes into the carriage. Their hands clasp at the wrists in the opposite direction of their bodies, which are pulling back. The cameraman sits down. She still stands. He's looking up at her. The driver puts down his foot. The camera-hand relaxes over the side of the Caddie,

catching the other two at the lights. The street corner clears as the three go into cruise control.

Kevin mutters sweet nothings to himself as he mutes the sound at the sight of the digicam hanging from the back of the flying-finned '59 Cadillac, saying, "What the fuck?" He compares the blonde to Ms San Fe as he steps on it.

The ring on his left, still gliding next to him, becomes a distinct voice from a distance that the wind catches and then lets go. "You know where Pontiac comes from, bro?" He swerves into the next street on the right as he quickly loses the '62 Chevy convertible.

The valet catches the key as Ms San Fe turns her ignition off. Kevin is in full stride for the elevator, which he catches with one long reach. The ring tone he changed is back. He says, "Fuck!"

Ms San Fe, in daytime tone, says, "Hiya, Kevin ..."

The floor number he wants is 45. "Forty fucking five."

The elevator doesn't stop there as the questions keep coming. "So -- you okay to travel?"

He smiles for the old lady and explains, "A woman, not as beautiful as you, but a woman."

He is back with her questions and suggestions flying at him. "We need shots, Kevin."

The elevator is now empty and back on the ground. It opens. she sees him. and then it closes again after a porter boards. He requests, "Forty-five, please."

Page shuts the door of the apartment. The cat purrs as it stretches its arched body and slides against his leg. When it has self-fulfilled its pleasure, it sashays off down the tidy hallway, stopping where a door might open. The machine on his right shoulder is much lighter from having had a decent night's rest. The phone inside the apartment rings, but he is on the outside. When the ringing stops he listens to her voice sat on her machine, "Hi. Thought you might be up? Make yourself at home, John." He winks slowly and tightly with the aid of a clenched fist. As we all know, he should have been in there. He opens his eyes wide, stretches the clenched fist, and walks for the stairs.

The elevator opens and he hears the techno. It makes him straighten his back. Ms San Fe hears it too. The strip in the middle of the hallway is a catwalk for K-MUZO. He feels his firearm on his back and says, "DJ sounds good." Then he repeats, "I have to go," for him and her as he reaches the door to the room, hearing only the bass and a tight kick, louder and louder

He knocks on the door of the fucking wrong room and LB Gee calls out, "Who's there?"

Kevin says, "K."

Hanibal asks, "K who?"

Kevin has the hands-on-hips-with-jacket-pulled-back look as the door opens. LB welcomes him in with a hand twirl that could well belong to a queer -- just two fingers loopaty loop in the air, then down towards the ground and onto his back.

The bass kicks and the high-hat crashes as K-MUZO steps past the two-seater and the couch that had been his the night before.

"Stop," says Hanibal.

Kevin stops two steps from the curtains blowing in with the wind. GEE-LEEZ is out there on the balcony flanked by two beauties. He sits. Hanibal plays with the small bandages on both of his ears.

A very serious Hanibal says, "It's all about the amalgamation. That's right, isn't it, Kevin?"

A cool, behaving Kevin responds, "Definitely about the amalgamation. Sorry, it's Mr Hammer?"

"Ammer," Hanibal corrects him, "as is am-a-going to spill blood if the sun don't rise in the morning."

"Will rise, Mr Ammer," Kevin assures him. "Will rise."

LB comes in from the balcony. He is pleased to see K-MUZO again. The women with him smile at each other as there comes another knock at the door. The phone is flashing and he absorbs the rhythm vibration with his hand as he steadies his smile for Hanibal, who has taken off one of the bandages and now rolls it into a cotton ball which he loops in the air to find the waste basket.

"Shot!" Kevin applauds as the tray of candies and drinks come his way. The cork in the bottle has already been pulled. Its head pops up from the neck just enough to see what's happening in this space. A woman in flat shoes and with another job waits for someone to sign. Kevin offers and asks, "What's their name?" Kevin has completed the loop in MUZO and is scripting, "Well wishes to ..."

The woman, whose blouse is done up to the neck, bends down to his ear and whispers, "Who are you?"

Kevin's shoulders drop. His smile says, Let's move on.

As Hanibal holds out his hand his smile says, Here, give it to me.

The woman is apologetic to Kevin in the way she slowly takes the pad from him and flips it back over to where the bill is itemized. The line is apparent where Hanibal has signed a big H. She turns and completes the uncorking of the bottle. She places the cork on the tray and transports it to where it will sit comfortably for the service staff to collect at the earliest opportunity that evening after dinner time. Hanibal, in no hurry now, stands and considers his offer. Kevin waits as LB looks down on him from his left side, out of K-MUZO's sight. The woman bends at the knees, but does not bow her head. Hanibal bows his head as the door closes. The techno is loud and the fiction emotive for the void in those who prefer a keyboard to a footpath to a doorway.

At the server stack someone with colored hair sits hunched, busily typing. Kevin sees the screen transferring US\$100,000.00 to his name and says to himself, Magic, as his phone on mute says "Ms San Fe."

Time is slipping away and WIPE is, if not already tagged, sliding into the category of "Who cares?" Page hails another cab to take him back to the place where jet fuel vaporized and passengers and their pilots all walked upon the same ground he plotted upon. The cabbie received the silent treatment but he did not slam the door when he reached his destination. At the end of the runway the heat was hazy, bubbly, threatening to rise. Page takes one puff on a cigarette outside before he makes his play. Ms San Fe waits for Kevin, who is now half an hour late. She cannot wait to be witness to his behavior face-to-face at the table for two at lunch time in an upmarket brasserie.

The inside of the internet café is dark. The long-haired guys who serve there help by pushing keys behind the counter desk, telling customers their stations without looking up at them.

"I want somewhere to plug this thing into," Page points down at the machine hanging at his hip. The place to plug the ThinkPad already exists, but the geek in the black t-shirt makes it feel as if the entire complex would have to shut down for a day so they can put the cable in the frigging wall.

Hanibal toasts LB and before they shake hands. The screen flashes an alert. PAGE1 is in session "PRIVATE" and with K-MUZO.

Page curses himself at how he didn't even manage to grab her details. The closest thing to her is K-MUZO.

Ms San Fe's phone beeps and so she flips the top back, still interested in Kevin's account of his morning and the evening of business with car importers from China. "PAGE1 wants something," she says, sliding the bottom of the phone around for his viewing. "You talk to him."

Kevin turns the phone back around to her. Ms San Fe thumbs the keys, the phone in the middle of her body, almost touching her lap. While she does this she recognizes and attaches the word "omen" to Page. Since meeting him, he has messed with her marquee player's head, and since spending time with him her marquee player has become a double agent.

The message is brief. "Ms San Fe here: What do you want?"

Page's eyes are a bit miffed at the reply. His reply is, "What's your number?" He gets up from the cubicle and heads for the payphone. From there he can still see the top of the screen.

Ms San Fe and Santana talk all at once now. Kevin looks about the place. His money is in the bank. His insides feel more at ease as the young boy wanting his portable console to be authenticated hands him a permanent marker while his mother smiles and says "Thank you" for him.

Page doesn't really know where to start so when he hears Santana he jumps at her with, "He has some sort of vibe that WIPE feels and then it takes his idea and makes the level." He senses her irritation at what could be nonsense, so he plows on, "It's a chemical imbalance that is an ideal incubator for ideas. His brain activity equals the sum of neurons it takes to compose a file size recognizable by WIPE's compiler, which it uploads through the controls and uses as the template for the rhythm of the logarithm, which then populates the base of the program, giving it its beginning, end, parameters and eventually its level." He swallows quietly and the answer is as he believed it would sound.

"Yes, John," Ms San Fe replies.

Page thinks about Kevin and his nice clothes, job, and credibility. He looks down at his boots and over at the surfers in their colored t-shirts and keeps his head down as he traces through his two explanations, which are both damaging to his credibility on that side of the phone and in the place where the geeks now had something to really laugh about. He says, "Okay, then."

He hangs up the phone. The one behind the counter now smiles at him as he stretches and yawns. Bringing down his arms he sees two of the git, his smile double the teeth, and he even has an eye in the middle of his head.

The mouse didn't want to go where the sensation of power is taken away and then let be within one second. Le Mac smiles at as he sees the face of his new character change to a less expressive extreme; he was learning to contain energy. Le Mac has no control over the eyes crossing in extraordinary conditions. Page eventually finds the folder he was meant to have populated two days before on the D drive.

Hanibal notes the accuracy of the prediction. LB looks down to the street. He can see the LA crew and their



cargo from their floor high up in Kansas City.

Ms San Fe watches the lineup which suddenly appears on her screen. The virus companies, their hackers, and their hackers' hackers are lined up.

Le Mac noted the deal with the major vendor to broadcast after a quick edit for the sake of copyright to be his master stroke. Someone smiling down his back makes him stop from thinking the next thought and making his next move.

Page thought about it, and as each head in a cubicle drew closer to conceal the image to which they are glued, he quietly closes the laptop, pulls the plug, pays at the counter, and exits the place. He feels no relief as his vision tracks back to one. The heads come back up and the screen on Ms San Fe's machine dwindles to zero. Page walks in the direction opposite everyone else, and when he has no one oncoming and just a straggler in behind he finds an exit.

Hanibal looks at the piece of paper. The IP addresses the hacker is entering into a window and then another window and then another window all come back with zilch value. Le Mac waits for the call, and as Hanibal pushes the last digit he signals to the ideas guy to pick up the phone in order to assess details for a second opinion. Le Mac assures the one standing in a daze smiling that he is not needed, as his calm palm pads the air between them.

The view looking up at Page from the handle of the bag is not flattering. Le Mac notices the even spaces between Hanibal's breaths, even when he says the opposite of what he wants. The second receiver is quietly placed down on the table, a sound Hanibal recognizes, but he keeps on selling. Le Mac signals to the one standing around who is about to pick up the receiver that his throat will be cut if he does that.

Page stands still for long periods of time. This time it lasts for one hour, enough time for the team to start working. The writer begins to pen the characters into the environment and ideas start to flow. Le Mac ensures that they were fed with food and Page's movements.

Ms San Fe turns the key. The cat, now on the tips of its paws going the other way, slides her furs against the silk leg and wanders in the opposite direction. When she reaches the top of the stairs it turns and looks at the woman looking at her, then turns and sashays back down the hallway to where Santina stops to pick her up. She studies her face while her fingers relax the cat's neck, massaging small muscles around fine bones with her knuckles, white from the day.

Inside the apartment, the bed was made. Page had also washed and dried the two cups. Unsure of where they lived, he'd put them to the side of the jug. The spare pillow waits in the middle of the bed. Her notepad is still covered with the magazine article she turns to. A speed-read with a focus on the extracts highlights the hallmarks that start to make her mind want to click, yet the other feelings are not at home in the orderly and methodical way she scans then files her hunches and her findings, which are brought to the fore after being washed in analysis spiked with a sixth sense, becoming the drivers of what she delivers to be fact. Many of those other feelings are directly involved with the advent of John Page. The compound that forms her heart had over time become combined. She would rather add his entry as another layer of rock hardening her still, his fast mouth today giving her reason to believe he was another one in the "John" mold.

The voice on the other end of the line, a product of business school, promises her, "He wanted to move on. We would have him back, anytime." Ms San Fe records this.

Page feels the need to eat, then the urge to smoke, then the desire to make a move. He wants to be in her company. He puts the thought to the side and then finds a use for it. Back inside the dark place, WIPEWORLDWIDE.COM is the address. The different levels are all-consuming and almost complete. A

writer has taken the concept and is now on his way to winning his tenth straight competition after creating personalities for the entire cast, including LAZER-P, whose profile makes the real PAGE1 smile. Happy for a moment, he starts his work. Page opens a window.

13.24.33.1 is the one IP address he remembers. He types the last character upon the click of the second hand, and as he pushes down on the return key, the reply comes from the server. A security camera has been left open and outside of any firewall; the security company had not thought of it at all, its page updating every sixty seconds. He thinks back to the day before the blast in the park and enters the 24-hour date range.

The shop clerk, named Ivan, has his name tag upside down. "Navi" the writer is told. Le Mac, on the phone, has told the cruising server to meet them, saying, "Old hanger -- the largest one at the beginning of the runway, midnight."

Page sees a group of girls in the distance, grainy and fleeing by the frame. WIPE appears in the back, new and innocent, with doves for peace and a little girl's dreams. Page goes back an hour and sees no WIPE on the screen. PlayStation and Xbox share the screen for the best part of an hour, then Polina Rada walks majestically into the shop.

He finds her face using software that is now available to him. Ms San Fe notes the way he concentrates. His eyes almost cross as she thinks of him and says, "Be you."

She sends the screen capture as Page frames it. Then he searches an avalanche of images from databases. They settle on a match, his submission of her still only half-way to the side that says, "Complete." He Googles the name Polina Rada. The page comes back with a single link, her physical location in an orphanage in Russia. Santana reaches for the phone as she says to the universe, "WIPE, John."

Hanibal notes the date and time on the store security camera, then pulls the piece of paper from his pocket. The blue hair is told to trace 13.24.33.2 as of that date. Le Mac smiles as he hangs up the phone and says to the crew, "Now we're talking Hanibal. Stick with it now. Don't go into dark fucking places, Ammer, or else the sun won't fucking shine no more."

K-MUZO packs his bags. The phone rings at a close to midnight. It's Hanibal. He says, "Let's roll." After that, at one, "You said you would travel?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah." Kevin stretches his neck. The white tank top makes him look cut.

Le Mac shakes hands with Esai, and then the long-haired Native American who cradles the server. The LA crew, now back in their wheels, drive up the ramp. Le Mac nods to the other two. The hangar fills with bass from a place in time when urgent deeds and fearless acts had indeed been required in order to seal a deal, to convince a pivot that they swing, or to swing this way. He stretches the fearless five. He sees Genesis. He smiles for Rozelle. He sees the eyes of Luoshlishca. They agree with the way they sway as the heat comes. Le Mac gives the hit in the head as Esai and his mob come down the ramp on their legs. They hold their bandanas and pistols high towards the sky so Le Mac knows they are clear, clean and simple, not one of them packing. They throw their colors and weapons on the ground in front of the three.

Page's eye is on the clock showing him the time in London. Outside, and not that far from him, are Hanibal and LB, who are on their way to Gate 88. The hostesses bend their knees as they pass.

The ants are outside, in the corner of the hangar. Le Mac, the ideas man, the writer, and the LA crew stand in a circle. Zapp makes them calm, playing and singing, "Let me see you grooving ..."

there are 10,101 ants, all of them in a circle round and round around the mountain of steel and colors. The one

with the big head climbs over the tops of the slower ones at full speed, a hundred times quicker than he can think, having been especially transported from outside the New York City Compound, and says, "He's going to see Polina Rada, isn't he?"

There is no pretty lady with her short blue skirt to look up, so he looks up to LMLA-ink and D-LACrew. Le Mac puts his hand up in the air to be the one to answer the question. "Widely, idealistically, puritanically, and effervescently LMLA come, and when I close mine eyes I do hope that the 20 points pivotal to the one junction of a function that we are, have been firmly planted."

Zapp plays and sings, "Shake it, shake it baby ..." Le Mac moves his head, just his head, then a slide, "Work your body / work your body," the bass goes, Clap. The D-LACrew, Lazoo, and Metofeaz move shoulders only Peacefully, then Le Mac sideswipes the torsos and he slides with Zapp's Roger Troutman and the vocoder: "Your sexy, sexy moves ..."

Le Mac's hand is in the air like a lasso. The black pill in his palm becomes visible.

Inside Le Mac shows the LA Crew their quarters for the trip. They follow his Cadillac in their Chevy to Opal City. As they enter into their own bungalows they agree to meet at the fountain inside the 20 Point Pyramid in New Generation Square in the Platinum City when the light melts into an orange glow beyond them rolls of hills he splays now with his hand. Inside Opal City, their dimension of choice they are told that Fidel Castro is on the run as they are given their tickets and a pill, with clear instructions that no one is to assume the character of Fidel.

Page sees the Moscow time. He cancels the pending flight as he puts his head down into the machine once again, but they have stopped right in front of him to see what he is up to.

Santina and Ms San Fe say, "Hi John, what you doing?"

Ms San Fe and Kevin are on their way to one of the gates. They look like they were about to hold hands, or are going to do so some time soon. Page sniffs and then tries to smile. His eyes begin to burn, but he still manages to give them this one, "Keeping busy, hoping one day you can add "Lucky" to the front of my name."

He expects Kevin to lead her away about immediately. Then he pushes the screen further back, as it should be able to hide him from them. Finally, after the final boarding call is repeated she walks off first and Kevin-K-MUZO makes the most of the situation, saying, "We're off. May see you again in the future."

Kevin can honestly afford his smile as he looks way beyond it at Ms San Fe, who is waiting at the gate some distance away. He sees two of her, and then just the one he so desperately wants to be with right that minute. He looks back to where Kevin was in front of him, but he is in the same picture as she is, gone.

Page clicks "submit" and makes his way to Gate 88.

## CHAPTER 8

Ms San Fe, Kevin, Hanibal, and LB GEE are all hooked up, flying through night air. In their laps is a version of what unfolds. Page hits the keys in his lap. The music from Chapter Zero goes, "Very superstitious / The writing's on the wall."

D-LACrew are now inside one of the dimensions. Le Mac is at the bridge and Lazoo is at the wheel. Metofeaz is in black, menacing, mean, but loving all at once. He thinks of Rozelle. John kisses Lotte, yet again for the last time.

*LRHYTHM*patterning reveals the fundamentals of ETF, the hypotheses of an accident, and the reason for this season. Manifestodial information is implanted in the sleeping of an age that has awakened all angles and demons alike. EDM equals the excitement data message, the packet that Kevin feels and then throws in a K-MUZO bullet from a tower in London. In the air it seeks the warmth of a heart. PAGE1 being in the way, he sways and eventually falls face down in the Siberian snow, a show in itself.

Wishing indiscreetly, Ms San Fe seals the envelope with her piercing eyes. FDMs, or fear data messages, are the things that Polina wants to be untrue, but are the ways in which she has been created, a fear in all children that they are here alone in this world, with or without a mama or papa. Alexvale is stealing things already. One day he will take your heart, but for now a big silver four-wheel-drive will do him just fine. LB GEE, a token in this game, is on his way to the AmalgaMension dimension. Hanibal is a fallen angel, crawling the floor to find the feathers in his wings so he may once again fly to where the car teeters on the cliff.

WAMX100, dotwamx, blah, blah, blah ...

## CHAPTER 9

She can hear the beginnings of her favorite song in English on her alarm clock. Polina opens her eyes by rubbing them. There is a bird in the tree this morning, and Lina hums along, "La, la-la-la, la." The words are easy for her and the tune is simple and pure, the same as her heart. She tidies the way her pillow lays, then pulls up the sheets and folds them back. She collects her letters and the paper plane with the dried flowers and puts them back in their box.

She sits in front of the TV as one of her friends is called to the office. She watches her leave the room and waits for the rest of the morning. Eating lunch and reading her book well into the afternoon, she still does not exhale, as she is determined that this is the day. The orphanage's mistress turns the key to her office, her work done for the day. Polina casually walks by.

The telephone is ringing inside, and Polina, with her hands behind her back, steps to the side of the mistress, who is unsure whether to let the call go. The phone call is from a man telling her what the three men below her window had promised her, "Someone will come to see you, for you." She flattens the crease of the paper plane with her hand. She knows that this is it. From a place without any reference of being wanted, she recalls the way he made her believe in a home, a mom, and a dad.

At Heathrow Airport, the belly of the Virgin airplane is above and then over his head. Page lights a cigarette and then immediately extinguishes it with his boot. Hanibal and LB Gee flee the scene inside a cab bound for London. His promise to Polina really does hurt him. He thinks of Ms San Fe and is only now beginning to accept that this story is not capable of growing a heart this late in the play. He steps to the curb. The cold makes him close his jacket completely. The cab has no signage, but the driver has a real turban. Page smiles at it as he places the machine in the open window, then he opens the door to board his ride.

Ms San Fe holds Kevin's hand. He wants a more realistic feel about the way they look like a couple. Ms San Fe politely shrugs him off as the prim and proper mistress leads them both into the room. Ms Polina Rada is seated and waiting. Ms San Fe notices the brick from Berlin in its glass box. They sit with their knees pointing inwards as a photo is taken for the orphanage. Polina, in behind, is eager for an introduction, and begins to look down to her left right after she smiles for the shot.

Hanibal and LB press the button again. This time footsteps come to the door.

Page pokes his fingers in his ears to unblock them from the flight. The orange turban on the driver's head is huge in the small space. The orange turban on the smiling driver's head is colorful in the grey area he sees outside the window, as he gets to witness the grey and dark air of London and its landmarks for the first time without snow and in daylight.

The Indian cabbie, a former Bollywood producer, pulls one wheel of the dented Nissan taxi with Toyota hubcaps onto the footpath of London Bridge. Page's hair blows as he surveys the location for real, then he shivers unto himself as the cabbie, eager for some action, finds a way out as the traffic really starts to matter and says, "I do know the best curry in London, Mr Page," the Rs finally flipping from the end of his tongue and rolling on the Thames to where he can see history. The river will soon freeze over from the mayhem that will arrive in WIPE, the final LEVEL.

The bobby on the bike has heard the horns and the abuse. He mistakes Page's driver for a Pakistani whose car has one wheel up on the walkway. Page assures the officer that it was his fault, "He saved my life," he explains as he boards the cab. "I was about to jump."

His fingers and head are trying to negotiate civility with the new cellphone in his hand. It does not retreat or renege, so he hands it to his driver, who shows him how. "Off, on, take-a-call, end-a-call." He takes the

driver's number, which the kind man enters himself, and closes the door quietly as Hanibal, LB GEE, and a boy come down the stairs of the address.

The curry repeats on him, making him bellow louder than the closing door, then say, "Beg your pardon." He takes the phone from the driver in exchange for US dollars. He asks the driver to take down the number of the rental car as he taps the roof and says, "Thank you."

Kevin places the box in his other hand down on the table. Polina tries not to look too excited. She smiles at Ms San Fe and asks, "Would you like to see my room?"

She checks with the mistress, who says, "By all means, Polina." She takes Santina's hand and walks her from the room. A melody floods the hallways of the big building. Polina runs up the stairs. Santina wants to join in and does. At the top of the stairs the young girl waits for the little girl, her smile wide, too. The music is encompassing. They lose their bearings as she skips ahead again to her room. She can't wait to have what may be a permanent figure inside the place where she rests on lonely nights.

Polina opens the door and smiles at her friend, who giggles to force a burb, then says, "Beg your pardon, Polina. Oh my. My manners."

Polina takes her hand and says, "This is my room."

Kevin twiddles his thumbs. The pretty lady in the two-piece navy blue suit with the flies down the back is smiling at him. In her accent she insinuates she knows him by saying, "I've seen you somewhere?"

"You play WIPE?"

Her hands go to her mouth. "Oh my God, it's K-MUZO!"

Kevin smiles to the ground. "Sure is."

Hanibal picks at the scab on the lobe of where he hears as he sits on a leather sofa. He calls out, "Game Boy!" a term of endearment for the young and old in this scene.

LB GEE points to himself and says, "Moi?"

Hanibal is becoming impatient and says, "No, the little one." Alexvale's older brother stands with his hands behind his back in the middle of the swank hotel room in London. Something tells Hanibal that the kid is wrong for the part, which is so pivotal to the plot that is about to reach its dead end. He interrogates him as if they are in a tree fort hiding from someone. Before he does, he organizes the place. This tree fort has loud music, candy, and video games. WIPE is on screen. The boy is dumbfounded that he is in the same room as GEE-LEEZ, now seated and talking with K-MUZO. The techno is strikingly loud again.

Hanibal snarls, "Game Boy! No, the little one."

The brother answers, "Yes, Mr America?"

"Tell me more about Alexvale Rokov III."

"He's just my little brother."

"Does he have an affinity with WIPE, Game Boy?"

Page knocks for a third time. Now he can see someone. Next door a little colored boy is entering that house. Page looks up and stretches his neck as the door is finally flung open.

The woman has talked long enough and crossed her legs a million ways to make him look. Page finally asks, "Well, where's Alexvale Rokov III, then?"

She offers him a cigarette, which he takes, and then she makes another offer, telling him, "You're welcome to stay out back. The handyman has gone."

Tapping the butt of the cigarette and opening the front door, he gives the cigarette back to Alexvale's mother. With her hands on her hips, she shrugs one shoulder and takes the thing. Outside the afternoon light is fading as he turns to the left, then decides to go right, and eventually faces the way he wants and begins to walk.

Inside the hotel room GEE-LEEZ and K-MUZO have drawn the best of the best, the LEVEL makers, the ones with the receptor and the most wanted commodity, the EDM to SOHO London, and are waiting like a pack. All in black, S-O-MANTIC, the sexy 17-year-old model from New York City, is in the cage. She pulls her gun.

K-MUZO whispers from behind her, "Should I go, or should we die together now?"

The babe puts the gun back in her wet plastic garter belt. GEE-LEEZ is in the middle of the floor. Ten clones, all with hair like Bruce Lee, miss their kicks as the genuine article rallies high in the air with his foot for the speed bag. GEE-LEEZ's ritual hexes the sexes. Inside the cage, S-O-MATIC, is already under the spell of K-MUZO.

The door opens. L-SOMASTIC, the 23-year-old-nurse in South Africa, advances with her needle dripping with techno, technically enhancing the fruit from the funk of sweating and bodies grinded. O-LO GRAM, the singer from Sydney, Australia, entertains them, A viewing crowd can take their real but zombie-like slickness seriously.

WIPE's definition is 100% animated hardware, wrapped in people's skin with his smile and eyes. The older brother of the elusive one has the control in his hands. Hanibal has requested the intermission in fighting and loud music to give the boy a chance. He can't hit the singer standing still, so he sneaks up on him from behind when he has his eyes closed. The level's gravity's air particles are the size of gallon bottles. Eventually the boy drops the controls to his side.

Polina and Ms San Fe enter the room, having been gone for a while, but Kevin seems to be okay, though. He has unwrapped Polina's gift for her and is showing the mistress his moves. Polina leads Ms San Fe to the sofa away from where he plays.

"Where's the man that called me?" Polina asks.

Santina smiles easily "Oh -- John Page, you mean? He's in London, Polina."

Polina introduces her friends to Ms San Fe. They whisper to each other as they wait to be introduced to K-MUZO, who is pausing WIPE. He stands and smiles and one of them hands him a pad and pen. He signs and smiles. They leave the room. Polina and Santina sit down. The mistress is absorbed in the beginnings of the FINAL LEVEL. Polina tells Santina about baby, and then about Alexvale.

Two blocks from his home the thief spots his last ride for the day. It is a silver one, the latest one, its chassis wider and its tires fatter to fit the kit like the body of the beast. No one is inside, but even if there were he would have pulled them screaming through the window and thrown them to the pavement for the bad things

they did during their day. Alexvale is ready with the slide as his brain listens for the numbers to key the alarm quiet.

Page makes out in the distance a shadow not yet the size to loom over anything but the ants and ladybugs on the ground. Still, its actions are loud but evasive in the way it does things fast and much too quickly for the eye to believe. He's in. One whirl of a blasted sick siren and that too is cut. The ignition is delighted to feel him as it meets him halfway. The engine is running. The seatbelt is harnessed. The foot is about to go to the floor and send fuel to all parts of the purring engine.

"HEX-V'L!" The head goes left and right and the foot can't go down as the calf muscles cramp. Page is in the rearview mirror. Alexvale is stuck in his place.

The nightclub with its world-wide stars starts to shake. The needle on the record slides as the dancers are thrown from their perching places. GEE-LEEZ is up in the air. The clones have come back to life. The quake is surprising even for the alert disciple. K-MUZO is unloading a magazine from the K-1Million with his other hand.

Polina's mouth is now full of a foul taste, as she sees the screen as only a blur. Ms San Fe is now concerned at the girl's sudden change in color to white, like the avalanche now coming down the cliffs.

Screaming for the release of his muscles, Alexvale is locked inside his getaway vehicle. Page senses that this is not only here on the street. Quick but on cushions, he has arrived at the passenger's window. The face of Alexvale morphs between that of a hapless child and the rusty lid of a tin can, dirty and orange. The oxidation of blood from his face is exorcised by a fist wrapped in a leather jacket breaking the glass. The particles fly at his eyes. On finding his aura, which now lights the child's body, they rebound into fragments of light. Page shields his eyes to find that the bits are composed of energy.

The rumbling stops, the nurse throws off of her two drunken sailors.

Ms San Fe has her eye on the screen. Her chin is resting at the top of Polina's crown, the little person huddled into her body shying away from the characters finding their feet on the screen.

The owner of the vehicle is a nice man and accepts that his son thought it was their wagon and, "hopped inside and locked himself in there and had an epileptic fit," which required the father to smash the window. "We have travel insurance."

Alexvale recognizes the man and sticks close to Page, who is on the phone. The Nissan taxi comes around the corner as he hands the man his phone number. The man, stunned and silent, watches Page and Alexvale board the cab.

The driver of wheels that are about to stop are told to drive on, as the car with LB GEE and Hanibal now deposits the older brother at the doorstep of Alexvale's home. Alexvale points out that he, "has the machine now. I gave it to him for his birthday."

Page smiles at the young fella's ways. Around the block again and this time they stop of at the shop, as Deepak runs an errand for his mother. The shopkeeper is about to close for the night. Page and Alexvale are his last customers for the evening.

Polina, Ms San Fe, and Kevin go out for a McDonald's somewhere near Red Square.

Hanibal and LB GEE wait around in the lobby of the swank London Hotel.



Page, Alexvale, his mother, and the taxi driver enjoy a cup of tea. Alexvale's brother is in his room.

Le Mac waits at the door of the dimension, 12 earth hours since the D-LACrew were advised that, "No one is to assume the role of a dictator!"

Le Mac now picks up the server with the data of the ground. He counts slowly. "One, two, three, four, five, and ouch," he says, as he cradles it as his own.

## CHAPTER 10

The London underground empties as the txt messages spread the alert that "WIPE FINAL LEVEL" is being released. In Times Square the digital definition of another project is in its final moments, brilliant in 100 million zillion colors. In Tokyo all the billboards say the one long word, WIPEWORLDWIDE.COM. The wind blows through the rainforests, making the wild wilder as the animal kingdom races to the center of the earth.

The nightclub's roof has caved in; its floor is a hole. WIPE's theme starts to come alive. The speaker, on its side, still has enough wiring to push forward the sound of destruction. The characters, GEE-LEEZ, K-MUZO, PLAZ-MANTIC, a 19-year-old Hollywood actor, S-O-MANTIC, O-LO GRAM, and L-SOMASTIC, throw iron beams and tables with normal people still clinging to them out of their way as they seek the origins of their existence. Out on the street they make the fans scream, the music louder than the engines of 10,000 screaming jets.

Kevin's face lights in the colors. Ms San Fe sits Polina down in between her and K-MUZO. She holds her hand tight as the girl gets comfortable. She rests her head on Santana's shoulder.

Page's eyes are straight on the screen. WIPE has accepted his wildcard entry from over 100 million applications to enter the FINAL LEVEL. The heads turn to the other side of the screen. PAGE1 loads, his jeans, white t-shirt, and leather jacket with broken glass still lodged in places along the arms.

K-MUZO says, "Give up, loser."

Ms San Fe's hand goes around Polina's head. The girl looks at the spare controls when they shake on the table.

Alexvale is next to Page. "I need you here," Page reminds him when he looks up at him.

Through the Westend the marquees' bulbs blow, spraying sparks on the living creatures that span the street. The people stop doing their own business as their minds are captivated by the crew, WIPE's elite -- those who have gone world-wide on the hunt.

PAGE1 waits for them as Big Ben strikes midnight. The howling wind freezes the melting snow on the eagles' wings. The icicle stabs one of the unlucky ones in the neck, hanging to its feathers. The dropping body lands with a thud on the frozen Thames on top another heap of bodies. The car is rocking faster than ever before from the wind beneath the wings of a new eagle. Once a Boeing 747, now its wings flap as the passengers that sat in seats are thrown sky-high. The debris from the exploding plane brings to Page's lips, "Is it a bird? Is it a plane? It's "WIPE WORLD WIDE!" PAGE1 starts to secure the entrance of the bridge. He lifts the bus and throws it down on its side. The quake from the bus landing on its side makes the car slide. Polina squeezes Santana's hand. Ms San Fe can see the anxiety in the lines across the brow of the young girl.

Slightly animated, Page's voice says he's excited. Alexvale bursts in as Page reminds him that the condensed mike is sensitive. Alexvale replies that "The cars used to explode when they ran out of fuel, then they became eagles."

To which Page cautions, "Okay! They can hear you, Alexvale."

All six of the crazed creatures face him, each with an evil eye. Their smiles are sadistic and their leaning is sarcastic as K-MUZO steps out from the bunch, the butt of the K-1Million on his hip. He wraps the magazine around his fist as he starts to step.

PAGE1 brings down the heart rate. All of the activity in the centre of his gut -- the "mo" cuts the electricity to his brain and checks the fuel for his arms and legs. He stretches his neck, left-right, left-right, as K-MUZO passes him and whispers, "Pulled the wrong wires this time," in his ear.

PLAZ-MANTIC, the young Hollywood actor, is the first to do anything meaningful from the shoulder of GEE-LEEZ. PAGE1 can tell this by the way he is walking towards him in a straight line. They are face-to-face. The hair swings as he launches into Tarantino:

PLAZ-MANTIC

Big Mac's a Big Mac, but they call it Le Big Mac.

PAGE1

Le Big Mac! Ahhaha - what do they call Lazoo?

The actor looks at his palm. The lines are gone. PAGE1 is in his face. The hair swings the kid face-to-face with a legend. He wants to shake his hand. PAGE1 extends his hand. The 19-year-old kid takes the gesture. PAGE1 grabs the hand firmly, pauses, then yanks the kid, whose body comes forward as his head falls backward. The neck collects it, bringing it to where PAGE1's head is coming to meet it. SMACK. The body falls backwards. PAGE1 ensures it is laid to rest as his elbow connects with the throat. As he walks over the top of the fading figure, the glass in the sleeve slices a deep cut sideways that immediately begins to bleed profusely. The kid holds his throat as PAGE1 now kicks his head, opening the cut wide so the head is hanging from the body by a thread of its neck skin.

WIPE's theme and the wind effects remind Page of a K-MUZO bullet. He turns his head quickly, but it takes off the tip of it. It feels cold and warm all at once. He puts his finger in his ear, then looks at the finger. It's covered in blood. His head is poised in the right position. All he has to do is lift his gaze.

K-MUZO, in his tower, reloads. This time he turns his cap backwards.

PAGE1 sees a busker with his guitar, the vocals too good for him to be singing for coins. The nurse's uniform is white. Her stockings are not ideal for the London night.

The mother with a smoking cigarette in her hand shrugs her shoulders at Page's question, "Can he have the chocolate?"

The taxi driver unwraps the chocolate bar at a quarter past midnight and hands it to the boy. Page instructs him, "Eat it slowly and think of the person you like the most in this whole wide world."

Alexvale's eyes outshine the shiny wrapper in the dark room lit by WIPE. His older brother is standing at his shoulder, watching him chew and swallow.

Hanibal, on the phone, closes the call as he opens the door. Four more enter: a blonde, a brunette, a redhead, and a bald one. LB is in a tank top only. As the leader gives the same instructions as he does in WIPE, his hand loops in the air, signaling for the models to parade around him. The cigar smoke gets in his eyes. The ash is about to drop. The redhead swaps the Cuban with a peck on the side of his mouth.

The mistress hands Kevin a beer, which he swigs. Polina is asleep in Santana's lap. Ms San Fe watches the way PAGE1 walks.

PAGE1 notices S-O-MANTIC's catwalk ways as they watch O-LO GRAM perform on the footpath. He

dances with his guitar. The audience on the road follows his moves and lyrics, "Baby, baby, baby." He can see the head of the guitar in between two jumping bodies. The hand that comes to cover a bit below her waist has a knife handle in the coat. Its ruby light begins to radiate. He feels the draining. He is ready for the K-MUZO packet as he hoists the model in the air, as he has done before. The bullet takes the head off the dummy's shoulders. He throws the carcass at the singer. The bullet from his guitar stops the body, which drops to the ground. PAGE1 in full flight collects the singer on the hop as they fly over the side of the bridge.

PAGE1's hand catches the railing the singer is holding onto him, his guitar facing up at PAGE1's face. O-LO GRAM's hand is about to strum a chord to blow his head clear of his shoulders. He smiles as his fingers flamenco and stretch the bass string. PAGE1's other hand has all six strings. He rips them from the neck of the instrument. He is ready for six shots. The singer performs in falsetto as the action loosens his grip, his body falling. PAGE1 catches his neck with the strings and winds the steel strands around the neck till he is sure the singer is choked dead by the way the blood appears in areas of his neck. His hand feels a jab on the railing. His view of the world is suddenly jerked from him. He sees a checkered floor. He is a rook, a pawn, a king, and then he is the hand that WIPES the board clean. On the footpath of the bridge, the wind blowing her uniform up and down, L-SOMASTIC smiles down at him as the chemical begins to work.

Alexvale is breathing as a young boy would under this sort of pressure. His brother is in his room looking for the spare controls. Polina's eyelids tighten, then relax. Her mouth smiles, then her lips tighten, too. Santina looks to see why her sleep is disturbed as she wakes slowly. Page checks his energy, the six shots and the needle in his hand sending the monitor into the red as the brother connects the controls, which he has found.

"He can maintain the course," Hanibal notes. "The question is, do you have the code?" He closes the phone before the voice has time to ask the next question. LB looks at him, nodding that he will maintain.

Ms San Fe assures the waking Polina that all is okay. The bridge on which the nurse stands and from which PAGE1 hangs begins to buckle. Polina's face is unsure of what is happening as Ms San Fe's phone turns red.

PAGE1 sees the bodies on the river and feels the gigantic frame of the bridge warping. Above him, L-SOMASTIC's smile is wild across her face and so contagious that the bystanders now have it, too.

"Put it down."

Alexvale drops the vibrating thing. The bridge settles back into its foundations. The noise of concrete and steel crunching and grinding back into their joins is almost too much for PAGE1. His one free hand tries to cover both his ears. The energy gauge is now flashing wildly. Alexvale, scared of the responsibility, hangs onto his mother, Page calls to him, but he will not come.

Polina is sitting up straight. A caller is presenting an offer. Ms San Fe notices the change in Polina. Polina takes the phone and says, "Yes, I remember."

The screaming from the car is louder than ever for PAGE1. The cackling from L-SOMASTIC is deafening. K-MUZO turns his eyes from behind his sight and looks down on the bridge.

GEE-LEEZ, in behind the nurse, says, "Look -- see how I make you still." With that, her head twists to see her final winding view of WIPE's landscape.

PAGE1's other hand reaches for the railing. He hoists himself up and back onto the bridge. The smoking bodies, the bus on fire, and K-MUZO's shadow are on the road.

Kevin's fingers find a way to bring him face to face with PAGE1. His feet are on the ground, his old boots are smoking, and a program deficiency casts that effect on everything on the surface of the bridge. PAGE1 snorts

the burning bodies, the leaking gasoline, and now the point of K-MUZO's firearm, which is point-blank in his face.

Kevin senses the difference in atmosphere in the room where he sits. The Mistress is in jeans and a sweater. Ms San Fe is up and about, her phone keeping her in contact with her office. Polina is next to him, her hands in her lap, wide awake extremely early in the morning. He ponders GEE-LEEZ's whereabouts, as he understands the instructions he was given and now has to make believe to an entire world what is about to happen.

Hanibal eyes the spare controls that one of the new ones who has just walked in is about to touch. He says, "Uh-uh," shaking his head. He hands her a flute of champagne and says, "Touch that." He flips the lid of his phone and answers, "Yeah?"

A voice from the cellphone says, "We have code to this point. Take the code and die, or play on and take the money."

He puts the phone to LB's ear. The message repeats, bringing a nod from the player as Hanibal closes the phone.

Inside HEX-VL's bedroom, Page has one request, "Yeah, a cup of tea would be good."

The mother, with Alexvale at her side, disappears. The former producer next to him, still in his orange turban, says, "May I offer some advice, John?"

"Yeah, by all means." The kitchen chair he is sitting on is becoming uncomfortable.

"Where I come from, music is always a very good thing for carrying a flimsy story line."

Page looks at him and smiles. "Yeah," he says, "we got music." WIPE's theme comes at them.

K-MUZO's finger feels the curve of the trigger, designed to be pulled back towards the place where the intent for the target is held. He sees PAGE1's face, the red dot the size of a dime on his forehead.

Ms San Fe sees movement from Polina by the glass box out of the corner of her eye. Kevin sees a hand reaching for the spare control. He turns and smiles at Polina, "You want to play, do you?"

Polina takes her hand back and says, "Some of the time," with her eyes on the car. An eagle's flapping wing clips the roof of the black Mercedes. Polina manages to keep her calm exterior and her hand by her side.

Ms San Fe is now back beside her. "Would you like to have a play, Polina?" she asks.

Her dark eyes stay solemn. "Maybe."

Hannibal orders that they leave. "Time to go." LB looks at him, but Hanibal says, "Uh-uh," on the phone. Hanibal's face is stern as the phone rings. The car moves. Inside the screaming is from all parties. Hanibal sees the controls slide.

PAGE1 feels the mark on his head. Page stretches his neck. He manages a quick sip of his cup of tea from the coffee table in the living room. Alexvale is back in the room. He looks at him with one eye, the other eye on the moving car. He keeps down the feeling he gets from introducing the music as he wonders to himself how much power PAGE1 has. "Would you like to steal a black Mercedes?" he calmly asks HEX-VL.

His mother, annoyed, takes another long drag of her cigarette. She exhales into the small bedroom and says, "My boy's not like that."

Page begins to get fucked off.

Ms San Fe receives another call with simple instructions. She understands the voices on the phone, which are those of all four of LMLA-ink saying, "She goes by the name PLANTOM-ZERO!"

K-MUZO clicks the round into his clip and drops to the ground. Kevin's fingers cannot find the combination to pick up the ammunition. On screen, PAGE1 smiles and says, "With our hands, K-MUZO."

Alexvale's eyes light up. His mother's arms are around his chest. He lifts one then the other as he steps forward next to Page, the chair rocking as he unleashes a combination. K-MUZO blocks the first flurry. The second scores on the fuel gauge. K-MUZO touches his lip, now fat and bloody.

GEE-LEEZ circles and smiles at the way PAGE1 has caught on. "We let you in out of pity, PAGE1. Now you've gone World-Wide. Wow!" PAGE1 listens with his eyes. As he didn't see K-MUZO's uppercut, he's flat on his back.

Polina clears her throat. Ms San Fe asks, "What's the matter, Polina?"

"Nothing's the matter."

Kevin looks at her sideways. Real sweat is starting to happen. He wipes it with one hand and takes a swig of the beer.

Polina looks at the bottle and asks, "May I have drink?"

Both Ms San Fe and Kevin shout, "No!"

Kevin has both hands on his controls. Polina eyes the spare one sliding around on the table. The car teeters on the cliff.

Hanibal closes the door as the last of the models leaves the room, thinking with his fingers both pointed up at his mouth. LB GEE is in control at this stage. Hanibal can imagine the car, with the screaming and confusion inside its fogged-up windows.

Ms San Fe's fingers begin to toy with each other. She picks at the ends of her nails and then reverses the ritual. Polina notices this as she places her left hand on both of the woman's hands, then reaches for the controls.

PAGE1 yanks K-MUZO's the right foot. The rain in London has finally arrived. The hot floor of the bridge is covered in vapor as big drops of water bounce off every surface. K-MUZO loses his footing as PAGE1 rolls to his right into GEE-LEEZ's feet.

Page's instructions to his little man are simple. "See that car on the cliff?" Alexvale answers, "Yes."

"Steal it!"

Hanibal looks out the window, his ears on the game. The rain has melted the snow. The windows on the car have become clear.

Alexvale follows Page's orders. "Lie down on the bed -- you remember where the car is at?"

Alexvale, on his back, answers, "Yes."

Page flicks a fast combination to block GEE-LEEZ's flying kick as he continues with, "Catch an eagle to the top of the screen, drop to the top of the cliff, get inside the car, and wait for my signal."

The older brother hands his little brother the controls.

The taxi driver straightens his orange turban as he confirms, "This is so, so much excitement." His white teeth shine gleefully while he rubs his hands together.

Ms San Fe keeps still, her breath controlled by Polina, who is holding both her hands while holding the console controls gently with her own right hand.

Hanibal is on the phone to his people, announcing, "We're going to bow out."

LB GEE hears the call. A look of concern comes over his face as he lets his body be carried away to his left, following the controls. On screen he accidentally hits his partner. The backlash is a roundhouse kick from PAGE1. GEE-LEEZ's head goes left and right.

PAGE1 looks up to the car and sees a swooping eagle. PAGE1 grabs for its wing. K-MUZO's kick to the middle of PAGE1's back sends him forward. The wing coming up connects with PAGE1's jaw, sending him backwards to the bridge floor, the rain showering all three. The blood cleans their bodies of dirt and the industrial fluids they seem to drink for the next burst of energy the gauge requires.

Alexvale lies flat on his back. The pillow props up his head so he can see the conditions and the chattels over which he now has control. Page is serious for once. The call from HEX-V'L still makes him smile. "There's two in the air. One will come down when the wind blows from the East."

Kevin feels he's in form. Polina lets go of Ms San Fe's hand. Kevin's lips go tight to say that he is pissed off. Ms San Fe is still fidgeting with the digits. She satisfies the urge and bites one of them, ruining the nail.

LB GEE nods his head slowly as he calmly puts down the controls. Hanibal sits down next to him on the sofa and hands him a cigar.

On screen, PAGE1 is back to his feet. GEE-LEEZ is to his right and K-MUZO is to his left. He decides he's hungry and says, "Thanks for the ticket, guys, but it's time to eat."

GEE-LEEZ brings his head forward to make sense of the nonsense. PAGE1's mouth is around his throat, ripping a chunk of flesh with his teeth. GEE-LEEZ holds where his larynx use to be to vocalize fear, staggering on the spot. PAGE1 takes K-MUZO's fist, which is coming at him from the left, with one hand. The wind is howling as he twists the arm so the elbow and the funny bone dislodge and pierce skin. K-MUZO is in agony. Bending at the knees, he looks up at PAGE1. GEE-LEEZ is dead on the ground. PAGE1 spits the blood and guts, which the wind carries to K-MUZO's face.

Kevin is tight-lipped about the way he feels as puts down the controls. "It's only a game," he says.

Polina agrees, "Yes," as she holds her controls closer to her.

K-MUZO, on one knee, shivers. GEE-LEEZ's blood is all over his face, an arm is half-torn from his body. As PAGE1 kneels down behind him, the words are repeatable: "Look how I make you."

He feels the wind before the bird's claws snag his jacket, taking him up, up and away. K-MUZO slumps to be

still, PAGE1 now being in the clutches of an eagle.

Page says to the boy on the bed, "Should've told me first." He can see the black car from above for the first time.

Hanibal sips on some cognac. He loves the way the cigar smoke swirls. The girls are back in the party. LB is satisfied with his work.

Kevin takes another beer from the mistress. The sun is coming up.

Page sees the way the car is weighted to the back. The eagle lets go and he drops, landing on the roof of the car. He shoots through the roof of the car, four of them. As he rolls to the side the ground up there is dry, but the wind ferocious, though. He requests HEX-V'L to "Open the car." PAGE1 is gone from view.

Polina's face begins to sour. Alexvale has something to say. "He's got a gun, John," but PAGE1 is nowhere to be seen.

The screaming from inside the car drowns the music. The bodies on the Thames are floating downstream to the ocean.

"A man and a woman with a baby in the back seat."

The controls have numbed. Page winds the words from the boy, "Mom, its Mr Hammer." He has a gun. Page's finger is in his ear.

Hanibal is on the phone.

Kevin shrugs his shoulders, gets up, and turns the machine off. Ms San Fe looks up at him, wondering what has made him want to pull the plug. Polina's head comes down, but then she remembers to smile to sell herself. She puts down the controls as Ms San Fe smiles at her.

Page stands up. He takes a cup of tea and finishes it. Alexvale is still on his back, his brother asking him questions.



## CHAPTER 11

Bacon and eggs for everyone, except Alexvale, the odd one out. He smiles at the waitress and asks for "Pancakes and syrup, please."

"Is that meant to impress me?" Page asks.

Alexvale's mother is smiling because she has to. The taxi driver digs into the bacon and the brother butters his toast. Polina is sound asleep.

Page smiles at the headline at the table across the room. He can't yet figure out how his pitch is meant to go. To the phone booth outside the diner he sees a path, and it's clear this time till an old lady and her shopping cart roll on in there. He takes another sip of tea.

Hanibal, on his own in the rental car, can see the turban and Page's unruly hair. The smiling kid must be the one. The car vacates the parking space in front of the diner. Desperate, Hanibal takes the spot. He pulls up and backs in.

In between puffs, the mother notices the guy in the car outside. The older brother is not sure whether to admit he has met the man before. Alexvale is about to start, "HEX-V'L." Page looks at him to let him know it's now a natural thing.

Hanibal fixes his eyes on the younger boy, who LB GEE has said "wasn't the one," as he came down the steps of the house. The villainous smile comes and goes. The psychotic episodes show only in the already deepening creases in the skin around the eyes. Page, LB GEE had advised him not to recruit due to a dodgy past. The mother twirls a strand and Hanibal feels like spitting a mixture of misfortune, detestation, and loss onto the road. He unwinds his window to bring in air.

The taxi driver reminds Page of his machine being in his car and advises him, "Use your cellphone."

Alexvale laughs, "He doesn't know how to."

Page looks at him and laughs to himself, as the old lady is finally finished.

Hanibal predicts the boy's eyes and the way he knows what the waitress is about to do with which hand as he opens the lid of his phone. The message is fuzzy but clear in the depths of Hanibal's brain, which now bursts the bone and makes a migraine the torture that it is. Hanibal shuts the lid, his hands on the wheel. The bending absorbs the sudden shock with which his body is hit. Page stands to leave the table.

Hanibal's hand on the ignition. He turns it backwards as Page picks up the phone. He dials as Alexvale asks the waitress for the toilets.

"This way, young man."

The taxi driver, the mother, and the brother all smile at the hero as he puffs out his chest and follows the way the waitress walks. Page is comfortable with the situation as he waits for the pickup. A double-decker bus on the narrow street crams Hanibal in from opening his door. The door of the toilets closes as Page still waits for someone to answer. The brother recalls the moment his little brother made his magic move in WIPE the FINAL LEVEL. His mother smiles for real as the taxi driver notices a tow truck backing in in front of his legally parked cab.

The orange turban flies past Page waiting on the phone as if it were on a magic carpet, fleeing the diner to ensure his livelihood was still in his possession and not in that of someone wanting to repossess his car. The skinhead with a wheel brace in the palm of his tattooed hand has little to say as he begins to command the hydraulics to perform a snatch.

Page hangs up the phone when he realizes that there is no answer, saying, "One, two, three, four -- five, ouch!" He wants to have a word with the likely looking lad with a weapon in his hand hoisting the front of his ride. Inside the diner, Alexvale must be still in the men's room. There's guy coming their way in his grey suit. The mother sits up straight as the guy enters the building. The brother looks like he's done something wrong already. LB GEE comes to mind and he says, "Wow, that must be the Hanibal Ammer. Wow!"

Page looks around to get a better look. The conversation in his left ear consists of one man begging another one, being a smartass.

The tow truck driver says in his rhythmic native Cockney accent. "Well, it ain't your mot-a is it? If it was, I wouldn't be here with the chariots of fire, would I?"

Page notices the red flames painted on the door of the truck along with the company name in red paint.

The taxi driver, thick in these situations, says his Indian accent, "Please sir -- just let me drive to the taxi office where they will make the payment for me, please."

Page interjects real fast, "Hey, soldier."

The tow truck driver responds, "You talking to me, guv'na?"

"I'm talking to your fucking mother, you fuck. Where's the notice?"

"It's in the truck. You the Bill or something? Or, better still, you the bleeding sponsor?"

"Just get the fucking notice for repossession, you fuck!"

The tow truck driver comes back empty-handed, but he is still determined to take the cab. Footsteps come from behind them now and another American accent is in the mix as Hanibal asks, "How much does he owe on the thing?"

"Three hundred quid and some change."

"Here's three-twenty." Hanibal turns and heads back to the diner.

Page looks at the taxi driver straightening his turban and puts his hand out.

The tow truck driver snaps, "Wot?"

"The change, mate."

Page pockets the money, then gives it to the taxi driver and bids him farewell. The taxi driver wants to come in and thank Hanibal himself, but Page assures him that it won't be necessary and that he will be ready to leave for the airport the next day at 9:00 a.m.

Back inside the diner, the mother's smile is wide across her face, her cleavage as high as the brassiere straps can pull them back. Alexvale and his brother are at a window table talking about the moves. Hanibal and Page

sit amicably over cups of coffee.

"How'd you know he owed money on the car?" Page asks.

"Most of them do," Hanibal replies.

"You going to let her know?"

"Know what?"

Mother smiles at Hanibal and puts in, "You two talking 'bout me?"

"Oh, that," Hanibal replies. "Ah, well, I've met your older boy before. We took him to a hotel room to test him for WIPE."

"Did he behave?"

Page watches the flirtation, smiles, and contemplates his options. Hanibal smiles at him he smiles back, as he sorts out what he has to give Hanibal in return.

Back at the house, Page is resting from the night before. The school has just phoned to see where the boys are and Hanibal is in the backyard smoking and talking on his phone. The mother can see him from the kitchen window. The boys are upstairs playing the Beta Version of WIPE on DVD.

Hanibal picks up the case, which is black with WIPE in plain white boldface font. It had been delivered that morning to Mr John Page, company name etfiction. The tagline is corny and well-suited to the type of idea that WIPE is. His company advises him of the situation, telling him that by midnight that night the Version 2007.01 of the book will be released.

Three o'clock in the afternoon and Page is awake, smoking with Hanibal in the back yard. Hanibal has a beer and Page has coffee. He tastes it and realizes it is sugared to perfection. He smiles at Hanibal and Hanibal smiles back at him.

"Know this great club," Page says as he takes a drag. "Got to fly out at 8:00 a.m."

Inside the bar are K-MUZO, GEE LEEZ, PLAZ- S-O-MANTIC, O-LO GRAM and L-SOMASTIC, the 23-year-old nurse in her wonderfully fitted uniform. The bar staff are all dressed as their favorite character. The screen and soundtrack play WIPE and the patrons are also in costume. Hanibal and the real PAGE1, still in drag, sit, summarize, accept, and commiserate. Well, one of them does as the other plays the empathetic nobody.

Page, parting his baby mo with his nicotine-stained fingers, says, "So -- a whistle blower, huh?"

"It's about all I can do now," Hanibal tells him.

"Got a couple of names for you."

Hanibal throws back a bourbon and then the remaining dregs of a pint. Page follows suit as Hanibal is on the way to the bar. Hanibal finally arrives back at the table with more drinks. Page understands why the double agent doesn't ever win, and is thankful that he was given a heart well-rounded at the two tops and sharply pointed at the bottom for when he was required to stab victims where they always needed to be stabbed.

Hanibal asks him, "How did you get the jump on all of us?"

"Working at a node monitoring company in LA."

Page thinks of the environment at the house if the drifter were to hang around in the hope that Alexvale would one day open up to someone. Page excuses himself from the table.

The house is dark. Page finds the key under the doormat. Hanibal, back at the bar, will soon realize that he is gone. He takes the key and opens the door.

Downstairs in front of the TV, Alexvale says, "They're all asleep."

Page nods his head and takes a seat next to the little man.

Alexvale is soon safely tucked into his bed, but before Page turns out his light and TV set he has to ask the little soldier, "Think of the person you like the most in this whole wide world -- who is it?"

"Polina."

Page finds the spare pillow in the dark and turns out the lights.

## CHAPTER 12

The taxi driver pulled up on time, his machine inside the trunk. He applies the seat belt in the passenger seat as he clicks the thing. The FM band is crammed, so he manually tunes it to a station. He waits for "Now", then tips the button with baby-breath weight. Robbie Williams waves to him on the last ride through old London town and across the bridge. The Thames flows its way to the North Sea. He looks at the driver, who looks in the rearview mirror.

Hanibal drives the mother and the brother in his rented car. Page looks around to wave at Hanibal. Alexvale is in the back seat of the cab. Page can see the orange of a turban on the head of a boy like Alexvale riding atop a tractor, but brings in his mind. He asks Alexvale, "You okay?"

The little boy is sad that his hero is about to fly away on a big Boeing.

"You had that look upon your face." The radio says what we cannot utter when we see him face-to-face. A stadium in Moscow comes aglow with lighters as their princess becomes a part of the West -- not a defection, but a peace offering.

Page sits as the red light changes. Thinking of others, he gives the cameras one more to savor and says to the driver, "Drop me off here, do one lap of the airport parking lot, turn the radio up loud, and look like Lazoo."

The cab about to take off when the driver flicks the trunk, popping the machine out and onto his shoulder. The driver looks back at Page, who signals with his hand for him to slow down. Page then waves at Hanibal to follow the cab, the Nissan, the rental car, and now a double-decker bus, a Big Mac truck, an ice cream van, a tow-truck with flames, and a luggage puller freed from the runway towing three carts filled with luggage. Page recognizes a bag as he looks over his shoulder into the terminal.

The orange turban bright, Alexvale sticks his head out of the window, putting his chin on his hands. The tow truck driver has the loudest system, its woofers giving the kick. At three miles per hour, the Big Mac truck still puffs. The tourists on the top floor of the double-decker sing along with "I saw you standing there ..."

Advertising Space. Page smiles at Branson on the side of the bus. He promises he will give to his cause. The cars coming through the barrier join the procession. Hanibal smiles at the ending he could not see. Kevin stands at the conveyer belt. Further up are Ms San Fe, Santana, the brown shoes, white socks, pleated skirt, and a woolen top.

The ideas guy fires up the engines as Le Mac gives the go-ahead and the writer finishes it off. Polina is turning.

Kevin shrugs his shoulders at the empty conveyer belt. A light whiter than light itself flashes. Then the entire complex and its surrounding districts flash black, red, green-red, orange, green, orange, green-red, and then green-green-green. The children smile as their mothers give thanks and are satisfied that they too be named "Man" till the end of time.

In the top deck of the double-decker, its fans' scarves stay the way they were. The orderly but fantastically colored line of vehicles and their passengers still promenades. Alexvale's arm scratches his locks.

The announcer on the airport speakers and in the cars announces in a familiar voice, "The world spins on a particular axis. Your hearts are aligned is an equator. The sun is in his eyes. The rain sometimes does come from Spain."

Kevin's shoulders are still up in the air. LB Gee's back is heading for gate AMD.

Santina's walk is quiet. She grabs Polina's hand as Page looks to see her for the first time.

The announcer's last words are, "Thank you for your time."

Page can hear the needle put to a record.

Polina wishes for her favorite song. She is skipping. The doors open.

"Again, again, again."

The door of the rented vehicle closes. The mother turns to see where her boy has escaped to, his legs running, his shoes splashing his way through the puddles.

The top of the double-decker is alive. An Australia contingent in Yellow and Gold know the song. Page sees him coming from in front of him, over his shoulder. Polina's skipping has become a sprint. Santina secures her hand bag as she quickens her step. The bus passes behind the running boy. Kevin throws his arms up in the air and then kicks their place where their luggage should be. Page sees the top of her head as it passes him. He catches a hand coming next to his and holds it tight. They watch Polina run. Alexvale's curls fly straight in his wind.

Santina says, "I'm falling in love again."

THE END

---

A free ebook from <http://manybooks.net/>