

# NEW LEAF

## *The English Cooperative Review*

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THE HIGH PRIESTESS

## The Greatest Survey on Earth

For years, magicians, palm readers, and psychics have been using techniques such as Cold Reading, Shot Gunning, Barnum Statements, and the Rainbow Ruse in order to make their “acts” more believable. P.T Barnum was born in 1810 in Bethel, Connecticut and moved to New York where he started his career. He was known as a “promotion king,” and then opened “Barnum’s American Museum” in 1841 in Manhattan. In 1871 Barnum then created a traveling circus and referred to it as “The Greatest Show on Earth.” This circus introduced the beginning of the coined “Barnum effect.” “The Barnum effect is named after P.T. Barnum,” as he claimed that “there’s a sucker born every minute” (Psych Fullerton).

The “Barnum Effect, also called [the] Forer Effect, in psychology, [it is] the phenomenon that occurs when individuals believe that personality descriptions apply specifically to them (more so than to other people), despite the fact that the description is actually filled with information that applies to everyone” (Britannica). P.T. Barnum claimed that there’s a “sucker” born every minute, and this is what caused the Barnum statement to be coined. Barnum often discussed about how people are generally gullible, and this is part of the reason why his circus was so successful and continues to be.

In 1949 professor Forer “gave personality tests to his students, ignored their answers, and gave each student an identical evaluation. They were asked to evaluate the description from 0 to 5, with 5 meaning the recipient felt the description was an ‘excellent’ evaluation and 4 meaning the assessment was good” (Furnham). The passage was as follows:

You have a need for other people to like and admire you, and yet you tend to be critical of yourself. While you have some personality weaknesses you are generally able to compensate for them. You have considerable unused capacity that you have not turned to your advantage. Disciplined and self-controlled on the outside, you tend to be worrisome and insecure on the inside. At times you have serious doubts

as to whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing. You prefer a certain amount of change and variety and become dissatisfied when hemmed in by restrictions and limitations. You also pride yourself as an independent thinker; and do not accept others' statements without satisfactory proof. But you have found it unwise to be too frank in revealing yourself to others. At times you are extroverted, affable, and sociable, while at other times you are introverted, wary, and reserved. Some of your aspirations tend to be rather unrealistic (Paranormal Encyclopedia).

“The class average evaluation was 4.26” (Furnham). This average proved that people are gullible, and mostly accepted all general statements that they thought were about just themselves. Forer had created this description from a collection of horoscopes, which is another type of reading that people fall for. Forer further stated that “people tend to accept claims about themselves in proportion to their desire that the claims be true rather than in proportion to the empirical accuracy of the claims as measured by some non-subjective standard (Furnham). In addition, after doing this study, Professor Forer suggested that his students had a tendency to accept positive feedback more frequently than negative. “People tend to accept claims about themselves in proportion to their *desire* that the claims be true rather than in proportion to the empirical accuracy of the claims as measured by some non-subjective standard” (Carroll).

Present day psychics such as Derren Brown continue to use these techniques in order to trick their customers. Cold reading “enables you to make complete strangers believe that you know a lot about them, even though you have never met them before” (Secrets Explained). Shot Gunning is a “technique in which the cold reader offers a large amount of very general statements and then waits for the response of the “subject.” If this subject’s response is positive, the reader continues and expands his statement” (Secrets Explained). The Rainbow Ruse, also used by cold readers, is a “statement which simply can’t be wrong, but still sounds like a very convincing description of the subject’s personality. The reader simultaneously attributes two opposite personality traits to the subject, leaving him or her unable to deny the statement” (Secrets Explained).

Derren was born in London England, and studied Law and German at the University of Bristol. During his time as a college student he “witnessed a show performed by hypnotist Martin Taylor, which inspired [him] to pursue magic and hypnosis” (All About Magicians). Derren began touring around the UK, performing, and has also written four books on magic: “Absoltue Magic,” “Pure Effect,” “Tricks of the Mind,” and “Confessions of a Conjuror” (All About Magicians). Now he has many vides on YouTube of his performances, and records mini series’ on there as well.

In his YouTube videos, Derren Brown asks groups of people to put an item of theirs along with a drawing of their hand into a numbered envelope while he shuts his eyes. After the envelopes are mixed up and given back to Darren he states that he will be back in an hour with descriptions of every individual person based on the two items in the envelope. After the hour passes, Derren returns the envelopes to the group and they reach read their three-page description. Those participating stated that the description Derren wrote about them was 80% correct or higher. Derren then revealed that he wrote the exact same description for each of them and they were shocked. They felt that the descriptions were so specific about them that they had no idea that it was a generalization. Derren used the Rainbow Ruse statements so that he couldn’t be wrong, and this proved to work on the several different groups of people he tested on.

I have always been fascinated with magicians and illusionist, and after seeing Derren Brown’s success, I decided to conduct my own experiment where I created a survey that asked college students a series of 10 questions as opposed to giving a description like Forer and Derren did. Psychosis didn’t play a huge part in this experiment because I didn’t give the participants a huge description of their personalities and I didn’t play off of their reactions. I simply created an experiment that utilized rainbow ruse and Barnum statements to see how gullible people are, and if I could get the same “4.26” result that Forer did.

I created a Survey Monkey, and posted the link on my Facebook page, asking for college students to participate in my survey. I was happily surprised to have 32 participants. Within the survey I asked these students to evaluate these descriptions from 0 to 5, where 0 meant the

description didn't apply to them at all (they strongly disagreed) and 5 meant the recipient felt the description definitely applied to them (they strongly agreed). My questions (descriptions) were as follows:

1. I am dedicated to my studies, however, often times procrastinate.
2. I am excited to be on my own in college, yet sometimes I wish my parents were still close when I needed them.
3. I am excited for what the future holds, but I am nervous about life after college.
4. I miss my friends from home, but I have made so many new friends in college.
5. I sometimes suffer from sleep deprivation due to homework and college life, but receive plentiful amounts of sleep when finally given the opportunity.
6. I am always excited for a break from school, but when the break occurs I often miss my college life.
7. I often eat unhealthily, but go out to eat a lot.
8. I am eager to be involved on campus, but I'm also afraid of rejection.
9. I want to make good grades, but I don't always give my school work as much effort as I could.
10. I often question what my future holds, and wonder if I'm making the right decisions in college.

After analyzing my results, I discovered that the average of question 1 was 4.4, question 2 was 3.6, question 3 was 4.4, question 4 was 3.5, question 5 was 4.2, question 6 was 3.7, question 7 was 3.3, question 8 was 3.2, question 9 was 3.7, and question 10 was 4.1. This results in the overall average being 3.81 which means that overall, college students that answered my survey felt somewhere between neutral and agreement of the statements that I made. To find these statistics I multiplied the rating of each question by how many people picked that rating, and then added all of those numbers up, individually, per question, and then divided them by the number of

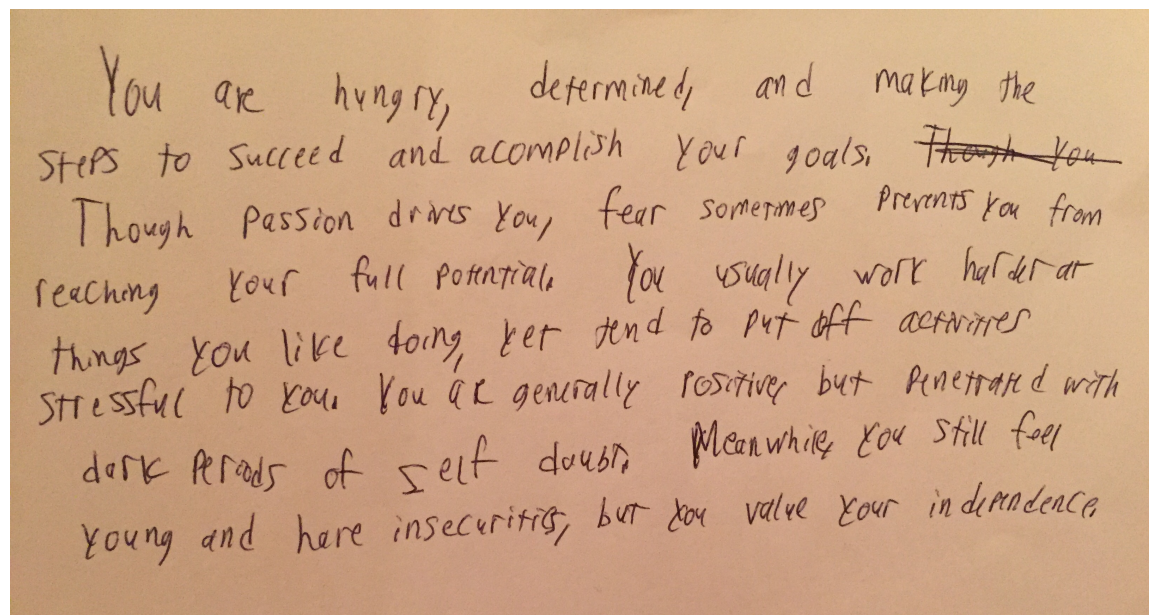
participants (32). Then, to find the overall average, I added up all of the averages together per question and divided by 10 (my number of questions).

The participants were completely anonymous, so I have no idea what year in college they are, or what gender. However, I analyzed each student's response individually, and to my surprise, none of the participants had the same answer for every single question, or even all "Agree" and "Strongly Agree." I expected that maybe students that selected neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree, would only select those throughout the entire process, however, I was incorrect and it completely varied.

The ten descriptions I put on Survey Monkey are mostly modeled after "rainbow ruse" statements, which are described as simply not being able to be wrong because they present two opposite personality traits within the same statement. When I created my descriptions I believed that like Forer's experiment I would also have results that showed that college students mostly agreed or strongly agreed with my statements, but I was incorrect. I'm unsure if my results were a little weaker because I didn't pick statements that actually apply to all college students, or if it was because I neglected to use "positive" character traits as Forer had suggested. Most of the traits I listed were negative and people probably didn't *want* to strongly agree with them because who wants to admit that they hold character traits that aren't considered "good?" I do think, however, that if "neutral" wasn't an option, my results would have been a little higher as I feel that the student participants would have rather selected "agree" instead of "disagree" for a majority of the descriptions.

In addition, I used the free version of Survey Monkey, which only allowed for me to create 10 questions; maybe if I had included 20 questions as opposed to 10, my results may have been more positive and closer to the results that Forer received. In addition, allowing only college students to answer my survey narrowed my subject pool, and I think that I could create different types of relatable descriptions if I wasn't just focusing on students that attend college. In addition, I could create descriptions that were based more on character traits than actions.

After doing this survey test, I furthered my research by replicating Derren Brown's test in the freshman seminar class I TA for. I had five students volunteer to participate, and told them that they would be tracing their hand, and placing it along with a personal item inside of a blank envelope. The five freshman students were instructed to go outside while I would use some sort of psychic practice to write a description about the person belonging to each envelope. Once the students left, the entire class worked together to come up with rainbow ruse statements that would apply to all college freshmen. We selected seven statements that the class created and put them together to create one statement. I had students recreate this statement five times to put in the envelopes, and we then asked the students whom were outside to come back into the classroom and retrieve their envelope. The description was as follows:

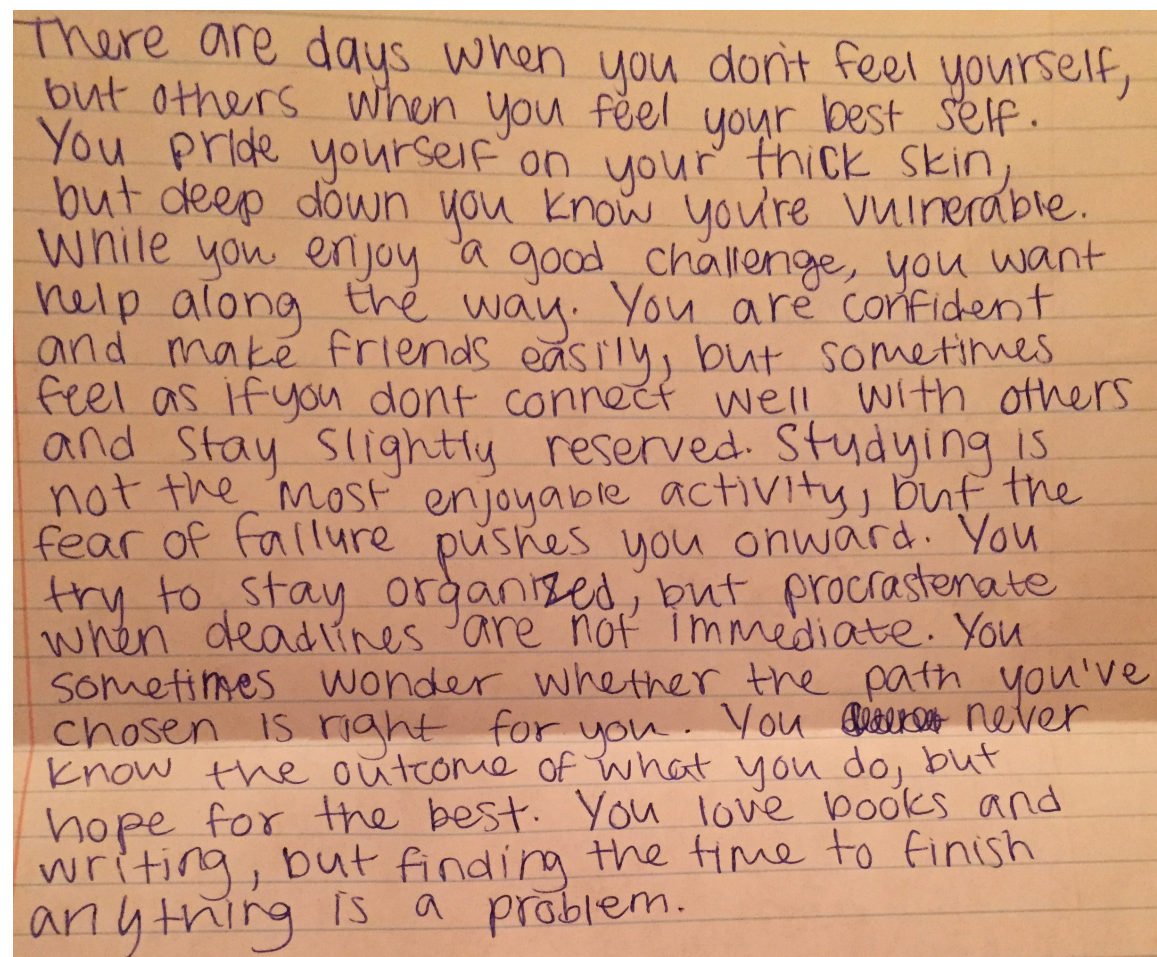


You are hungry, determined, and making the steps to succeed and accomplish your goals. ~~Though you~~ Though passion drives you, fear sometimes prevents you from reaching your full potential. You usually work harder at things you like doing, yet tend to put off activities stressful to you. You are generally positive but penetrated with dark periods of self doubt. Meanwhile you still feel young and have insecurities, but you value your independence.

Once the five students read their description, I heard many of them say “oh my gosh, this is so much like me. I’ve seen this type of things before, but I never knew this could be so personal.” I asked each student if they could rate the accuracy of the description on a scale of 1-5, what would they rate it? Two of the students rated the accuracy a 5, two rated it a 4, and one rated it a 4.5. This resulted in a class average of 4.5, which is higher than Forer’s 3.4. Once they read their descriptions, I urged them not to read each other’s, and instead of explaining what happened, I showed them the Derren Brown video where he performed the same experiment. Upon realizing

that each of the five students received the same description, four of them were shocked. I believe that the only reason one of them wasn't surprised was because he had seen the video before. After the video was complete I asked the five students how they felt now that they knew they all had the same description. One of the students said that she had a positive outlook on this experiment, and she had felt that it was real because it was personal and more specific than horoscopes and other experiments like this typically are. Another student says that he felt angry and tricked, because he also felt that it was very personal and specific to him, and now he doesn't believe in psychics, magicians, clairvoyants, or palm readers. The other three students had a pretty positive outlook on the experiment, thought it was enjoyable, and found it interesting.

Professor Barnes repeated this experiment for me in another one of his English classes, and this is the statement that the class came up with as a description:



There are days when you don't feel yourself, but others when you feel your best self. You pride yourself on your thick skin, but deep down you know you're vulnerable. While you enjoy a good challenge, you want help along the way. You are confident and make friends easily, but sometimes feel as if you don't connect well with others and stay slightly reserved. Studying is not the most enjoyable activity, but the fear of failure pushes you onward. You try to stay organized, but procrastinate when deadlines are not immediate. You sometimes wonder whether the path you've chosen is right for you. You ~~never~~ never know the outcome of what you do, but hope for the best. You love books and writing, but finding the time to finish anything is a problem.



In that particular class, one student rated the description a 3 on accuracy, one student rated it a 3.75, one rated it a 4.25, one rated a 4.5, and the last rated the accuracy a 5. The average of these ratings was a 4.1, only .1 of a point lower than the previous class I tested.

After completing both a rainbow ruse survey with ten individual questions and a full rainbow ruse “psychic” description. My description test was a lot more effective and successful than my survey with individual questions. I think this is because the students were lead to believe that they were receiving their own personal description when they traced their hands, but in the survey the descriptions were broken up one by one and were done virtually so it was less personal overall. I think that doing an experiment in person leads individuals to believe that what is happening is actually real, as opposed to taking a survey online that is impersonal. After doing this project I can now say that I have a better understanding of how psychics, clairvoyants, and palm readers perform. I wouldn't say that I feel tricked or deceived, because in a way I've always felt that these individuals were doing something extra to be successful, but I still have hope that few individuals have some sort of natural ability.

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## Scientology Interviews: Husband and Wife Disagree

Is Scientology, the organization created by L.Ron Hubbard, a religion? Scientology considers itself to be a religion, and the United States government agreed until recently when the IRS refused to classify the organization as a religion for tax purposes. I interviewed two former Scientologists who had polarizing experiences with this organization which led to different interpretations of how they believed Scientology should be classified. Both joined to repair their marriage. Unfortunately, this did not happen and the wife left Scientology before the husband. The following anonymous interviews from a husband and wife offer a contrastive perspective on whether Scientology is a religion or a scam. According to the husband, Scientology is a religion that requires one to make donations to advance spiritually. The higher the amount the higher and faster participants can progress to potentially help themselves succeed. Scientology, by his account, assisted him with this process:

It's just like when you make donations to the church, you know you can make donations to any religion, Scientology takes those donations and helps you progress to what they call the bridge. It's a higher level of understanding. [...] With most religions you donate without having any thoughts of what you get in return. With Scientology, that's the difference. [...] If you don't make the donations they will not give you the services you need. They're connected differently than most religions.

The wife had the opposite experience. She joined to try and fix her marriage, but unknowingly

signed up for harassment for the next twenty years. She confided that, "It's been since 1996 that I went (to a Scientology session). They will still call me, and I will tell them not to call me. They will send me mail and I'll send it back. I can be ugly to them, and they still keep calling." When she parted ways with Scientology, it was not amicable:

I just left. I didn't tell them anything. They told me to go outside and look around. When I got outside I thought I'm not going back in there. I must have had a cell phone, because I don't know how else I would have called my friends. I told my friends get here, get here fast. I'm leaving. I told them where I'd be. They (scientologists) would have tried to talk me into staying.

In contrast, the husband defends Scientology's portrayal by the media. He contends that the reason that the public views Scientology as a scam is because the media is not accurately portraying the religion. He argues:

The media is sort of down on Scientology, sort of like politics today and the media is skewed with politics and it's the same thing it is with Scientology. I would say that the reason the media did that is because Scientology, a lot of times, will expose those things with the government and the media that's not true. And so, basically, the media really wants to find anything they can wrong with Scientology. And that's the problem; Scientology to them is a threat to the government.

The wife felt that the media is, for the most part, correct. It is not a religion, but a business whose primary focus is money. When she had no money left to give they became nasty and accusatory. The full (polar and polarizing) interview is below.

## Scientology Interviews

Wife- "I don't trust them, so I don't know about recording me, really.

Me- They'll have no way of knowing it's you, I promise, it's 100% anonymous.

Me- Can you tell me how you became interested in scientology, and the membership process you went through.

Wife- I was really never interested in it. My ex-husband got me into it and um I was basically doing it because he wanted to, and I really never liked it. I don't know what I can say good about them.

Me- How did you and your husband find out about scientology, and initially join?

Wife- He read the book Dianetics on the way to Hawaii, and that was probably in '96, and that's how he started getting involved in it.

Me- How long were you members?

Wife- Ummm, I don't know how long he was a member. We got divorced in '96, and I think he was still involved in it, but I wasn't.

Me- In 1993 Scientology was ruled a religion by the IRS, but in reading Dianetics, I got the impression that it is more of a therapy process, so do you believe it is more of a therapy or religion?

Wife- It's more therapy.

Me- And you didn't find it helpful? You didn't think that it worked?

Wife- It was somewhat helpful as far as what you react to, but to me, I tried, but I just couldn't. They wanted money, and it was just very expensive.

Me- How does that work? Did you donate the money? Did you have to pay to get to different levels? Did you have to pay per session?

Wife- You pay per session. It was called a bridge program, and you would have to go through the bridge program, and you paid money each time you went per session. Like 1,300. One day we gave them 15,000, and it was just a lot of money. The last time I went I was going through the divorce and I was just searching for everything to try to help myself, because I really had a hard time with it, and I went over to Atlanta and two of my friends let me off there. They wanted me to go in the office and they were trying to get money. I called my friends and I told them to come and get me, and I basically just snuck out of the place because I thought they weren't going to let me go. And I just got in the car and drove, I mean I got out of Atlanta the fastest you could ever get out of Atlanta. I was out of there and I never went back. They still contact me and send letters and I just throw it in the trash. I don't have a good feeling about it.

Me- For the people that only know what the media portrays, how could you describe scientology to them?

Wife- I would describe it as something you don't want to get involved in. I basically just think its money; I think they just want your money. And I think that they are, I mean I think that my opinion of them is not good.

Me- Have you, or anyone you've known, reached clear?

Wife- I think my ex-husband may have reached clear, I didn't.

Me- The relationship between the auditor and the auditee seems strictly professional. Is it hard to be friends with someone after they've been working on uncovering your personal memories?

Wife- No, not really. I didn't really have a friendship with them. We had to drive to see these people.

Me- That's an awful lot of money for each session. I can't imagine that there are people who are able to afford doing something like this.

Wife- I don't have a good opinion of it at all.

Me- It was mentioned in the going clear documentary that the auditing sessions are recorded, were you aware of that?

Wife- I don't remember that, I can't remember. It's been since 1996 that I went. They will still call me and I will tell them not to call me. They will send me mail and I'll send it back. I can be ugly to them, and they still keep calling.

Me- Now, you've never been a fan of scientology, but what was the last thing that made you officially decide that you were going to leave. You were going through your divorce, was there some big event that happened in scientology that made you think that it was not for you and you needed to get out?

Wife- Well it was the last time that I went there. They wanted more money, and I wasn't giving them any more money. I just decided I didn't want to do it anymore.

Me- Did you tell them that you were going to leave?

Wife- I just left. I didn't tell them anything. They told me to go outside and look around. When I got outside I thought I'm not going back in there. I must have had a cell phone, because I don't know how else I would have called my friends. I told my friends get here, get here fast. I'm leaving. I told them where I'd be. They (scientologists) would have tried to talk me into staying.

Me- What did your friends think about you being in Scientology? How did they feel about it?

Wife- They thought it was crazy. They knew the reason I was in it.

Me- If you could tell anyone about Scientology what would you say?

Wife- I would just tell them to leave it alone; it's not going to help you.

Me- Do you think that celebrities like Tom Cruise will ever leave Scientology? What's the purpose in them staying?

Wife- I think you have to be searching for something that I wasn't ever searching for. I was trying to keep my marriage together, and that was basically why I did it.

Wife- I just got out of cancer treatments last year, and if I had been in Scientology I wouldn't have been allowed to have treatments because they don't believe in that, psychiatrists or psychologists. They think if you get sick it's because you're out of ethics. They think that's the reason you get cancer or anything you get.

Husband:

Me- can you tell me how you first became interested in scientology, and what was the membership process you encountered?

Husband- I became interested in Scientology because I was having challenges with my family and I wanted to get counseling and Scientology seemed to have a real solid approach for the issues I was dealing with. So I started reading about it, and initially I didn't become a member. Initially I just read about Scientology and I thought it was good. So, later when me and my wife were about done I told her that I really believe that if we get some counseling with the church of Scientology that there will be a chance that we can make it. That's how I became interested in Scientology.

Me- Did you just show up at one of the centers and tell them that you were interested in their services? How does that work?

Husband- What I did was, once I had read about it, and my wife agreed to go, I tried to find a place for us to go to. I was referred to the Atlanta Scientology Organization, and that was in 1989. That's what we did. We went over to the, they call it the Atlanta Organization for Scientology, and that's where I went and I got uh, we both got counseling.

Me- How long were you members of Scientology?

Husband- Well, probably, uh, '89 until probably, I was active off and on, but 1989 until 2003.

Me- So you really had a strong bond with them (Scientology)

Husband- Well, I did because once I went to counseling, I discovered some things about my life that I didn't understand. [...] It saved my marriage and my business.

Me- You would describe Scientology as a therapy and not as a religion, necessarily

Husband- Well, it's both; when you go to any kind of church you can get counseling, if you have an issue with your family or anything else. So, I look at it as spiritual counseling.

Me- Could you describe Scientology for those who only know what the media portrays?

Husband- Yes, I can. The media is sort of down on Scientology, sort of like politics today and the media is skewed with politics and it's the same thing it is with Scientology. I would say that the reason the media did that is because Scientology, a lot of times, will expose those things with the government and the media that's not true. And so, basically, the media really wants to find anything they can wrong with Scientology. And that's the problem; is that Scientology to them is a threat to the government.

Me- Have you, or anyone that you've known, reached clear?

Husband- I know some people that have reached clear, but I didn't reach clear. I came close, but I fell short.

Me- I've read that Scientology does a lot with charity, and when you donate money you also go up in levels, is that true?

Husband- It's just like when you make donations to the church, you know you can make donations to any religion, Scientology takes those donations and helps you progress to what they call the bridge. It's a higher level of understanding. [...] With most religions you donate without having any thoughts of what you get in return. With Scientology, that's the difference. [...] If you don't make the donations they will not give you the services you need. They're connected differently than most religions.

Me- Is there a set amount of how much you're supposed to donate?

Husband- It depends on the services you want to get, is how much you donate.

Me- Is there a minimum amount?

Husband- Well it depends, that's where they explain that to you. There's two ways to approach your services. You can actually study and have someone else that doesn't have enough money to actually work through it with you. You can actually audit each other. Or you can actually, if you're a business person, and don't really want to go through the slow process, you can actually have someone that has been trained in Scientology to give you a faster route to your abilities. That's where I took it. I decided to go the faster route and I paid more money than most people because I was a business person.

Me- And in that instance, you prospered in your business, from getting this help.

Husband- Well, I'll tell you something that someone asked me, when I was trying to decide how much I would spend, and I basically asked: why is this so expensive to get the results that I want to get and they said "Well, how much is your life worth?" I said: well my life is worth millions because I believe I have abilities to do a lot of good things in business. They said, "okay well what difference does it make to spend 100,000 if you think it's (your life) is worth millions." I said okay I got your point, and I moved forward.

Me- So what happens if you don't get that return back though?

Husband- Its really up to the individual. They have to make that decision themselves. They might say I'm not willing to do the work to get where I want to go and they go negative and that's what you read about in the media a lot. You have two ways to do it. You can either do it by paying for it [...] or you can actually find people in the organization. You can do it either way, it's just slower if you have to do it with somebody that's not trained.

[...]

Husband- When you go through the counseling in Scientology, you won't feel the same way anymore. You don't look at things the same way anymore. That really disturbs people, especially family members. The person might be better off because the family members might actually be playing games that would trap them in an emotional cycle that was not good. So basically, the family members get upset and they start to challenge it. [...] People are questioning what Scientology is doing. They're thinking that their loved one has gone crazy and is trapped in this cult. And to circumvent, it's understandable that they would see it that way. But, that didn't happen to me. I can only tell you that it's a challenge sometimes for family members that are really sensitive and they don't want their loved ones to be involved. Of course, I had a lot of questions about what I was doing, but the results I got were pretty phenomenal.

Me- So you would say that your friends and family were supportive of you and Scientology?

Husband- Well, they were, but they always questioned it and I always had to answer questions about it. So I didn't have to go through RPF, I just had to answer questions about what I was doing because even back then there were always issues about "we heard crazy things about Scientology. What are you doing? Have you gone crazy?" So they just watched me and most of them determined that I was okay, but the same stories from that time are the same stories you hear about now.

Me- The relationship between the auditor and the auditee seems strictly professional, when I read about it in Dianetics, is it hard to be friends with someone after working with them in that kind of setting?

Husband- It's a professional relationship. You're not friends with him, but I'm sure people can. But hopefully, [...] he can get you the desired results you're looking for, but you don't really have a friendship in that relationship.

Me- I've heard that the auditing sessions are recorded, is this true?

Husband- I'm trying to remember; they may have been. To be honest with you, I can't remember. It's possible they were.

Me- Do you feel that more people are now pulling away from Scientology, then previously?

Husband- Yeah, I think so. I think there's a shift away from it because of the amount of money that it costs to be in Scientology. Most people really don't have that kind of income.

Me- Do you mind, telling me how much exactly it is to go through the sessions or the fast route?

Husband- The fast route is about, well it depends on what you're really trying to accomplish, but you could spend 100,000 pretty quickly. I'd say within a period of six months to a year you could get 100,00 worth of auditing and that would be the donation you gave to the church.

Me- It seems during this conversation, that you've had a pretty positive experience with Scientology, why did you leave?

Husband- Well because I went as far as I could with them and then I ran into a road block. I went so far with them and I wanted to go clear so I decided that I would take the funds that I had left and I would go for what they call the training route. That's what we talked about earlier when two people train each other. When I tried to do that I ran into a problem. I ran into a problem and I could not accomplish, so it was like I ran into a dead end. Basically, I didn't get any further with it. But I was happy with it at that point because I really turned my business around and turned my marriage around. But, when I went back and tried to do it that way, and I wasn't going to say it was anybody's fault but mine. It could have been something I did wrong. All I know is that it just didn't work.

Me- What was it like leaving; how does that process work?

Husband- It's not a matter of leaving, it's just of matter of deciding: hey I can't spend any more money and I can't go any further with this because my funds were exhausted. Pretty



much, they didn't want me to stop, but I just didn't have the funds to continue. It didn't work out the way I thought it should so I basically just didn't continue with it.

Me- Are you still in contact with anyone in Scientology?

Husband- Oh yeah! [...]

Me- Do you ever see yourself rejoining?

Husband- Not at this point because I never resolved the issue [...] I never went through training. I went through the auditing part. It was pretty effective. But as far as the training, that takes a lot of work. I think a lot of my problem was, that I really didn't have the time to do that because you really have to dedicate yourself almost 4-5 times the level you do with being audited.

Me- How often would you go to the center in Atlanta?

Husband- I would probably go at least once a week.

Me- If someone was considering joining Scientology, what advice would you give them?

Husband- I would tell them that they should be prepared financially to go the fast route. Or be prepared to dedicate yourself to do a lot of studying if they're going through the training route. And being a business person, I really didn't have the luxury to spend that much time with the training part of it. I would have to shut down what I was doing. So it just depends on the individual. They will get results; it just depends on if they're willing to pay the price. They have to pay the price with their money. They have to pay the price with their time.

Me- You hear a lot of times that people who leave scientology are being harassed; do you see that as an actual problem

Husband- The people that leave want to complain about Scientology. One thing for me, I got good results when I was there and I wasn't happy with the results when I was trying to train but that was I think my responsibility so I didn't complain about it. Some people [...] can get harassed by them.

Me- There are big named people like Tom Cruise that support Scientology, but there have been rumors about him leaving. Do you think people that high up and high profiled will ever leave Scientology?

Husband- Well it's hard to think about them leaving because Tom Cruise for example got really fantastic results. You can see his track record of what he's done. A lot of those people like that are not likely to turn on Scientology because they know, just like myself, that there's a lot of good things, but at the same time there's a point where they have to decide how much time they're going to give to it.

Me- Is there anything else you can think of that I should know about Scientology?

Husband- no, I think I tried to be honest with you about how it works. I can tell you fortunately for me, just like Tom Cruise, I had a major advance in my business career from the technology that I learned from Scientology.

Husband- I want to tell you one more thing, this sticks out in my mind very vividly. You know I said I went because of my marriage as well as my business, but I had an experience one time, and this is part of the auditing experience, and my parents... I had some real anger issues with the way my parents got along. I didn't really know how to deal with that. I was always upset about it as I grew up. Once I got to this counseling session I realized that it had affected my own family, my own marriage and my own child. I had probably been going to Scientology for about between six months and a year. One day I was in this auditing session and the counselor, he was asking me questions about issues that had happened in my lifetime. And it was sort of strange because a lot of times I couldn't see clearly. But he asked me a question one day and I realized that the fights my parents were having was because of me. In other words, when they would fight or disagree it was because of me being part of that relationship. And so once I saw that I started laughing. All at once I saw what the problem was, that I really couldn't be part of their marriage or their solution. And when I did I started

laughing; I couldn't stop laughing. [...] After that happened, I went back home to my parents and every time they tried to get me involved in their arguments I would just laugh at them and tell them "you guys don't understand what you're doing" and after that my parents started going to church and getting along alright and I never had any more problems with them. It was remarkable because I would have never been able to see that on my own and that's really what auditing is. Auditing is really trying to get you to see something yourself because unless you see it, no one else can tell you what to do or what to think. You have to see it and make the decision on your own. And that's really the power of Scientology, is that the decision you make and not what someone else tells you to make. So anyways, I learned a lot of technology in the process of how to deal with my business. My business multiplied tenfold after I learned some of the key elements of Scientology. I have to say I really got a lot of good out of it.

## Encomium of Voodoo

The art of Voodoo is not just geometrical patterns drawn for design or pure art. There is a history to these mystical symbols, and real power is believed in behind their meanings. This paper aims to provide a rhetorical analysis of the images and symbols used in voodoo practice. Voodoo's inception and movements through history will be explored to provide some background on the symbols used for voodoo rites and ceremonies.

The word Voodoo, when broken down, means the introspection of the unknown or the mystery. It has been practiced as a religion for longer than some other faiths. Voodoo has been seen in ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptian, Assyrian, and Ethiopian cultures. This religion is just like many others; there is a belief in how the world was formed, the human soul, and what happens after death. Practitioners of Voodoo believe that loved ones depart to the resting place of their ancestors, within the stars. As a group of ancestor-worshippers, this may be why Voodoo practice is known as the Cult of the Dead. The dead are believed to manifest and exhibit their own power, and so there is a deification process. In the Voodoo religion, there are priests and priestesses but there is not a hierarchy like in Catholic traditions. Instead of the structure and rigidity involved when interpreting Catholic religion, the leaders of Voodoo religion have more flexibility and are free to interpret as they see fit. This may cause a lack of uniformity when looking at Voodoo as a religion, but that is simply a part of its history.

Voodoo today is the culmination of several African tribes, mixed with Roman Catholic or Christian beliefs. Before their lives as slaves, several tribes performed their own rites to the voodoo gods (called Loas). To each tribe, the rites were unique even though all tribes served the same gods. These gods follow similar characteristics and domains as the Greek gods and goddesses. The favorite Voodoo god is Legba, the gatekeeper of the worlds and protector of the crossroads. Typically referred to as Papa Legba, he is the god that begins all ceremonies and rites, as well as the ending. The most well-known and powerful of the gods is Damballah, the creator of the world

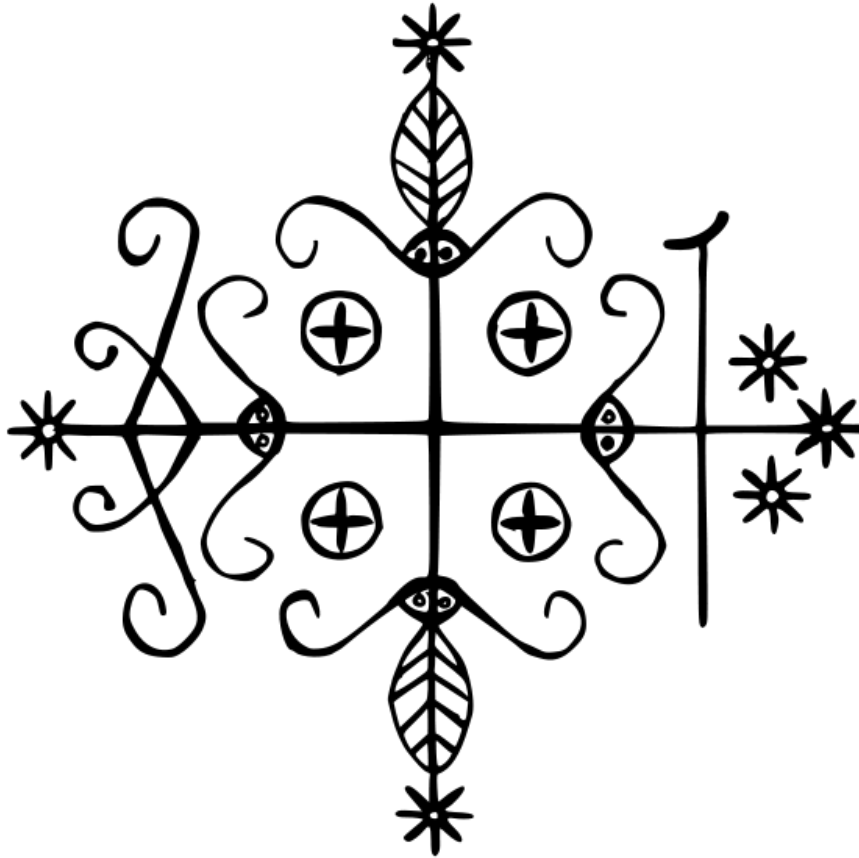
and human beings. There is a goddess of love, Erzulie, who has three husbands but still has affairs with the other gods. Another, often called the Voodoo Hercules, is called Ogun who represents the god of war, politics, and technology. These are some of the main deities, but there are several more that fall into different categories, or families.

As slavery of the African tribes rose in demand, the resulting immigration of blacks were not well-organized. As shown in history, several families were torn apart. On plantations there were several different tribes, from the Mondonques to the Ethiopians, that became mixed and their unique version of the Voodoo rites became mingled until the unique characteristics were no longer discernable. At first, the incorporation of Voodoo beliefs in the days of Haitian slavery went without notice or reprimand. Eventually, however, the urge to wipe out this religion and colonize the slaves began a combat between the white masters and the African slaves. In 1685, a new law forbade the practice of African religions. Slavery was condoned by the Catholic Church as a tool for converting Africans to morally upright Christians. Expected to teach Christianity to their slaves, plantation owners would punish those in possession of any voodoo artifacts, such as clay sculptures or religious voodoo symbols. Voodoo practitioners used a variety of measures in order to keep their religion in tact. Rather than face annihilation of their culture like the natives of Haiti did, the African immigrants devoted their hopes to the gods in order to receive salvation in the form of freedom. Yet there were slaves forced to adopt Catholic rituals did occur, and their teachings of another religion gave them double meanings. That is why in the process many of their spirits became associated with Christian saints. The slaves gradually created their own religion to combat their oppressors—Haitian Voodoo, a mix of Catholicism and their root African religions. Much of the Voodoo tradition settled into the Deep South of the U.S., Brazil, and Haiti, which is now considered the central location. Traces of Voodoo religion are still prominent today, Haiti for the most part, but also Florida, New Orleans, and several of the Caribbean islands.

The symbols used in Voodoo are referred to as veve (pronounced vay-vay). While the origin of veve used in rituals is unknown, veve are an integral part of the Voodoo religion. Made

from materials such as cornmeal, wheat flour, coffee grounds, bark, red brick powder, or gunpowder to form powder-like substances (though the material depends entirely upon the ritual), veve are used specifically in ceremonies to invoke and to offer sacrifice to the Voodoo gods. Typically drawn upon the ground in ceremonies, in recent years veve have been drawn using paint and more modern substances. They have been used as amulets to be worn on a person. There is also an increase of veve being used as decorative or art pieces that warn against harm or are intended for good luck. However, it is thought that to establish a direct connection with the gods can only be done through the temple rituals. In rituals, these symbols act as a beacon to the gods and are also used as a likeness of the gods. Veve come in a variety of different forms, depending on which god is trying to be contacted. Drawn around the center pole of the temple, called *um'phor*, that acts as a channelling device into the spirit realm, veve are thought to actually incase the soul of the Voodoo god or goddess being called. It is thought that the Voodoo gods are deified souls. Their power comes from the nourishment provided during sacrifices, without which the god will not physically manifest. Typically, sacrifices are the gods preferred food or drink. For instance, the goddess of death, Maman Brigitte, has a fondness for rum and hot peppers. These act as a materialization of the cosmic energies. Voodoo gods are not only called upon when there is need of them. They demand attention, for their energies are consistently at work since they inhabit all living things, such as plants, animals, and waterlife.

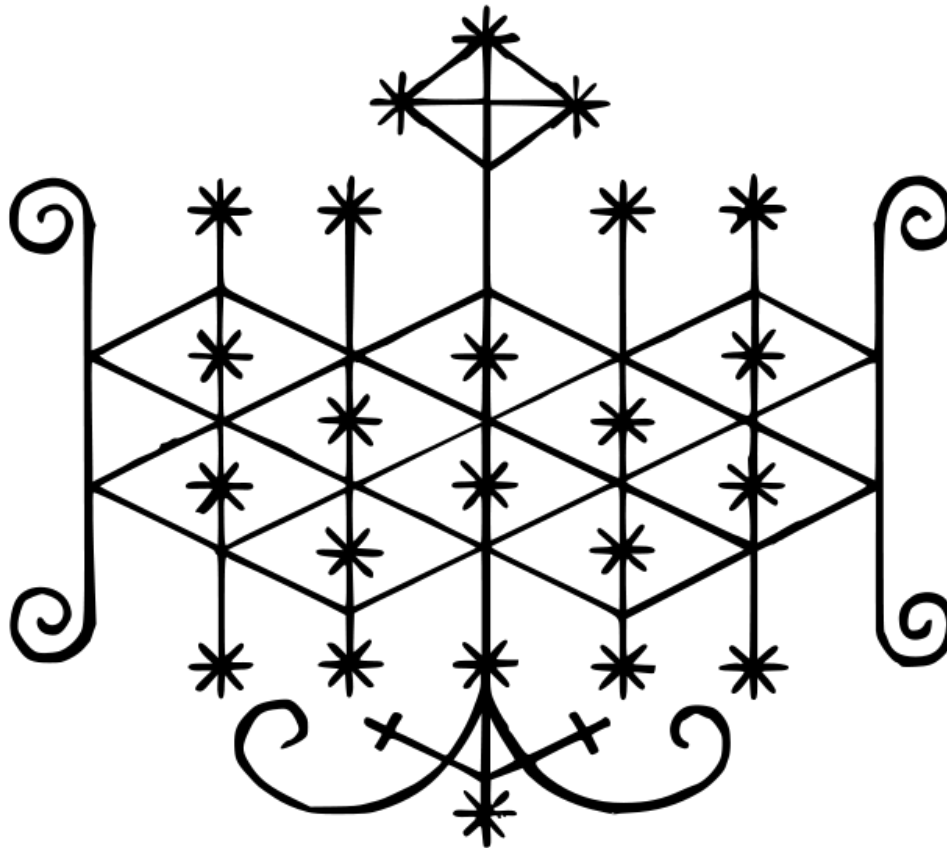
The first veve that should be examined is the gatekeeper god, Papa Legba.



As the communicator between humans and the gods, his veve is typically seen in all ceremonies as a way to access or pass through the threshold into the spiritual world. The symbol shown above looks strikingly like a mirror image. When looking at the middle of the veve, each side looks identical to one another, a mirror image. However, there is small changes in detail to the outer sides of the veve. This shows that while each side, or world, is related, the worlds between mortals and the gods are not one and the same. Representing the alternative worlds out there, Legba is sought out when communicating with any god in the Voodoo diaspora. From there, other veve are used in conjunction to Papa Legba's depending on the aim of the ceremony. Priests of Voodoo have claimed that entire governments can be overthrown if the use of veve are properly used. Essentially, the Haitian rebellion is looked at in this case, when Haitian black slaves wrestled their independence in 1806. The Haitian revolution began in 1791, though there was discontent with the mother country of France for a long time before then. In the 1750s, a Voodoo priest used his

knowledge of poisons to murder several hundred slave owners and their livestock. The catalyst of the revolution began with a Voodoo service, where a woman was possessed by Ogun, the warrior god, and using the voice of the spirit named the individuals that would lead the slaves into a successful revolt.

The veve that is used to summon Ogun looks somewhat like a gate. This gate is not a typical design as the geometric properties make this an extremely difficult subject to reproduce in the three-dimensional world.

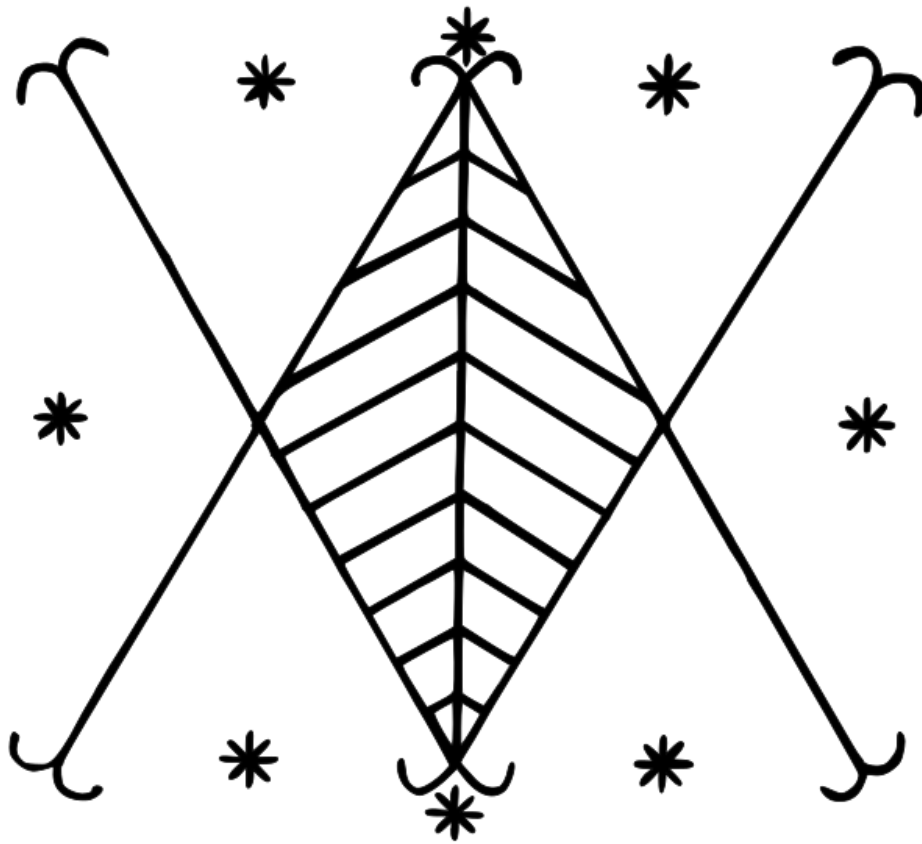


This is because the points drawn through the middle of the design do not necessarily touch the square sections at every interval. Ogun is thought of as a teacher of crafts and “one who prepares the way” in addition to his warrior-like qualities. The complexities of such a god could be represented here in this design. In Voodoo rituals, only the high priest or priestess are able to draw these symbols. Those who were not initiated did not have the talents to draw the veve as detailed

and accurate. When done correctly, the connection between the god and human becomes stronger. It is also considered that a veve cannot be activated without the presence of the high priest / priestess. Yet, the gods do not speak to the high priest or priestess alone but is able to communicate through any individual present at the ceremony, such as the woman who was possessed by Ogun exemplified above.

Veve are not used only for great needs, such as sparking a rebellion. Voodoo is an everyday practice, just as religion ought to be conducted. The use of veve in ceremonies can be used for protection, or for guidance on matters of the heart. The goddess Ayizan represents commerce and the marketplace and is typically looked to in an effort to gain prosperity or learn the direction of the markets. She also is regarded as the first priestess, and so represents priestly knowledge and mysteries, particularly those of initiation, and the natural world. When looked at closely, her veve is comprised of her initials, the A and the V intersecting across each other. The veve is sometimes further decorated with stars and whirls to imitate the royal palm frond, shredded and worn by every initiate of Voodoo.





According to Voodoo beliefs, Ayizan has control over the moral governess of humankind, helping people balance the desire for pleasure with culpability. This veve is also a perfect mirror image no matter which way the design is looked at. One could argue that the stars surrounding the veve are anchors or weights that balance out the central image of the veve.

Due to the history behind voodoo, the sparks of revolution, and its association with the minority black group that were once slaves, connotations of this practice have been negative. Pop culture has not helped, as it takes little parts of the religion and demonizes it in order to sell, such as voodoo dolls, zombies, or “black magic” sacrifices. It also does not help that in Christian theology, spiritual possession is usually considered to be an act of evil, either Satan or some demonic entity trying to enter an unwilling human vessel. In Voodoo, because of their belief that the spirits and gods were once ancestors, the possession by a god or goddess is sought after. Possession is considered a valuable, first-hand spiritual experience and connection with the spirit

world. Yet the idea of Voodoo as evil, occult-like, and Satanism still occurs in a number of people who do not take the time to educate themselves. They prefer to believe in false claims of the religion, closing their minds when their own religion usually teaches the opposite. The 1930's film *White Zombie* by Victor and Edward Halperin is one of the more popular cases of sensationalizing and commercial exploitation of the voodoo belief, and is the starting point for this continued profiteering. With the lead character described as a Voodoo master, the film focused on the more fearful aspects of Voodoo, that have little to do with the actual belief systems. Fear of the occult, and of losing your autonomy due to black magic created pathos that made the film and several of its ilk as popular with the majority of the population that does not practice Voodoo.

As much as the unknown can frighten, it can also enlighten. Much of Voodoo is based on healing and nature. Healing involves not only the body, but also the psychological aspects, such as heartache or homesickness. The use of herbs ties in the idea of nature, but the main reason for this affinity is the belief that gods and goddesses are providers and inhabit all living things. Many religions around the world still believe in natural healing, such as Buddhism. The central belief of Voodoo is that each person is responsible for their own actions and capable of self-actualization. Voodooists especially place value on the strength of community for support and enrichment. In turning away from the propaganda against Voodoo, many would come to agree that Voodoo is as all-encompassing as many other religions, and that it promotes well-being and spiritual enlightenment. Though some may think that ritualistic sacrifice and polytheism as outdated, a look at history would reveal that several other religions practiced the same way until pretty recently.

Looking at Voodoo veve and realizing that these images are not the work of the devil or evil magic will not be an overnight success. There is a long way to go before people come to realize what true Voodoo means. Bringing attention to the inconsistencies that surround the representation of Voodoo in popular culture today is a start. The tourism in New Orleans, one of the top areas that hold practicing Voodooists, still displays Voodoo as sinister and dark. Tourists are shown the heinous areas where Voodoo was involved. Yet the best way would be teaching

others about Voodoo and how its history has shaped this religion into what it is today. Voodoo veve is an integral aspect to the practice of this religion, and this analysis of them notes the use of mirror images and geometric symbols that can vary depending on the gods. As a religion, Voodoo inspires introspection as explained before. The introspection of Self in relation to a higher power, such as the Voodoo gods, and the afterlife. In using mirror techniques, veve invite reflections to occur in addition to drawing out the gods from their spiritual world. It is much easier to say what Voodoo is not, and that is to say Voodoo is not what society has portrayed it through movies, books, or other propaganda tools. It is not an evil cult, nor is it indicative of a group of primitive savages who practice Voodoo. It is not backwards, and it should not be used as a way of entertaining those who are outside of this religion. As a religion that countless individuals practice, Voodoo should be respected as much as Christianity, Buddhism, or any other that have as long and established a history.

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## Book Review

### *Moon Up-Moon Down: Do the Sun, Moon and Tides Affect Writing?*

Solunar Theory was developed in regards to the patterns of animals and fish to aid people in determining the best times for hunting and fishing. However, while humans are certainly more advanced than fish, they are still animals with some primal instincts. Therefore, the theory stands that humans could also be in some way affected by the major and minor solunar periods. In order to test this, experiments must be done in many aspects of human life, including athletics, job performance, creativity, alertness, and memory, among other things. I plan to test the theory in regards to creativity and writing skill by setting out times to write short stories during major and minor solunar periods as well as during off times and then looking at them myself as well as asking others to look at them and determine if any of them stand out as any better than the others. I will also discuss how easy or hard it was to write during each time.

Solunar theory was first developed in 1926 by John Alden Knight after he looked into various folklore on factors that influence fishing. Eventually, he rejected all of them except the sun, the moon, and the tides, which is how he came up with the name "Solunar." Knight first released tables for his theory 10 years later, in 1936. These tables, both then and now, have to be calculated based on location and adjusted for Daylight Savings Time in order to determine the exact times for your area. Knight conducted a study of when large fish and large numbers of fish were caught, and over 90% of these catches occurred during a major Solunar period. Later, Knight also studied bird and animal behavior and found similar results ( [http://www.solunar.com/the\\_solunar\\_theory.aspx](http://www.solunar.com/the_solunar_theory.aspx)).

I do not believe that the Solunar theory will have a noticeable effect on my writing skills or creativity. While fish and animals may be affected by the tides, the moon, and the sun, I feel that given the amount of control that humans exert over their lives in general (e.g. sleep schedules that

may or may not coincide with natural patterns, alarms for various tasks, drugs both prescribed or otherwise, and an enforced concept of time), they will have very little, if any, effect on me. Even for this experiment I have a huge amount of control as I picked the day in

which to do it (a day where I had absolutely nothing else going on) and what times out of the day to do it within the constraints of the theory (i.e. the periods last for 1-2 hours and I pick the half hour period within that frame), unlike animals who just exist in a natural state. Additionally, I feel that my degree of tiredness will also play a bigger role in the quality of my writing, as my first Major period is at 4:20AM and I am not a morning person.

How the experiment will work is that I will write for a half hour block during major and minor solunar periods as well as during “off” times. In order to get me started during each block, I will generate a list of five different potential story themes (from which I’ll choose one) from this website <http://www.seventhsanctum.com/generate.php?Gename=quickstory> so that I don’t hit a huge roadblock determining what to write and so that I do not have time to plan any ideas beforehand, thus destroying the intent of the experiment. The theme is mostly just a guideline, as I won’t be writing full stories, just snippets of them. I will notate the time I start and stop (and what period that falls in), as well as what the theme was at the top of the page. After finishing my writing time block, I will then take a few minutes to write down how I felt when writing the story, such as if I felt extra creative, if I was having a hard time, if I was extra tired, or whatever the case may be. I will not put pressure on myself to write a certain amount, or necessarily finish the story during my allotted 30 minutes, simply write at a pace that feels comfortable and that progresses the story in a natural manner, and not rushed to completion.

After having completed the experiment, I think there were some things that I could have done better. While doing all of the writing in a 24 hour period helped keep the variables down, by the end of the day I was extremely exhausted due to the amount of writing and the odd hours I had to keep due to the times of the Solunar periods. I think it would be better to do it multiple times, over the course of several days, so that you could really get a feel for the potential effects. That way you would be able to tell if it was the time of day that was affecting the person or the Solunar Period. It also would be better done with multiple people, however it would be difficult at this time of year to get multiple people to agree to spend so much time at such odd hours. Finally, multiple judges would be ideal, however I did not have anyone else available to judge. Overall though it was a good experience. I'm very pleased with how some of the stories came out, and though it was a long day I think it was worth it overall.

There were times where I had an easier or harder time writing, and the easiest times were always during the major solunar periods, but I don't know if that was due to the theory or just due to the ease of the prompt and my mood/level of tiredness at the time (which again could be due to Solunar Theory or just my own sleep schedule and stress levels from finals) The more interesting thing about the level of writing difficulty I had was that it directly correlated to the enjoyment my reader had when reading each story. The ones he liked best were the ones that I had the easiest time writing, and my ranking of difficulty writing is the exact same as his rank from best to worst.

When I gave the judge my stories, I sent him a separate document that only had the title of the story and the story, without any mention of the periods or what my theme was, so that he read each story unbiased. My judge preferred the stories as follows: The Cab Driver, The

Gambler, Sounds Like Love, Barnabas Saves the Day, Captain Fred and the Holy Grail, Damsel. If I ranked them from my favorite to least favorite I would have also picked the same order, which again correlates with my experience writing them. While his two favorites were written in the Major periods, the other four were mixed up, so it's not completely accurate to the theory.

The study as it is is inconclusive. While the Major solunar periods were definitely easier to write in, and were received the best by the judge, the minor periods and off periods were a mixed bag. Perhaps the Major periods, being the stronger ones, are able to affect humans but the minor periods are too weak? Or perhaps it's just luck that my best work was during the major periods. It's impossible to say for sure without further tests on the subject.



# Appendix A

## Solunar table for day of experiment (12/18/16)

North America > The United States > Florida (East Coast) > New Smyrna Beach

Sun 18 Mon 19 Tue 20 Wed 21 Thu 22 Fri 23 Sat 24 DEC 2016

01:43 am UTC -5 Florida (East Coast) (US) time change 84 days (UTC -4)

*The best times of day for fishing are:*

### MAJOR PERIODS

**HIGH ACTIVITY** from 4:20 am to 6:20 am  
Lunar transit (moon up)

**HIGH ACTIVITY** from 4:49 pm to 6:49 pm  
Opposing lunar transit (moon down)  
This period also coincides with **sunset**, therefore the sun will exercise more influence, possibly obtaining greater activity than expected.

### MINOR PERIODS

**AVERAGE ACTIVITY** from 11:01 am to 12:01 pm  
Moonset

**AVERAGE ACTIVITY** from 10:38 pm to 11:38 pm  
Moonrise

## **Appendix B: Short Stories**

### **4:30 - 5:00 AM - Major Period**

The theme of this story: romantic thriller. The main character: persistent gambler. The major event of the story: misunderstanding.

#### **The Gambler**

Susan had a problem. Not a small, “ran out of room in her makeup bag” problem, but a big “being pursued by Las Vegas mob bosses to settle her debt” problem. Her current solution: more gambling. It’s not like she wants to dig herself even deeper into this pit, but she couldn’t help it. She gambles when she’s stressed, and boy is she stressed now. She was sitting at the high-stakes blackjack table, nervously biting her thumb nail (another bad habit she has when stressed), when she heard “Hey dollface, I heard you got yourself into some trouble. Perhaps I can help. My name is Joshua and I think I have just the solution for you.” Given the high level of anxiety bubbling within her, the deep growl of Joshua’s voice suddenly in her ear put her into an instant panic, and she pulled him into a headlock on the ground. “Just because I’m small, doesn’t mean I don’t pack a hell of a punch, pretty boy, so you better start talking. Who are you really, and how do you know that I’m in trouble? And I better like your answer or you’re not going to like my response.”

“Well, your knee is in my sternum so you’re going to have to let me up first so that I can explain.” Susan scowled, but relented, and allowed Joshua to sit up. He rubbed his chest to try to get the blood flowing again, and began explaining. “You see, I’m actually an undercover cop, and I’ve been tailing these mob bosses for a very long time. Recently, I caught wind of their...

displeasure.... with you through the contact that I have in the group.” Susan snorted at the term displeasure, as that was a mild way of putting the ire that the mob bosses felt for her. “My contact also informed me that now is a good time to move against the group, because the only thing that’s uniting them right now is their beef with you, otherwise they’re completely at each other’s throats, and I completely intend on taking advantage of that.”

“What, and you think I will help? Hun, I’m not getting within 10 miles of these guys, let alone trying to take them down. I’m just going to continue hiding from them, and wait for them to eventually give up on me, and then I’ll skip town and find a new place to gamble”

“Oh no, you’re not “helping”, I have all the help I need. You’re the bait, and you will do what I say because I’m a cop and I will have you arrested for obstruction of justice if need be. Or assaulting an officer in that case.” He smirked, looking down at his shirt, ruffled from the earlier takedown. Susan glared at him, and if looks could kill she would be in jail for murder of an officer of the law. However, as it so happens her glare did not possess superhuman capabilities, and merely made Joshua chuckle as he picked himself up off the floor and extended his hand down to her. She ignored his silent offer to help, and got up on her own, crossing her arms and tapping her foot impatiently once she was up. “So, what are we doing then, Josh? What’s the big plan huh?” “Um it’s actually Joshua-” “Yeah whatever, what are you doing to get rid of these mob guys because since I don’t have a choice in helping I at least want to know what’s going on.”

Joshua looked contemplative, “You know, I actually hadn’t thought that far ahead. I just wanted to nab you before you got out of my sight.”

“ARE YOU GODDAMN FUCKING KIDDING ME?? YOU MEAN TO TELL ME THAT YOU’RE PUTTING MY LIFE AT RISK, AND YOU DON’T EVEN HAVE A FUCKING PLAN?!”

“Well I mean I was going to do it now . . .” Joshua trailed off, a slight pink tinge on his cheeks. Susan just scowled and continued to mutter about incompetent policemen while Joshua worked out a plan in his head. “Okay I got it, here’s what we’re going to do-”

**My writing experience (before beginning and after ending):**

Gotta say, it’s about 10 minutes until start and I’m not feeling very motivated to do anything except go back in time and strangle my past self for making this decision because 4am is not a time that a human being should be awake, I don’t care if fish are active I’d rather starve.

Now that I’ve actually completed it, I think I did pretty okay for basically just stream of consciousness on a random prompt. While it’s definitely not my best writing, it flowed fairly easily and once I woke up a bit I’m actually not super tired, though I’m still looking forward to laying back down and sleeping some more. Overall, not a bad time though. Easy to write, didn’t spend a lot of time trying to figure out where to go next, and I was surprised at how quick the 30 minutes ran out.

## **11:15 - 11:45 AM - Minor Period**

The theme of this story: humorous quest. The main characters: compassionate space captain and complacent actor. The start of the story: repentance. The end of the story: intimidation.

### **Captain Fred and the Holy Grail**

“Captain, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to drop the artefact. Now that it’s drifting randomly in space, I don’t know how we’ll ever find it.”

“Oh Veronica, don’t worry about it! We’ll find it, and besides it’s not that important anyway. Just gives me more of an excuse to fly ol’ Betsy around into new and exciting places! But we should stop at Pluto to get a new tracker device so that we can track down the grail.

“Absolutely Captain Fred, I’ll route us to Pluto right away sir! You don’t have to worry about a thing!”

Veronica walked to the control panel and input the new coordinates. While the ship was old, she was very reliable and they could trust that they would get where they needed to go without having to pay a lot of attention to the controls. That is, of course, unless one of the alarms go off, but that’s very rare. Since Pluto is a several day trip from where they are at the outskirts of the Cuiper belt, they have plenty of time to relax and enjoy the views. Or, they would if Captain Fred wasn’t so obsessed with board games from 21st century Earth. “Hey Veronica, let’s play a game of Uno, eh? Gotta pass the time somehow!”

“Oh alright then,” Veronica agreed. “As long as it’s not charades again,” she muttered under her breath.

“What was that, I didn’t quite hear that last bit?”

“I said it sounds great, Captain!” Veronica hated charades. Just because she had a background in acting before she joined Captain Fred in his quest to find historical artefacts, doesn’t mean she likes to act out a polar bear fighting an elephant. Now, if it was Shakespearian Soliloquies, that she could get behind, but charades was just dumb. But she didn’t know how to tell that to the Captain, so she just hoped he would pick anything else, and went along with it when he didn’t.

Several hours later, still on the first game of Uno (it was a brutal game, filled with many Draw 4s and well placed Wilds), an alarm started ringing. However, this wasn’t the usual alarm for two many asteroids nearby, or another spacecraft accidentally interfering with their signal. No, this was something that Veronica had never heard before, and Captain Fred only knew about from his days at the academy. This was the “enemy ship has targeted your spacecraft” alarm, and it was shrill and horrible. Captain Fred immediately ran to the controls, tipping over the card table and scattering the uno cards in the process. Thankfully they had a gravity stabilizer in the craft, as otherwise the cards would be - “Captain Fred! Look at the cards! The table! What’s gone wrong with the stabilizer?” The cards were floating everywhere, it was a verifiable disaster as there were so many.

“Quick Veronica, grab them! Put them back in the box and into the cabinet, carefully. And strap the card table back into it’s spot!” Veronica quickly obeyed, grabbing the cards that had drifted closest to the control panel first so that they didn’t disturb the Captain as he figured out what was wrong. After she finished cleaning up their game, she moved to stand next to the Captain.

“What’s going on, Captain Fred? Are we in danger?”

“I don’t know, Veronica, but perhaps you should stay back in the sleeping quarters just in case....”

“Absolutely not! I know I usually go along with whatever you say, but we are in this together! We’ll face whatever it is head-on!”

“Thank you Veronica, I appreciate your bravery and dedication.” In fact, although Veronica had bravely decided to stick with the Captain, it was partly because the sleeping quarters kind of creeped her out when she was alone, and she didn’t want to spend what could possibly be her last moments in there. Her decision to stay did not mean she was not scared though, she was utterly terrified, which you could tell by the tremble in her fingers as she checked the controls.

Suddenly, the holo-screen booted up, and displayed a menacing figure. “You will hand over the grail, or else we will destroy you and your ship.”

“B-b-but, we don’t have the grail, we lost it.” Stammered Captain Fred.

“Well you better find it then, hmm? You have 24 hours.” The figure growled, and the holo-screen powered down, at the same time the alarm turned itself off.

### **My writing experience:**

Before beginning, I really don’t want to get out of bed and I especially don’t want to write. I’m pretty cranky because I did not sleep well in between the two periods.

I didn’t feel very motivated to write this. I had a hard time determining where the story was going to go, and I had to back up and rework things a few times. Although I wouldn’t call it

difficult to write, it wasn't easy either. I just couldn't quite get into a good groove. While the 30 minutes didn't seem long, they definitely didn't go by quick either, and I was glad when my timer went off so I could wrap it up.



## **2:00 - 2:30 PM - Off Period**

The theme of this story: romantic adventure. The main characters: unathletic poet and composed computer programmer. The major event of the story: education.

### **Sounds Like Love**

Lucille was not very athletic. And by that, I mean she wasn't athletic at all. She couldn't run more than a quarter of a mile without stopping, winded, and though she was not overweight her body was made of curves and soft edges that were more indicative of time spent in a quiet reading nook dreaming up poetry than chasing a ball around a field for hours on end. She had shoulder length, curly golden hair, and the sweetest smile you have ever seen and I was in love. Unfortunately, she didn't love me back. It's not that she didn't like me, she just didn't know me. We'd actually never had a chance to talk, and I only knew her name because she was one of the presenters at Freshman orientation the same year I was working in the sound booth making sure that the microphones did not act up. The way the lights hit her made her sparkle, and her voice sounded like bells as she spoke to the freshman about our poetry club on campus. This was two years ago now, and we're both seniors. I tried to go to the poetry club a few times, but something with the A/V team always came up, and I needed the money so I could not refuse the hours. The one time I did manage to make it, she was out sick, a rarity for her (or so was informed to the group before the open mic started). However, this year things are going to change. The girl who always brought her sound system graduated, so now the poetry club needs the A/V team to set up and run the mics every Tuesday evening for the year. Thankfully, I have seniority in the team now, so I was able to claim the recurring event for the entire semester before anybody else

volunteered, so now I have 10 hours before I finally meet her. Thankfully, I'm a pretty composed gal. While I do spend a lot of time with computers, and taught myself to program in high school, I'm a business major and 3 years of presentations, group projects, and networking means that I'm cool as a cucumber. That's not to say that I'm not nervous, because I totally am, but I don't fear that I'll make a fool of myself. I spend the day picking out my outfit (nothing too fancy, but it can't be just jeans and a t-shirt) and deciding how I want to do my hair and makeup. I decide on one of my nicer, casual dresses and pull my brown, slightly wavy hair into a loose braid. A little makeup, plus a spritz of my nicest perfume and I was ready to go. Two hours early, oops. I set an alarm for when I need to leave by and open up my personal selling textbook to read the chapter on the quiz tomorrow. Brrriing! It was finally time to go, so I grabbed the equipment and loaded it into my car, quickly driving across campus to begin setting up. The building they host the poetry club in isn't actually that far from my room, but the equipment is heavy and there's no way I was going to get sweaty this evening. I was still a little early, but I had the setup plans that were submitted when they requested our help, so I began setting up before anyone else arrived.

“Oh! Hello!” A voice like bells interrupted my concentration, and the plug I was trying to insert into the socket just bounced off the wall instead. “You must be Allison from the A/V team! I'm Lucille, the president of the poetry club, it's nice to meet you! Thank you so much for coming!”

This was it, my moment. “Hi Lucille! You can call me Allie, it's great to meet you too! And absolutely, it's great to be able to help. I've always loved poetry but I've only made it to the club once because A/V stuff always gets in the way, so now I can do both!” Yes good, nailed it.

“I’m glad it all worked out! Do you need any help setting up the equipment?”

“Oh no, I’ve got it! Just need to plug this cord in and I’m done! Though you can help me test it if you like, then I can adjust the sound levels a bit for you.”

**My writing experience:**

I’m not feeling particularly motivated or unmotivated to write, just resigned at this point. I mostly just want to get it done.

This story flowed fairly easily. I hit a couple minor blocks figuring out exactly where I wanted it to go and how to say it, but otherwise it was pretty easy. Picking out names was hard, but that’s not unusual. Overall, time went pretty swiftly and I wasn’t struggling to continue at any point.

## **5:00 - 5:30 PM - Major Period**

The theme of this story: dark horror. The main character: serene cab driver. The major event of the story: funeral.

### **The Cab Driver**

Misha was a cab driver. All day and all night long, he ferried people from one place to another, always making sure they got to where they needed to be as smoothly as possible. One day, a particularly sweet old lady was on her way to a funeral. “What a handsome young man you are,” she quivered out in her soft, high pitched voice. “I need to get to the cemetery please.”

“Right away ma’am” the cab driver responded, “I’ll have you there in no time.” As the old lady closed the door, Misha pulled away from the curb and began on the journey to the cemetery, a decent enough drive. The old lady was very quiet in the back seat, she had pulled out some knitting and was finishing up what looked to be a very long scarf. The scarf had many different colors and patterns in it, some were bright and cheerful while others were dark and almost sad. However, she was now at the end of her scarf, a deep, pitch black color that almost sucked you into it it was so dark. Suddenly, a flash of light engulfed the vehicle, and Misha slammed on the brakes as a shrill electrical noise filled the small space. The old lady gasped briefly, but returned to her peaceful silence quickly. “Sorry about that ma’am, just some traffic issues is all, nothing to worry about.” Glancing back in the rearview mirror, Misha noticed a couple stitches of bright white yarn in the otherwise blackness of the end of her scarf. Again, the light and sound suddenly filled the vehicle, and again, Misha slammed on the brakes, however this time the old woman merely shed a couple of tears and there was only one additional white

stitch in her last row of the scarf. As they were pulling into the graveyard, she finished tying off the ends of her scarf and set it down in her lap.

“Ma’am, I suggest you put your scarf on, it’s starting to get chilly,” the serene cab driver gently advised. She acquiesced, and slowly wrapped the scarf around her frail neck several times. In fact, it was getting more than just chilly, it was downright frigid as the two of them traveled deeper into the graveyard. When they got to the area where the funeral was taking place, Misha pulled up close, but did not stop when he got to the end of the road. Instead, he continued driving straight towards the people surrounding the grave. However, instead of knocking them over, he literally went straight through them, none of them the wiser to the large black cab traveling through their bodies, except for a sudden unexplainable chill that disappeared in an instant. Misha continued to drive straight into the grave itself, but instead of falling into a hole and crashing, they merely continued on, now on a smooth packed dirt road. Large copper gates rose up ahead of them, and they stopped at the gatehouse to inform the guard of their arrival. “Hey Darren, it’s Misha coming to drop off Mrs. Selene Woodbrook for her appointment.”

“Ah yes, we’ve been expecting you. You’re late.” Darren tsked, a small smirk on his face.

“Yes, well, you know, modern medicine always causing traffic jams.” Misha joked back.

“All too well friend, all too well,” Darren’s face twisted into a wry smile as he waved them through the now-open gates. Misha drove through and drove up a long, winding path, pointing out landmarks of note to the old lady. After a while, they pulled up next to a small, cream colored building, very pretty and charming.

“Well ma’am, this is where I leave you. Have a wonderful afterlife!”

**My writing experience:**

Feeling pretty neutral prior to starting this period, mostly tired because I've been writing all day between the various Solunar periods and other papers in between. I also didn't get much sleep last night because of the two Solunar periods early in the morning so I'm just trying to get through the rest of the day at this point.

I enjoyed writing this story, it flowed pretty naturally and the only thing that really gave me much pause was names and a couple descriptors. All in all, the time went by pretty swiftly.

### **11:15 - 11:45PM - Minor Period**

The theme of this story: light-hearted conspiracy. The main characters: fearful sailor and ruthless musician. The major event of the story: journey.

#### **Barnabas Saves the Day**

Barnabas and Thomas were best friends, they had been since daycare, and it being kindergarten now, it had been a pretty long time. Tommy loved music, he always took the best boomwhackers during music time, even if he had to pinch the other kids to get them. Barney, however, was the exact opposite. A sweet, shy kid, all he wanted to do was play with his toy sailboat in the water tubs during freetime. He was also afraid of everything, literally. Spiders, snakes, bugs, dirt, the grass - you name it, he was afraid of it. The only thing he wasn't afraid of was his sailboat and, funny enough, Tommy. One day, after snack time, Tommy and Barney decided that they were still hungry. And while Barney would never break the rules on his own, he was always willing to go along with whatever Tommy wanted to do, as long as it didn't involve anything scary. Since snacks were the opposite of scary, and Barney really was quite hungry still, he happily agreed. Since they had free play time right after snack time, which itself was before naptime, it was the perfect time for hatching a plan.

Tommy and Barney played with the sailboats in the water tubs while eagerly whisper-shouting their plans. "Okay Barney, if you knock over the tub of water, then Ms. T will come over and help clean it up, and I will be free to grab some snacks and hide them near our nap mats so we can eat them then."

“But, what if my shoes get wet?” whispered Barney back worriedly. Barney was afraid of wet socks. His mom once told him that wet socks would give him the flu and he’d die, so he was always careful about keeping his socks clean and dry.

“Don’t worry silly! Just push the tub away from you, so that it spills on me! Then I have reason to run towards the bathroom and dry off, and I can grab the snacks on the way!”

“O-o-okay then, I guess that will work,” Barney nervously replied. “But what if Ms T. sees you grabbing the snacks? Or sees us eating them at naptime?” Eating during naptime was strictly not allowed, and while Barney wasn’t afraid of breaking rules per se, he was afraid of getting in trouble because his mom always said that troublemakers get bad grades and won’t get into college and then they’d have to live in a box for the rest of their lives and you don’t want that do you? Barney was afraid of his mom too. She was a perfectly nice lady, and loved Barney dearly, but she could be a bit....much....sometimes.

“Okay I know! After I grab the snacks and get to the bathroom to dry off, you offer to go get some paper towels from the bathroom and run over to meet me and we can both eat our snacks real quick like and then you can go back with the towels. But hurry, you gotta go now so that we don’t run out of time.”

However, right at that moment Ms. T. called out for everyone to put away their toys and get out their mats for naptime. “Aw poop Barney, now we’ll never get our snacks.” Tommy whined. “I’m so hungry!” Tommy’s stomach gurgled as if in agreement.

In that instant, however, Barney knew exactly what to do. He shyly walked over to the teacher and pulled gently on her skirt. “Ms. T?” he inquired softly.



“Yes honey? What do you need?” She replied sweetly, with a faint hint of amusement in her voice.

“Tommy and I are still reaaalllyyy hungry after snacktime,” Barney’s stomach rumbled helpfully, “and I was wondering if we could pleeeeaasse have some more?”

Ms. T, amused at their prior conspiracies to get snacks (they weren’t as quiet as they had thought), chuckled and said “Sure Barney, just this once I’ll let you guys have extra snacks. In fact, why don’t we all have some extra snacks before naptime? Go get on your mat and I’ll bring some graham crackers around to everyone.”

Barney proudly walked over to his mat next to Tommy and sat down. “Snacks are coming!” He exclaimed gleefully. And Tommy could, in fact, see Ms. T. walking around with napkins and graham crackers, handing a couple to each of their classmates.

“But how did you work up the courage to ask her? Even I’m not that brave, and you’re scared of everything!”

“Oh but Ms. T isn’t scary, and besides, my mom told me to never be scared of teachers!”

### **My writing experience:**

I am damn pissed off before writing this story because my computer decided to break down moments before I was supposed to write so I had to walk across campus to log in to another computer, so now the full story won’t be written within the time period. Unfortunately, there’s nothing that can be done about that.

This story was a little hard to write at first because I was so annoyed by the circumstances that I was literally fuming. I actually ended up yelling out once because the

keyboard was not cooperating with me. But other than that, once I calmed down a bit, the story came fairly easily, and was not difficult to write. I did keep checking the time, but I think that was partly due to the frustration of me starting later than planned,

## **1:30 - 2:00 AM - Off Period**

The theme of this story: light-hearted adventure. The main character: ethical traitor. The start of the story: intimidation. The end of the story: treason.

### **Damsel**

“Jonathan! If you leave now, you know that you can never come back! Why would you leave this town, the place you’ve grown up in and built a life, just for a girl whose address you got from a bottle washed onto the shore? It doesn’t make any sense!”

“Well father, I know it seems crazy, but this woman needs my help! She’s in danger and I’m the only one in this town skilled enough with a ship and navigation to find her. If that means that I have to leave during the King’s imposed curfew, then so be it. I can’t let this poor woman suffer if I have the capability to do something about it. I’m leaving and that’s final.”

“Okay son, as much as it pains me, I respect that. Please, take some of the food we have stored for the winter, I won’t need as much with you gone, and I want you to stay safe. Please though, once you find this girl, don’t come back. I would hate to see you be captured and tried for treason.”

A tear escaped Jonathan's eye as he packed some food, saddened at the fact that he may never see his father again. However, he knew in his heart that this was the right thing to do, even if it went against his King. “Of course father, I love you. I will try to send word if I can, so that you know I am safe.”

“I love you too son, now go! Be safe!” Jonathan nodded briskly and ran out the door towards the wharfs. As he ran along the docks, he eyed each ship in turn, looking for something

that was sturdy enough for the open sea, fast enough to evade any pursuers, and small enough that he could manage it himself, at least until he got somewhere he could pick up a small crew. Finally settling on the perfect ship, *The Adventure*, he jumped aboard and quickly began preparing to shove off. He knew that he only had so much time before the King's Guard spotted him, especially since this was one of their prized ships. Thankfully, being up before dawn had its merits, so most of the guards were still sleeping, and the ones on night shift were starting to doze. By the time one of the guards noticed what was going on, Jonathan and the ship were already decently away from shore, and by the time that guard was able to properly rouse the rest of the night guards, Jonathan was merely a speck on the horizon. The wind was in his favor, and he himself was a skilled sailor as he had been taught since he was very little. The King hadn't always had such strict policies against leaving, you see, and Jonathan and his dad were sailors. But now that the King got wind of some terrible plague sweeping the world, he demanded that the entire island remain contained, and that nobody should enter or leave, and anybody leaving would have to stay gone. His paranoia was not groundless, however, as his only son had died from a different plague that had entered the country several years ago, and he was desperate to protect his two daughters from the same fate. But while Jonathan may have understood the King's decision, he didn't have to like it.

As the wind picked up, and the ship started going even faster, Jonathan felt confident that he would be able to rescue this woman in no time, and then he would be a hero. However, a small niggling feeling of doubt lingered in the back of his mind, "What if it's a joke? What if this woman is dead already? What if she was dead years before I even got this note? Did I throw my life away for a moldy skeleton?" Jonathan shook his head, trying to clear the negative thoughts

from his mind, knowing that he would never be satisfied until he did everything he could to make sure that this woman is safe, even if it means committing multiple acts of treason to get there. His father had always raised him to think of others before himself, and that's exactly what he would do.

As the morning wind died down, Jonathan began steering towards a nearby port on the next island over, where he knew he could find a few able-bodied men and women to help him on his quest. After docking and tying down *The Adventure*, he went into the nearest tavern, knowing it would be the best place to find some help. He jumped onto a table in the middle of the bar and yelled, "Does anybody in here want to join in my journey to save a damsel in distress? There will be great rewards for anyone involved!"

### **My writing experience:**

Had a hard time starting this story, I didn't like any of the first sets of prompts that were generated for me, so I had to refresh, and I feel generally distracted.

I was pretty tired while writing this, so it didn't come very naturally. It was a bit of a struggle to write, but I don't know if it's because I've been writing all day or if it was because it was during an off period.

## *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (Movie Review)

In this classic Japanese Anime, the viewer is truly amazed by the inspired visual artists who dedicated so many long hours to the making of this film. Their talents are very much appreciated, and audiences will be delighted by their astonishing representations of giant forests, underground caverns, and beautiful valleys. Miyazaki's science fiction masterpiece begins with scenes of a young princess navigating and traversing a dangerous jungle populated by powerful and poisonous monsters with bug-like features and enormous size. She emerges unharmed, showcasing fantastic immunity to danger by showing compassion and love to these venomous and often blood thirsty animals. She has much control over everything that occurs in the film because she is as fast on her glider flying machine as she is witty and smart.

Her story continues, and the audience discovers she is a princess residing over the Valley of the Wind, but her kingdom is doomed to the dangers of a post-apocalyptic world, warring neighbors, and the toxic jungle. She becomes an excellent strategist and fighter against the great adversities that she faces. Her fighting is mostly non-violent, even if incidentally, and she remains valiant in her simultaneous efforts to protect her kingdom and all living things, including the nasty creatures of the jungle. This is pertinent to the film because it highlights Nausicaä's gentle qualities and emphasizes her moral for peace and harmony.

As the story progresses, the audience discover that an adjacent empire seeks to burn the toxic jungle, and our protagonist finds out a way to save everyone without doing harm to anyone, which is very uplifting. This brings the story a fullness that comforts the heart of anyone and these virtues of which Nausicaä is very grounded in bring a righteous element to the character. Thus, I think Miyazaki directly compares the princess Nausicaä with Jesus Christ. This is developed not only through clothing and color symbolism, but also her Christ-like life cycle.

The best parts of this movie, in my opinion, are all the fantastic air scenes. They introduce whimsicality that is intrinsic to many popular Anime. For instance, whenever Nausicaä boards her glider, there follows an epic battle of her against the forces of nature as she naturally glides in and out of the nimbus clouds. These aerial adventures enforce the thematic magic that captivates audiences and brings one child-like joy and wonder. This accentuates a more amorphous characterization of Nausicaä, but her personal magic is arguably as equally important as her moral and spiritual aspects.

*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* is a must see for the all of Miyazaki's fans, long time or new. Along with fantastic art, animation, and music the film is focused on the characterization of a young princess. Her principles, piety, and charmed nature, guide us through Miyazaki's beautiful world and tell a brilliant story that is as entertaining as it is exhilarating. Miyazaki's talents go unmatched once again.