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[Previously on Beyond TPT: An underwater prospecting rig has discovered an amazing alien lifeform in a deep ocean trench. They have a gentleman of military persuasion onboard whose state of mind may not be beneficial to peaceful interaction. Will the nutter with the nuke get his way or will the good guys sort it? Now read on...]

Beyond The Porcelain Throne

Series 3 /3

Shortcuts

If you fall in a forwards direction, the reality of nature hits you in the face. But it does allow you to sit on it without injury. And sitting comfortably is just what you should be doing, right about now, because it's a lot easier to read that way; the nature of reality then hits you in the mind.

Fortunately, the Darragdomians were still waiting. Conan gestured to the architecture around us. "In all the broader routes, memories are strong. Some of the larger ones will never fade. The less often they are used, the more memories fade, and all memories fade in sections. The final section to go is always the emotional section, hence the Cheshire cat, you know?"

"Where?" said Gaz, who was walking past with a protein under each arm. "Who brought the ship's cat?"

"-No one," said Conan, "I was just explaining –memories fade like the cheshire cat; the smile, the emotional part, goes last. That's what the Cheshire cat means, my friend."

"Oh right," said Gaz, then- "Your tables are ready, over there." Looking into the distance it appeared like they had put on a wine reception for our visit, but on approaching the tables we saw large bottles labelled "Drink Me", as well as some more "Eat Me" cake, so we knew very well what to expect; a bit of cake-and-wine juggling to get the balance right. Hormones work just like that. If there's an excess of one, we can accidentally overshoot production of its 'antidote', and we move towards balance like a sailing ship moves with the wind –we 'tack' towards our goal. The more practice we get, the better we get at it, of course...

...Anyway, can't stand here yapping all day; we'd best get on with this wine tasting and sudden changes of scale business...

...After a first glass of wine we find ourselves in a blank white space, looking dead cool and not at all confused. Of course, we're getting used to this virtual trippery now, and can remain looking dead cool and not at all confused as a gentleman with really cool shades called Morpheus explains that we're stuck on the clipboard:

"The clipboard is an imaginary construct where we can store files, training programs, equipment, clothing, weapons; anything we need. It's a space between realities, like the train station. I'm not sure you're meant to be here right now, even though you're looking dead cool and not at all confused."

A door appears and opens in the background and a lady called The Oracle enters, carrying a covered tray. [No; I don't know if her first name is really "The"].

"Well, look who it is," she smiles. "Take no notice of Morpheus; you're right on time. Morpheus and I were just having tea, and I was just checking there was no dormouse in the teapot... You can ask me a question if you want to, but I don't think you'll figure out how. -Unless it's "how do I get out of here?" in which case I'm supposed to say- Oh-but you already know what I'm going to say..." she takes the cover off the tray, and you see six cookies with 'eat me' written on them. The Oracle points sideways, and there in the distance is a white rabbit, standing on its hind legs, tapping its digital chronometer and one of its feet.

The Oracle says, "Take a cookie. You drank too much wine, and when you've finished eating it you'll feel much better."

Approaching the rabbit, we're not surprised to find that it can talk.

"I've been waiting here for at least three minutes," it says. "Didn't you listen to the safety instructions?" It doesn't wait for a reply, just hops off through the wall. You touch the wall and it feels solid. ...Right...errrm...?

After we fail to follow it, the rabbit hops back again. "Come on! Look –it's this way. You know I can only communicate through analogy, so what do you think I'm trying to tell you here?"

You put your hand on the wall and it still feels solid. "Are you trying to tell me that I can walk through walls?" you ask.

"No! Walk through walls? What have you got, farts for brains? Course you can't walk through walls, you daft git! Walk through walls!" He fastidiously washes his whiskers, tutting and checking the time again "Look I'm late. I haven't got time for this. Haven't you been playing with any of the ideas you've been introduced to? Didn't you eat your cookie? Right, and who's in

charge of your reality, the author of this story, or you? You are. You're the Captain. So I'm not telling you that you'll be able to walk through walls; I'm telling you..."

"I won't have to," you say, realising it was a boring place to imagine a wall anyway, and deciding to replace it with something nicer and easier to get through and then, hey, why don't we fly back to the Darragdomians Superman style? The rabbit declines to accompany us but halfway there you meet Conan the Librarian, who's come halfway to meet you.

"I say; well done!" Conan says, "nearly everybody gets lost the first time, even though this is only the very edge of inner space. You need to be an experienced Captain to fly the wormhole, so there are still a few things to be done before we can do that safely. We're going back to the Darragdomian tent at the party, to tell you what those are."

Well, that was your first unofficial flight! ...The Ambassadors were in quite a state of excitement when you arrived back at the party, and there was champagne doing the rounds.

"Captain, my congratulations," said Mr Stock. "Your knowledge and memory databases seem to be functioning within normal parameters." [This is probably a really cool compliment, from a Vulcan.]

"And that was a creative way to deal with a barrier to exploration!" -Anashar was also impressed. Glenda wanted to hug you. "Wow! You have to go flying more often! That was soooooooooo cool! Party on, dude!"

Conan steered you away by the elbow to a quieter area. "You need to think about some stuff while it's fresh in your mind. What you did back there, to get off the clipboard, was changing a virtual reality in your imagination. You imagined something else instead of the wall, and there it was. I'll always meet you halfway when you do that, because doing that sort of thing is good practice for developing another of your superpowers, colloquially known as "Shortcutting".

"Shortcutting isn't a single ability, it's a set of abilities that can change your mood, improve your perspective, augment your abilities, save your life, boost your immune system and affect your

body as well as your mind in a beneficial way. It doesn't need drugs or technology because like the others, it's a natural superpower as opposed to a supernatural power. It develops out of the ability to bring intent into actuality; it's just another way of working with entelechy for faster results. We know the way emergence works is from the bottom up –things emerge from the rabbit hole only after they begin at the bottom of the hole, after going through a process. And we've seen the very basics of that process; bridge-building, we can see that a lot depends on what chemicals the Gnomes get to work with, and how some chemicals can speed up their work and some can slow it down. Ordinarily each section's chemicals come in as our response to our environment and whatever's happening to us. If we feel good and someone's being nice to us, we don't have to deliberately send 'feel good' chemicals to the crew; that just happens automatically. -But what if we're not feeling so good and can't seem to get out of that mood, or we're ill and feeling grim –then, of course, we can't help sending 'feeling grim' messages either. These slow down healing, so that's not in our interest, [although it's obviously valuable that they let us know there was something wrong in the first place.]

"How can we change this? -Some people, when they're ill or feeling low, use input control; they watch comedy movies or listen to their favorite music to 'cheer themselves up'. What it really does is change their hormonal balance to one that makes their immune system more efficient, so it works; they get better faster. That's a great idea and it shows real incentive; these Captains have decided they are in control and are taking care of their minds in order to stay there. This is very basic shortcutting, but we can expand on that. Shortcutting is also usable when you're feeling good, because it can augment your natural abilities to their optimal.

"You don't have to work hard to achieve this. Again, all you really have to do is play, and I'll give you some examples of games that work. Some are very simple, and only need you to make a physical movement. Some require you to write or read something. Some need you to imagine things, and some require you to imagine whole states of being. I can tell you about the simpler ways of shortcutting here, but to learn the really powerful stuff you must go to the Dagobah system, in Darragdomian space. There you will learn from Master Yo Dude, the network master who instructed me.

"You can shortcut via any main network; any section. Starting from the bottom up, shortcutting via the Gnomes is simply about using sensory or chemical input like nutrition, supplements, smells, sounds, soft or bright lights, meditation or the relaxation response, to affect a change of chemical production. This is great for getting you out of an anxious mood or into an altered state in a hurry. Spiritual seekers and shamans traditionally use 'substances' to shortcut via the Gnomes, but even having a cup of coffee affects changes in the Gnomes' department [and it's a nice thing that pain killers do, too!] so I don't really have to explain this, there's no mystery about knowing what to use to change your mental state via the Gnome network.

"Shortcutting via the Cakdons needs physical movement, but not much. One game is: Imagine you have a friend who is an android that doesn't have emotions, okay? [They can be hot if you like; that catches the Cakdons attention. Or you can use a familiar movie figure like Commander data, Seven of Nine, or Terminator 2.] This android friend has asked you to please demonstrate how to do different sorts of smiles, like, when mildly pleased, grinning, surprised and delighted, contented and happy, friendly, confident, and so on. You can either do this in a mirror or without, but do the demonstration a few times because your friend wants to copy it. If you think of fun things you will be able to do a more realistic amused smile, and thinking of things that make you happy will give a good example of genuine pleasure.

"That's it. Game over, you won. And so did everybody else, because sitting there grinning on your own was in fact an interaction. In Real life you've just sent a load of messages via the Cakdons to the Gnomes that they've interpreted as 'something really good going on out there' and have promptly delivered to the Darragdomians a whole bunch of 'feel-good-communicate-well' hormones. The Vulcans and Orlians will probably think it's because you think this story's fun, but we secretly know it was you, shortcutting, so there.

"The brain automatically makes chemicals whenever the muscles of the body send it messages, doubly so for facial muscles. By simply moving the muscles, even if you don't feel any emotion, you can shift a mood from pessimistic to optimistic or gloomy to beneficial.

"If you extrapolate on this you'll realize that you can release the chemicals relevant to any state by mimicking the facial expressions, and so how important it really is not to pull expressions related to sentiments –Beware! -scowling poisons you.

"That doesn't mean you should run round all day long laughing your head off for the good of your health. The normal facial expression of a healthy mind is one of calm alertness; peace of mind and quiet confidence. The expression reflects the mood within, as well as the other way round.

"Anyone who thinks that moving bits of your body around cannot affect your mental state has either never had a wank or is terminally stupid. Masturbation and massage are also methods of shortcutting via the Cakdons in order to change your state of mind, as are spiritual states induced by martial arts and dancing.

"Shortcutting via the Darragdomians brings the conscious imagination more into the picture. Here you provide yourself with an example of something, in this particular example it's a DVD of someone fit and healthy working out in the gym or in a movie. Instead of just watching it though, you watch it and pretend you are an actor whose moves are being demonstrated in order for you to learn the part –so you watch it with a view to copying it, imagining yourself making each move the example onscreen makes. You don't have to actually move much, you understand –it's the mind that moves *[see footnote]. You just imagine you're learning the part. You can pull the same faces as the example if you want to be even more effective.

"If you do this well, the Darragdomians will get the message that muscle-building chemicals are likely to be necessary anytime soon, and they'll alert the Muscle Gnomes, who will begin carting proteins around and making your muscles bigger. If you actually do work out for real as well, this kind of shortcutting will increase your progress a lot; you'll take about half the time to build the same amount of muscle mass. You can lose weight by the same shortcut, because the Muscle Gnomes will be burning more fat to produce the energy they think you'll need. Computer games are good for this sort of thing, but only if the subjects on screen look and move like real humans, and real humans as examples are of course fine; if you want to go watch karate championships or tennis and pull the same trick. But movies make the biggest impression because of the emotional factor; that catches the Darragdomians' attention. That's why they love music too.

"This is of course just another example of imagination changing reality, and that's about as far as I can go with this; Yo Dude will show you the other kinds of shortcutting. What you need first though, if you are to go to Dagobah, is a crew review and recruitment plan. You can do that most easily back in the hotel where it's quiet, with the Starbase Computer."

[I'll see you there in the next chapter.]

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*Footnote: There is no spoon.