

Catchment 4

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

My name is Patient Q34P1 and I live in Catchment Area 4. Five years prior, a chemical detention centre opened a kilometer from my housing and it only took a few months before I was funneled into it and under the state control of 'Chemical Zone B5'. Pretty soon, detention centres like the one where I found myself as a captive began to pop up throughout the urban and rural areas of Pinzaclo Province, to control state opponents, also known as 'mental deviants' or 'atypicals'.

As an inmate of Catchment 4, I was required to ingest 3 'correctives' a day and follow up with one of the centre's dosage regulators once a week to have my 'corrective' levels monitored and to comply with chemical traceability regulations of Zone B5. Today was my mandatory bi-weekly appointment with Dr. Pillpot. After entering through the sliding doors of the EnWave Neuro-Adjustment Facility, located on the west side of the detention centre complex, I walk through the immaculately spotless clinical lobby and head up the stairwell to Novodyne Corporation Clinic. After being granted patient access to the clinic, I sit down in a waiting area, awaiting the 14:25 appointment time with Dr. 'PP'.

"You here to see Dr. Pillpot as well?" A gruff looking man says sitting across from me by a table with various clinical pamphlets advertising Novodyne Corporation research.

"Yup. Wish I could stay off the chemical grid, but had trouble after I was registered." I answer the slightly familiar patient with a tone of slight boredom.

"Yeah. I know the feeling. Once you're on 'correctives' they have you in their chemical registry. Tried to avoid the curfew a few weeks back and four 'regulators' came by to force the nightly dosage."

"Q34P1! Doctor Pillpot will see you now!" A uniformed chemical attendant seated at the far side of the waiting area says aloud.

"Ok, thanks." I answer, standing up from my seat, waving slightly at the same patient across from me.

After leaving the waiting area, I turn a corner and walk down a familiar corridor to the office at the end of the hallway.

"Come on in, Q34P1. Please sit down." A low-pitched and slightly authoritative voice says seated at a rectangular desk, staring into a work portal console device.

"I'm noticing your 'corrective' levels are slightly lower today. Did you miss your dosage recently?" The man asks, staring back into my docile eyes with a stern and inquisitive air.

"I can't recall missing a dose. I take one first thing in the morning and two at night as directed." I answer curtly with a shade of anxiety.

“You do realize that missing a dose will force ‘regulators’ to come by to recalibrate and re-establish your chemical presence in the B5 perimeter.”

“Of course, Doctor. I do understand that the rules of chemical adherence apply to my case in Pinzaclo and that daily ‘correctives’ are mandatory as part of the regimen.”

“Good. Have you done your monthly EnWave scan? I can schedule you in for a scan at Novodyne Labs. This will help us adjust your chemical connectivity with the Airborne Server.”

“It’s been about five weeks. I’ll try to go to the lab by Friday to be re-calibrated.” I answer preoccupied at the notion of state-operated chemical surveillance.

After about thirty more minutes of chemical interrogation, the Doctor concludes the appointment and I leave the Corporation’s Clinic. As I head back down the same stairwell, I notice the statue of the stern looking Dr. Arnold Heffman, creator/innovator of the “Chemical Control Program” and former lead researcher of tracking and control technologies of Catchment Area 4. Walking back through the lobby, I catch a quick news feed on a flat screen motion image portal.

“Just today in _____, two ‘psych-bots’ attempted to free themselves from Catchment 3 by assaulting three ‘clears’. After locating them through their ‘correctives’ somewhere in the countryside of _____, they were apprehended and will stand trial paired with intense re-calibration.”

After exiting through the same sliding doors of the EnWave Neuro-Adjustment Facility, I look up at the sky wondering if the Airborne Server somewhere overhead would ever go down. As I prepared to leave the detention centre complex via the west gate, I notice a pamphlet on the ground with the same slogan and image I’d see throughout the city on hydro poles and bulletin boards saying:

“The time for action is NOW! The ‘Love Parade Movement’ will set you free!”

As I walked through the brick gate and out of the confines of the chemical carceral area, I notice a hidden sensor at the top of the gate beeping faintly along with a faint flashing red light. Soon, I re-entered the world of the ‘clears’, still under the chemical control of the catchment area’s Zone B5.

After catching an eBus at the intersection of Lower Heffman and Major Street, I sit down at the rear of the bus as it rushes me out of the vicinity of the detention complex and back home. After a few stops, I push a button signaling my intention to exit and I step off the bus cautious of the oncoming traffic.

Back at home, I turn on my Pasocom Portal and ask Guru to tell me about the ‘Love Parade Movement’. After a few seconds of rapid data and information searching, Guru answers back:

“The ‘Love Parade Movement’ promotes equality between ‘psych-bots’ and ‘clears’ and is advocating a world free of chemical shackles. On Saturday, October 16th 2030, there will be a protest and rally against the despotic powers of the Airborne Server at noon in City Hall Square.”

After the quick response, I thank Guru and turn off the portal, noting down the upcoming date.

Two weeks later, I put on my modest parade attire in the small bathroom of my catchment zone flat and take the elevated Electro-line to City Hall Station, carrying a homemade sign that reads: “Down with Satellite Chemical Control”. After heading out of my train, I walk down to street level, hearing loud chanting and rallying crowds from the direction of _____’s Square.

As I approached the bustling crowds of ‘psych-bots’ on the opposite side of a mass of ‘clear’ crowd control operatives in full riot gear, the chants hit a frenzied note:

“One... Two... Three... Four... Electric pills out the DOOR!.. Five... Six... Seven... Eight... The Airborne Server we do HATE!”

After about thirty minutes of straining my voice to take part in the partisan chanting, a ‘clear’ hooligan wearing a balaclava began to push and shove twenty or so feet away from me in the densest part of the protest. Soon, pandemonium set in as the ‘clear’ operatives began to disperse the crowds and use their eBatons to subdue ‘psych-bot’ protestors who were deemed to be too harsh and violent. Lucky to have avoided the riot police, I quickly shuffled out of City Hall Square, leaving my sign to be trampled by rushing rallyers.

After heading back on the Electro-line, I decide to head to the _____ Central Library to catch up on the latest portal news feeds. After boarding an elevated rail car as the familiar chiming crescendo announced the closure of the doors, I sit down on a hard polymer seat as the snake-like train cars begins to translate northward. After four stops, I exit the Electro-line at Central Garden Station and head back down to street level. After leaving the station via a lengthy set of metallic stairs, I feel a tad self-conscious walking with parade garb onto a downtown street at the very margins of my chemical zone. Heading through the revolving doors of the city’s largest library branch, a wave of anxiety rushes through me as I spot two ‘regulators’ in full uniform, on sentinel duty at the security desk along with usual local central branch security. Trying to blend in with other library users, I head through a security turn style and toward the Media and Current Events Wing in the northeast corner of the first floor, where several screen panels are laid out with an eye on all of the latest news station outlets. Searching for the NBV news feed portal, featured prominently on a large central screen panel, I sit down near a crowd of students as the breaking news story of the hour comes on.

“Just a few moments ago, following a rally and protest at _____’s City Hall Square, the Airborne Server satellite system, gravitating roughly 1000 kilometers from planet Earth was struck down by ‘psych-bot’ backing rebel forces. Despite there being no clear link established at this hour between the Low Earth Orbit satellite strike and the renegade activist group known as ‘Love Parade Movement’, sources believe the event was coordinated and timed precisely for this afternoon as a battle-cry against what the ‘Love Parade Movement’ has always referred to as ‘spatial chemical slavery’...”

A few moments after the breaking news feed on NBV, a loud wave of partisan cheers could be heard among the small crowd that had gathered on the library’s first level. Suddenly, a group of ‘psych-bots’ who had noticed my parade garb came over to my seat to give me high fives. One of them had tears in his eyes and gave me a hug.

“Now that the system’s down, I’m free from Catchment 4! I can already feel a difference. The chemicals remain in my system from this morning but I’m less sluggish and my eyes feel normal again!” He says to me with a wave of emotion.

“You’re number four as well? What a coincidence! I’m thinking of relocating ASAP now that there’s an outage and the meds are no longer active. This is the chance to really get off the grid!” I reply.

“No chemical zones anywhere until they repair the server! We’re free!”

After chatting with fellow ‘psych-bots’ and a few ‘clear’ allies as the same breaking news continued to reveal itself on the library’s media multi-panels, I leave the library and head back home via eTransit. Soon, I would pack my bags for a bus trip out of town and into the ravines of Getzmana where a large colony of unregistered ‘psych-bots’ were rumoured to live in solidarity, unhindered and out of the controlling grasp of catchment areas and chemical zones.

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