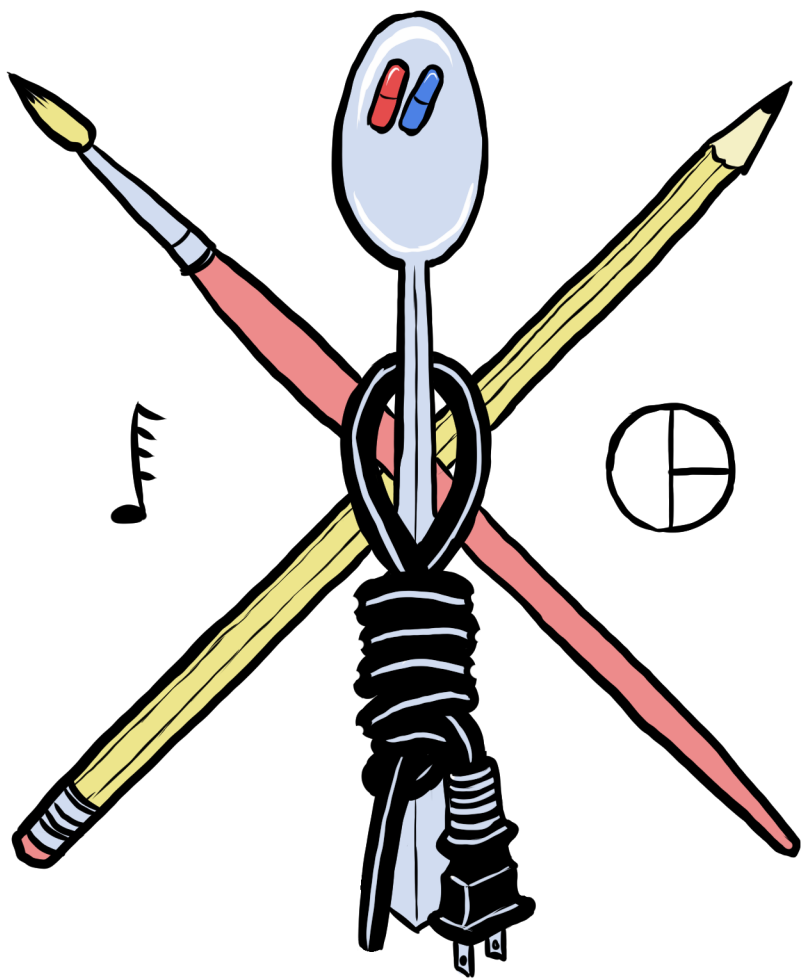


CULTIPLES#2:
THE FANDOM CULTS OF DRAVEN



LB LEE



Draven, circa 2006 (used with permission from ex-follower)

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More LB stuff at <http://healthymultiplicity.com/loonybrain>

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SLANDEROUS CULT TIDINGS: INTRO

I am nineteen, and I have just joined the plural communities of Livejournal. I find myself talking to a man named Neo, a metaphysical multiple—in other words, he is one of many within his body, and he sees his origins as being spiritual or mystical in nature. He is from *the Matrix*, and when I mention that I have heard of him, he replies, "Heard of, eh? Slanderos rumors and cult tidings I hope" (Lee, 2007 April 12).

He then links me to "the article to end all articles" on his website, which is "about Neo, Trinity, [and] this 'underground revolution'" which is built to "spread the message of choice" (DK, 2007, Paragraph 2). But some are against their "status-quo-smashing revolution" and "some have gone the cliché [sic] route of spouting 'cult' at anything that even remotely looks like an 'alternative' belief structure."

Neo is quoted as saying, "until there is concrete proof or evidence that we've harmed someone by trying to save them from themselves... by simply trying to wake them up, people are free to take it or leave it as they choose" (ibid, Chapter 4: Who They Are - The Controversy).

Less than two months prior to this, Neo pled guilty to a felony charge of obtaining a controlled substance through fraud or a false prescription and spent two weeks in jail (State of Washington vs. Draven, 2007); his partner helped him obtain the drugs, so she's now a convicted felon as well (citation available upon request). Less than three months prior to their jail time, Neo was the respondent to two charges of domestic violence (Parker, 2006; Smith, 2006), and a few months after his talk with

me, he will end up in court again for two more (Prissel, Phyllis 2007; Prissel, Steve 2007). And these are not mere miscommunications or minor arguments; Neo also threatened a follower with a knife in May 2006 (citation available upon request), and he'll be arrested again in 2011 for threatening someone with a weapon (Morning Sentinel Staff, 2011).

But at the time, I don't know this. I am nineteen, and unworldly. Having just experienced my own massive paradigm shift of realizing I too am multiple, my mind is open in a way that it isn't now. It doesn't seem unbelievable that Neo could come to the real world to save us all. Indeed, I find myself attracted to the idea, the thought of helping free people's minds. It's only pure luck that I don't get taken in, that Neo loses interest in me and never recruits me.

It's easy to blame my attraction to the cult on me being foolish, naïve, or stupid. When I spoke to ex-followers, they overwhelmingly derided themselves for their own poor judgment. But the fact remains, however ludicrous it might appear from the outside, Neo's Matrix cult was built to attract people just like me—inexperienced, open-minded (arguably *too* open-minded), maybe a little bit odd, with a desire to help the world and find a place within it. Truly, is it fair to blame the victims for being conned by a man who has worked very hard to do so? Who has in fact made it his *career*?

Neo's Matrix cult only lasted about six years, but he is just one of at least twenty headmates that have appeared over the decades, and just one of many cults they have run during this time, all involving fandom. In the '90s, it was Kurt wanting to carry on Kurt Cobain's music; in 2017, it was Tony Stark, trying to build his Iron Man armor and fight fascism. The faces, names,

and identities change, but the end-goal is always the same: to maintain adoration from followers. The results are also identical: arrests, homelessness, and suffering.

Anyone who voices criticism of this group of headmates, or puts the pieces together, is stalked, flamed, harassed, and threatened with lawsuits, sometimes for years. As Neo himself puts it, "Hell hath no fury like me on a psychotic, disillusioned rampage [...] I WILL tear you apart" (2004 November 12).

Such predators are common in plural communities online. I hope that by writing about this one, I will help others recognize this kind of behavior, avoid being sucked in, and refuse to allow cult leaders a foothold (and a victim pool) in our communities. If nothing else, the story is long, twisted, and abstruse, but compelling. This isn't just a history of cults, but an unsavory part of plural history,

Neo and his headmates have never chosen a group name for themselves, as far as I know, so I will call them by the most common name carry-over they share: Draven.

REGARDING PRONOUNS, CONJUGATIONS, AND TERMINOLOGY...

For those who are not plural or in fandom, the linguistic and grammatical hurdles can seem harrowing. I try very hard to avoid jargon, but that's not always possible. Thus, a brief word of explanation and list of terms:

- **Multiple:** more than one person who lives in the same body.
- **Singlet:** one person who is the sole tenant of their body.
- **Plural:** a general-purpose term to cover the full spectrum of people who aren't singlet, but aren't quite multiple either—people who are only multiple at certain times, or are in-between, and so on.
- **System:** refers to a group of headmates as a whole.
- **System member:** one person within the group.
- **Headmate:** a person someone shares a body with.
- **Integrate:** When two or more system members merge to become one.
- **Dissociative Identity Disorder** (AKA DID): a mental illness characterized by “multiple personalities.” It has a certain medicalized culture associated with it, and in plural communities online, DID is merely one of many different types of plurals.
- **Soulbender:** someone with a deep connection to fiction. This ranges from feeling one's characters are “alive” and “writing themselves” to having fictional characters

(soulbonds) among one's headmates. A soulbonder may see themselves as singlet, plural, or multiple.

- **Fictionkin:** someone who believes themselves to be a fictional character. The lines between fictionkin and soulbonders can be blurry.
- **Slash:** in fandom, the depiction of a romantic or sexual relationship between characters who aren't involved in the original media—for example, Sherlock Holmes/Dr. Watson. Overwhelmingly involves male characters.

So, for instance, Draven is the system, Neo a system member. At various times, they have identified as multiple, singlet, soulbonders, and fictionkin. They have never claimed to have DID, but they will claim integrations periodically.

When referring to the group as a whole (or when I don't know who's speaking), I will say "Draven" and "they." Otherwise, I will use the individual's name, such as "Neo" and "he."

I have stumbled across sources who have changed pronouns under time; when in doubt, I use the pronouns others used around them during that time.

Since I do not know how Draven's system feel about verb conjugations, for simplicity's sake I will use constructions like "Draven is," rather than "Draven are," since I know it comes off as strange to people not used to it.

Although I myself am multiple, I will be using singular pronouns throughout the write-up. This is purely for convenience to keep the reader from getting confused or distracted.

The next section is purely for reference purposes; skip it if you want to get to the story.

A NOTE REGARDING CITATIONS...

APA style citations, it turns out, are completely unprepared for the practicalities and ethics of referencing a prolific plural predator online.

Draven has used many, many names over the years, and they sometimes use multiple names for a single system member. Since they have no official system name, ex-followers have used anything from Draven's legal name to individual system member names to online handles in their discussions with me, or in their public warnings to future potential followers. All of this has worked to Draven's benefit, because as the names keep changing, present followers never realize Draven's past actions. In the interest of standardization, citations of all Draven's system members will be listed under that sole name.

Draven is immensely prolific, and their followers can be too. They sometimes make multiple untitled posts on the same platform on the same day. As a result, I will use full dates as needed, for example, "Draven, 1999 January 1." I will only go to APA's preferred format of adding letters when I'm differentiating multiple sources created on the same day, such as "Draven, 2001 June 6a." More conventional sources will remain year-only, for instance, "Lee, 2016."

Due to Draven's special attention on children, their penchant for stalking and harassment, and the sensitivity of the material, I will be referring to all followers by pseudonyms. Some sources will only be available upon request. I have no desire to expose followers and ex-followers to more harassment, or enable unsavory types who wish to do so.

The Internet moves very quickly. All of my cited sources were originally gleaned from publicly accessible online records; the sole exceptions are private ex-follower communications and a photograph, given with explicit permission to use, along with access to the Safety Pin Army roster, which is public to anyone with the link. During the times I have worked on this write-up, large swathes of my sources have been deleted, locked, or moved elsewhere. As a result, I will be replacing these sources with screen-caps from my own downloaded copies, with file names identical to their inline citations and zipped together so that my facts can be checked.

With all that said, let's get on with it.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE: DRAVEN SYSTEM MEMBERS

Name	Time	Bio
Robin Hood	1995 – ?	Started music career.
The Crow	‘95 – ‘99ish	Continued music.
Kurt Cobain	‘95 – ‘99ish	Continued music.
William “Fox” Mulder	‘99 – ‘02	Paranormal PI.
Angel	‘01ish – Sept. ‘04; Apr. ‘09*	Doomsday seer, artist, Paranormal PI.
Angelus	‘01ish – Sept. ‘04; Apr. ‘09*	“Pure evil.” Merged with Angel?
Sirius Black	Jun. - Dec. ‘04	
Neo	Sept. ‘04 – 2011ish	Doomsday seer. Most successful.
John Constantine	Jul. ‘05 – Mar. ‘06	Paranormal PI. Alchemist.
Tyler Durden	Jan. - Feb. ‘06, 2015*	Inspired creation of soap and rockets.
Greg House	May - July ‘06	
Edward Elric	Nov. ‘06 – Feb. ‘08	Alchemist.
Hannibal Lecter	Mar. ‘07 - ?	Artist.
Anakin	Apr. ‘08 – Aug. ‘10	Wanted a junk shop.
The Phantom	Apr. ‘09 – 2015	Musician, magician.
Tony Stark	Mar. ‘15 – now	“Activist.”
Jigsaw	Nov. ‘15 – now	Made traps.
Ash Ketchum	Sept. ‘16 – now	Not sure if existed
Rick Grimes	May ‘17 - now	Antifascist.
Kylo Ren	Jan. ‘18 – now	

(Years marked with a * note a minor, short-term resurface)

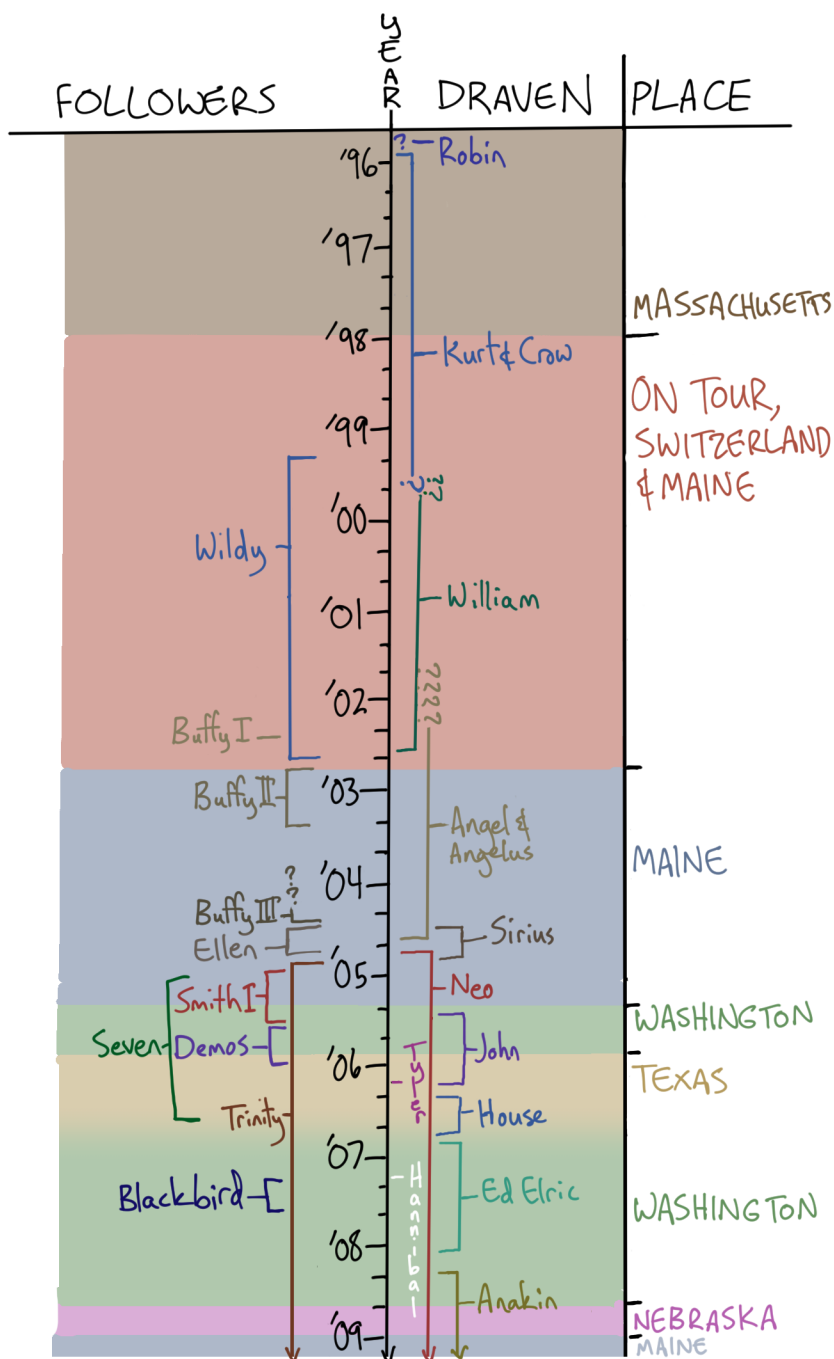
PARTNERS

Name/s	Time with Draven	Brief Bio
W (Dana/Krycek)	Late '98 – Aug. '02	Fiancée. SF writer.
Buffy I	? - May 2002	
Buffy II	Fall '02 – March '03	Multiple fiancée/wife. Stalked, harassed for years afterward.
Buffy III	~Mar. '04 – May '04	Fiancée. Possibly a troll.
Ellen	~May – Sept. '04	Fiancée. Very ill. Had a toddler.
Smith I	Nov. '04 – April '05	Stalked, harassed, flamed on Fandom Wank.
Trinity (Smith, Angie, Gabriel, Clarice, Mara Jade, Obi-Wan, Padme, Sidious, Christine, Mama Giry, Pepper Potts, Steve Rogers, Natasha R., Rey, and many many more)	Oct. '04 – Present	Wife. Arrested many times, convicted felon due to Draven.

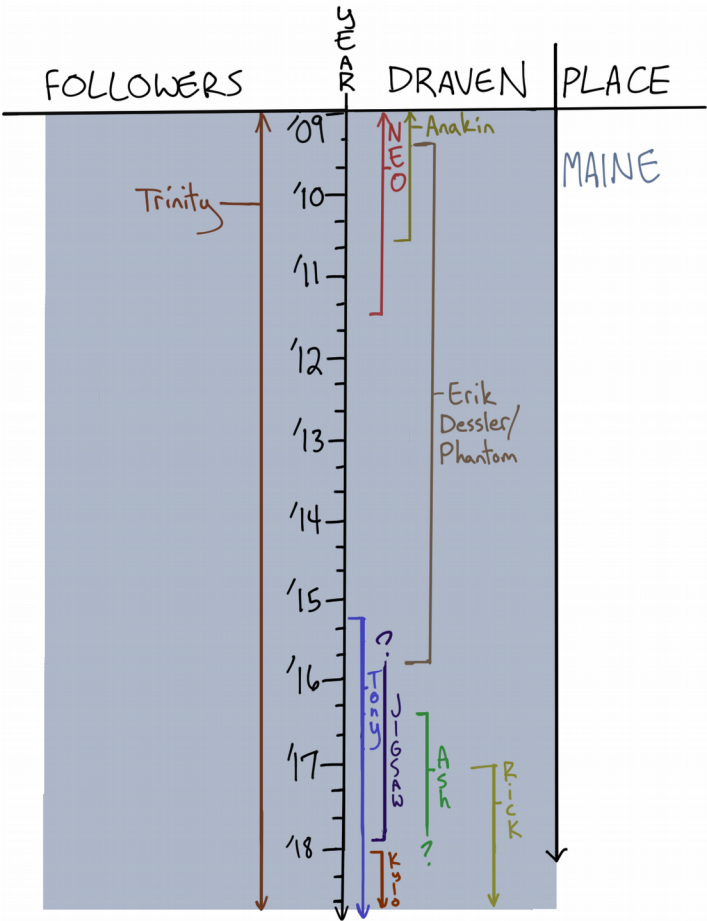
OTHER PLAYERS OF NOTE

Name	Time with Draven	Brief Bio
Connor	~2002 – present	Joined Angel's cult as a child, became Draven's "adopted son," BDSM spankee, and punching bag.
Faith	~2002 – present	Joined Angel's cult as a child, became a love interest.
Crowd	2005-?	Matrix fan, became Neo's attack dog on Fandom Wank.
Demos	Jun. '05 - Jan. '06	Teenage acolyte who moved in with Draven, ended up in court. Escaped.
Seven	Jan. '05 – Jun. '06	Gave Neo, Demos, and Trinity housing and money, got threatened with a knife. Neo's "adopted daughter." Escaped.
Blackbird	March – July 2007	Acolyte who moved in with Neo. Escaped, tried to take Neo down, got banned from Livejournal.
Zeal	March 2007-2008	Australian follower; escaped thanks to Blackbird.
Blaze	2008	Neo and Anakin's "adopted son."

VISUAL TIMELINE



VISUAL TIMELINE, CONTINUED



THE PIED PIPER OF GOTH: ROBIN BRENNAN AND KURT DRAVEN

Draven is born on Cape Cod on June 10, 1977 (Draven 2004c). Much later on, the Phantom will describe the circumstances of Draven's birth, alleging, "the body in which I currently find myself was born extremely prematurely, and almost – if not entirely – dead" (2012 August 13). He mentions it as a possible reason for their plurality, stating, "There is no 'body personality.'"

In other words, by their own claim, Draven never has a sense of self, merely an empty vessel. Later, that emptiness will be filled by a succession of figures from pop culture—or "PC" as Draven calls it. Draven will later describe taking on these identities throughout their childhood: "I've been doing it my whole life, as far back as I can remember. At first my parents tossed it off as 'cute' -- like, 'Aw, he gets attached to these characters' -- and then it just didn't go away" (2004 November 8a).

They also describe an early obsession with greatness and cosmic purpose: "I remember very, very clearly standing in the huge open field/lot/playground in the second grade, with a little tape recorder under my arm[I had to have music everywhere] feeling completely isolated from everyone else, and saying 'There's something I'm supposed to be doing, something BIG, some reason for me to be here... I'm not like them'" (ibid).

At the age of nine, Draven's family moves to the Farmington area of Maine (Bolduc, 1999), an area that Draven will leave and return to again and again throughout adolescence

and adulthood. Perhaps the smaller, less accessible towns in Maine proved intolerable, but relatives provided financial and psychological support.

At fourteen, Draven discovers James O'Barr's *The Crow* (2008 June 15b). The comic becomes the object of almost religious devotion, to the point that they will later describe it as "one of my personal [...] inspirational bibles" (1999 April 15) and get their first tattoo of a crow in its honor (2017 May 31). Even now, the book's importance can't be understated; they later claim, "every Halloween, at midnight, for two decades, I've quietly donned the makeup, sometimes taken a photo, and been silent for a somber and yet monumental minute" (ibid).

They never outright state that the Crow is one of their system members, but during an online battle in 2005, Draven's aunt will post a full list of system members, which ex-followers later pass on to me; the Crow is the first name on the list (personal communication, 2006 May 22).

The Crow is a story of death, rebirth, and revenge; it seems to have supplied some of the core metaphysical beliefs behind Draven's system. The Phantom specifically quotes *The Crow* in describing how it works: "Sometimes, something so bad happens, the soul can't rest.... back to put the wrong things right" (2012 August 13). Tony describes it more fully: "people, REAL people, from 'somewhere else' - call it an alternate reality, call it a parallel timeline - can sometimes cross over into 'this reality'... via a conduit, if the desire is great enough, if they have work to finish, a purpose to fulfill" (2015 March 2). This is exactly what happens to the fictional protagonist of *the Crow*, who dies under such unpleasant circumstances that he is brought back to find

vengeance. It is also how the Draven system gets new members—though oddly, they don't necessarily have to die first.

In April 1994, Kurt Cobain tragically commits suicide, and sixteen-year-old Draven organizes a vigil in Maine (Buldoc, 1999). They report, "I remember saying to myself, 'I'm going to learn to play this stuff- this man's songs- and carry on this voice because it's not ready to be forgotten. There's too much there.'" (ibid).

From anyone else, this would be an expression of devotion; for Draven, though, with that craving for importance and bigness, that lack of innate identity, it implies something darker and more grandiose. They start learning guitar (Buldoc, 1999) and make plans to start a band.

Draven claims to have joined the kink community at around this time (2008 June 13), though the statement seems dubious. Having a few friends who're within the BDSM scene, I know for a fact that children are steadfastly not allowed in any reputable group; asides from the massive ethical concerns, to do so would risk the entire group's safety and likely lead to exposure and arrests. Regardless, however and whenever Draven starts BDSM, they will later claim their long experience gives them some authority in discussing the subject... despite how unethically they practice it.

In 1995, Draven graduates high school (Unknown Date C) and here the story becomes a little muddled. They move to Boston, that much is for certain, but they claim different reasons why, depending on their audience: either they attend Boston University for a couple of years (ibid), or become a homeless drug addict (1999 April 8). The BU period is never discussed, except for a couple oblique references to Draven having gone to

film school (citation available upon request). Draven focuses more on the homeless drug addict period, describing themselves as "a street rat" "trying rather unsuccessfully to score a job or some money or something so I could [...] concentrate on my songwriting, skipping between friends' couches and floors... and going twice-weekly to the needle exchange" (1999 April 8). It is one of the few times they will admit forthrightly to the addiction issues that will plague them throughout their life. They also mention self-harming during this period (1999 April 17b). All of this is a similar narrative to the protagonist of *the Crow*, who besides being a heavy metal guitarist is also a cutter. The heroin addiction, of course, reflects Kurt Cobain.

By January 1996, Draven is playing back-up guitar for a grunge band called "Bleach," fronted by Maine musician Arend Trent and playing in Boston bars, but they aim higher (Trent, 2008). In April 1996, they release "The Recovery Song" on the "Angels Bleed: Songs of Tribute... From Seattle and Beyond" album (Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 1996), the sales of which "at least 50% of the profit [...] will benefit chronically depressed young people who can not afford treatment" (Bassoul, 1995).

Grunge music is not my forte, but even I can tell the influence of Nirvana in "The Recovery Song." The sound quality is not the best and the mixing uneven, but I can't offer much judgment about the song itself. It's catchy enough, I suppose; I could imagine hearing it on a local punk radio show some evening. Due to a hearing impairment, I can't even make out most of the lyrics, though the song is clearly about suffering, drug addiction, and recovery.

The name Draven gives for the album is Robin Brennan. In all my records, Draven never mentions who Robin is, but their

aunt's list of system members includes Robin Hood; it seems most likely that Robin Brennan is him.

By summer 1997, though, the system has switched over to the name of Kurt Draven (findthefun.com, 1997)--a composite of Kurt Cobain and Eric Draven, the protagonist of the first Crow movie. Since Draven's aunt lists them both as system members, it's clear that Draven's new name is not merely tribute to their fictional Bible and beloved musician, but a literal statement of who is in the system at the time.

At 20, Draven is the lead guitar and vocals of a grunge band with the appropriate name of Broken Messiah (*ibid*). This is a motif that will turn up in their activity for decades afterward. At the time, the band is in Centerville, Massachusetts, working on their debut album, "Temporarily Happy," and while they originally plan to self-release it, they are instead picked up by John Dyer's Unintentional Music in Blue Hill, Maine on October 25, 1997 (Verna, 1997). By this point, the band is now in Nantucket.

The band remarks that it's "seeking live gigs to promote the record and to raise funds for their upcoming 1998 overseas tour," (findthefun.com, 1997) and apparently they get enough to make it to Switzerland. There, in late 1998 or early 1999, Draven meets W, an award-winning science fiction writer who Draven claims sought them out after hearing their music online (1999 April 17a, paragraph 6). For a time, W gives them financial support, housing, and their seizure alert dog, Menemsha Blue (2002 December).

Menemsha Blue will sadly die an early death in 2007 (Draven, 2008 January 7). An ex-follower reports, "Draven treated Mnemsha [sic] (the dog) ok, but because of his constantly

destitute situation, the dog never really got the medical care/stability it needed” and that “he did have horrific mange, and Draven never did anything. [...] It ended up killing him” (ex-follower personal communication, 2017).

A year or so passes, and by July 1999, "Temporarily Happy" still hasn't been released, but Draven nets an interview with a local paper in Maine, where he and W spend their time when not in Switzerland (Bolduc, 1999). "[Draven's] musical style has been compared to that of the late Cobain," the article states, begging the question of, by who? "'It's really erie [sic]' said [W] of the likeness." Kurt even claims that he "learned how to sing by locking [himself] in a room with the Nirvana recording, 'Nevermind'" (ibid).

As far as I know, Kurt never publicly comes out online as the quantum reincarnation of Kurt Cobain, but it's the start of the formula that future system members will use before coming out. First, they allude to how uncannily they resemble the people involved, physically and mentally, in memory and skills. They mention how much the "pop culture" means to them, and attempt to emulate it. They ease a prospective follower into the idea with suggestions and implications, testing to see if they're receptive. When the time seems right, they finally theatrically disclose their identity for maximum emotional effect. They also help beef up their credentials by having their followers and partners speak for their veracity. All of these behaviors will become more pronounced over time.

"Temporarily Happy" does eventually come out, some time after the interview, but under the name "This Perfect Day." Rather than a full album, it's an EP with five songs: "The Recovery

Song," "Widow," "Sometimes I'm Happy," "Black, Like Guilt," and "Gethsemane" (2009 March 18).

On April 9, 1999, Kurt appears on a newsgroup devoted to Poppy Z. Brite. But before discussing what transpires next, a brief digression regarding Brite.

In 1999, Brite has the peculiar position of standing at the nexus of Draven's interests, having just published their 1999 biography of Kurt Cobain's spouse, Courtney Love, and their 1998 novel set in the universe of *the Crow*. He also shared space in 1995's *Splatterpunk II* anthology with W. Was all of this a coincidence? Did Draven's interest in one fandom lead them to others? Who knows?

Now twenty-one, Draven appears to be at least somewhat aware of their plurality, even if they're not open about it. Kurt mentions how Brite's book, *Lost Souls*, appeals to him because "LS is like aspects of my personality - and many others, I'm sure - fragmented into several personas" (1999 April 16b).

Kurt introduces himself using the email of W, who he claims to be his fiancée (1999 April 8). Kurt seems to love Brite's work as a reflection of himself: "I've found Poppy's works to be, well, about myself and everything and nothing, about all that makes me what I am" (ibid). He describes his homeless junkie period in Boston as a teenager, and claims that it was during this time that he first read a book by Brite, stating that it was given to him by a mysterious stranger saying, "I think it's for you."

Despite an initial positive impression, Kurt soon rubs other newsgroup members the wrong way by posting some of his fiction on the newsgroup—double-posting it, in fact (1999 April 9 and 10). A couple commenters request he not do so—they are here to celebrate the works of Poppy Z. Brite, not Kurt Draven.

The statements are fairly mild, but Draven takes them as blistering personal attacks. He complains that the newsgroup has spent “three days [...] blasting me” and insists, “I don't need a flame fest, okay? [...] I didn't come onto this newsgroup to be hurt” (1999 April 13). This exaggeration will also prove characteristic of Draven—the slightest criticism is inflated into bullying and harassment.

This inability to handle criticism doesn't endear him to some of the newsgroup members, and Draven adds fuel to the fire when he sends an effusive fan letter to another writer on the newsgroup—Jessica Amanda Salmonson. That on its own is no bad thing, except that when she posts his fan-letter on the newsgroup (1999), it sounds almost exactly the same as his intro post, hoping to reach the attention of Brite. It's so cookie-cutter that some of the commenters joke that Microsoft Word now has a form letter for the purpose.

But it gets weirder. Draven's specifically signing his work Kurt Anthony Draven. Jessica Salmonson is the author of *Anthony Shriek*, and the titular character is a tortured Goth painter in Seattle who falls into other worlds via his art and has deep obsessive relationships with women. Those traits that aren't present in Draven already will appear over time. Does the “Anthony” part of their name come from this novel? Was he a system member too? I have no idea. And while it may seem absurd for me to even wonder in the first place, Draven is very fond of the slow fade when introducing system members, as will soon become apparent.

Needless to say, Draven is doing a good job at pushing away more and more of the newsgroup members, but the breaking point is Tiffani. Apparently a minor, she makes a post of

only two sentences: "i find a comfort in cutting...as i find comfort in poppy. can anyone tell me why i might find the same thing in inflicting pain on myself as in reading poppy?" (1999).

Kurt's response is to send her a private message. (Or so he thinks at the time.)

It starts with an isolation attempt: "that group, no matter what the FAQ says, is NOT a friendly, open-minded, or underground group of people. [...] Several people actually wrote *me* to warn me of the same thing, and to say I'd be better off with personal e-mail" (as quoted by Rocky, 1999 April 17a). So from the start, he's trying to separate her from the group to talk to him privately, where they won't be overseen. (And who exactly are these people who warned him? He never says.)

Next, he goes on to talk about cutting, reassuring her that he does it too and that it's a sign of their shared specialness. "Cutting, etc., is very common among people who see and feel too much, who read the pain of the world like other people read a newspaper; those of us who wander the streets at 3 a.m., longing for something better," he says. He then moves on to paint himself as a rebel, a brooding bad boy. "I'm an artist, and a musician for an underground band. [...] I have scars, piercings(earrings, navel ring) and tattoos [...] and am a long-time ex-junkie" (ibid). The ex part, sadly, will change over time, if it's even true in the first place.

Finally, he ends with, "Please, please keep in touch if you dig this letter; I'd desperately like to know. I'm attaching something that I think you might find compelling - it's the recent piece of mine I sent to the ng to try and communicate. It speaks to *you*" (ibid). What follows is the piece of writing he posted

that got him in trouble in the first place, which describes cutting in graphic detail.

The message might have been effective, had it reached its young target, but it doesn't. Kurt sends the message to the wrong group member, an adult. The receiver, after sharing it with one trusted friend named Rocky to decide what to do, sends it back to Kurt, but he isn't satisfied. He complains, "I *didn't* appreciate you passing it around like a love note in junior high, because it *was* private" (1999 April 16a).

To which Rocky responds, "So priate[sic] and so important that you didn't even know who it was your [sic] were emailing it to. Okay lookit, you were a little werid[sic] in that email, and just a little scary. [...] The things you suggested to that girl where [sic] off base [...] You're playing at this Pied Piper of Goth thing and leading all those kids right into the river" (1999 April 17b).

This statement will prove outright prophetic, but it also shows just how intensely Draven hates being witnessed in his bad behavior, and how he overreacts to even a single other person seeing his words when he doesn't want them to. He calls it privacy; really, it's secrecy and isolation.

Kurt does not back down and finally, angry at his reality distortion, Rocky posts the Tiffani email in its entirety for all to see (1999 April 17a).

Unsurprisingly, Kurt is not pleased about this turn of events, but he tries to spin the whole thing as a cruel attack perpetrated on him by an unfeeling group of bullies with no artistic taste. He insists that he hasn't romanticized cutting at all and claims that anyone who thinks otherwise hasn't suffered the pain he has: "if you think that's romanticized, man, you've never done it, never felt the need. Never felt the need to cut or scream

or break your own hands to keep from exploding open from the inside" (1999 April 17b). It's as though he can't imagine any self-harmers disagreeing with him. He also claims protection under the first amendment (1999 April 17a) and compares another commenter to a Nazi, saying, "you are neither my mother nor my Fuhrer, and [...] [this] does NOT give you complete and total reign to act judgemental [sic]" (ibid). He also acts as though people are upset with him for the email's style, not content, declaring, "I'm saddened to know that so many people flame me just because of the style in which I write" (ibid).

In the future, these guilt-trips and spin doctoring will work, but the newsgroup doesn't buy it. "Jesus, shut up," says one commenter (FSL, 1999). "You used that kid to try and get shit going outside the ng, and now you feel violated. [...] You are so self-involved that you do not see your own manipulations and how every single thing in your mind has you sitting upon it as the king. Wake up." Another commenter says, very astutely, "I got news for you, kid. ALL OF US HAVE SUFFERED. All of us have had shit lives. [...] You haven't got any corner on the market for pain. Nor for the artistic expression of pain. But the rest of us don't need to inflate our sagging egos by blaggin on about it for days and days" (S, 1999).

W shows up to attack the detractors and defend Draven (1999 April 18), but it's over. In sum total, Draven is tarred, feathered, and sent packing within a week and a half.

I bring up this incident because it displays a lot of the themes of Draven's later behavior—coming into an existing fandom community, trying to impress it with their own creative work, focusing special attention on minors, and exploding into bilious defensive rage when things don't go their way. Always

playing the victim and martyr, bringing in their partners to defend them... Draven will never abandon these tactics over the next fifteen years, only elaborate on them.

However, this blow-out also demonstrates how to effectively safeguard a community from such a predator. The newsgroup staved Draven off in a matter of days, because they recognized Kurt's manipulation immediately. They named it as such and called him on it from the very beginning. They didn't let him keep his words private or secret; everything was made public, with his statements debunked and analyzed as they were made. The culture of the group was such that Kurt's increasing guilt-trips and reality distortions only made them angrier and more adamant. They held to their boundaries and grip on reality, and the harder they held on, the more Kurt raged, until his massive temper tantrums could no longer be passed off as innocent. He self-destructed and left.

Sadly, groups in the future will not be so wary, or lucky.

I'VE MASTERED THE MATRIX: WILLIAM "FOX" MULDER

Fox Mulder is the protagonist of a TV series called *The X-Files*, an FBI agent who works strange and paranormal cases with his partner, Dana Scully. The slogan of the show is "I Want To Believe."

Even before William's official appearance, Draven had an interest in aliens, and seemed to truly believe that they existed and interacted with humanity. In 1995, they claimed to be working on "a thesis paper concerning crop circles and the possibility of their being caused by extraterrestrial intelligence" (1995 December 15). Alas, they put the cart before the horse, stating that they are "looking for information to support my ideas," rather than trying to test and disprove their hypothesis, which involves "hidden mathematical or data agenda" in the fractal-ish appearance of recent crop circles. This will characterize how they misuse science to this day.

The X-Files had already been on the air for a couple years at that point, so it's not impossible that William existed at this time. That said, the first proof I can find for sure of William as an individual are a few fetish stories from the Male/Male Spanking Archive, dated a couple months after the Usenet blow-out, in June 1999. William will reuse both the pen-name of Fox Mulder and the associated email address for one of his later fanfics, "Whispers In a White Room" (2001 October 8) a couple years later.

The MMSA stories themselves are formulaic: Mulder behaves badly and Skinner (his boss) disciplines him with a

lavishly-detailed spanking, for his own good, of course. Greg House will later role-play a strikingly similar scene with his "adopted son," but that's not until the next decade. Asides from helping date William's appearance, the stories have nothing else of interest.

William disappears off my radar for the year 2000, but returns in 2001 when he starts writing fanfiction for squidge.org and the Basement. But these are vastly different in content and tone from the MMSA stories; instead of pairing Mulder with his boss, they all pair him with Scully (his work partner) or Alex Krycek (his enemy). What's more, Krycek writes back on the same sites, using the same screen-name and email address W had on Usenet!

Yes, Draven's fiancée, like the many who will succeed her, has a complementary fictional identity to Draven's own, and it doesn't seem to be mere role-play. In the author's notes of "Still Life At Gunpoint," she says, "this is a true story, as told to me by Alex Krycek himself. So there" (2002 June 3b). The disclaimer in The Threat reads, "AK [Alex Krycek] and FM [Fox Mulder] belong to CC [Chris Colfer] -- that's the party line, anyway. I don't believe it, myself" (2002 June 3a).

William is more forthright about the matter. In his fic, "A Splinter In My Mind", he rants, "How can anyone even believe I exist when my whole life has been touted, categorized, commercialized, and exploited as a fiction? Let me tell you something—David Duchovny doesn't keep the scars from those stitches, or have nightmares about coming home to Bill Mulder at fourteen" (2001 June 12). In "Desperate Letter from Mulder," William takes up Kurt's Broken Messiah metaphor, comparing himself to Christ on the cross, asking, "Can I be *your* Fox Mulder,

even with this situational crown of thorns?" and describes himself as "busted and rejected and nowhere near the Fox Mulder that ALL OF YOU are convinced I am" (2002 June 30).

Who is convinced that William is Fox Mulder? He doesn't say. But these rants will also become a Draven trademark, part of the grooming process. They take the sympathy that fans feel for a fictional character and reattach it to themselves. By claiming that he's more real than the fictional character he bases his identity on, William suggests that he deserves more sympathy than the original character. In fact, the fiction's very existence contributes to his suffering! For certain fans who desperately want to participate in the rehabilitation and nurture of their favorite character, it proves very attractive, a sort of real life hurt/comfort fic.

William uses drug use to add to his aura of suffering. He mentions the drug habit in a fanfiction, but it's clear that this habit is not fictional; he mentions: "codeine, say, or maybe heroin? Or maybe Jack Daniels and diazepam -make it a family cocktail." Obviously the heroin use was already in use back in Kurt's day, while in the future, John Constantine will talk about taking codeine for his supposed lung cancer (2005, August 28) and House will talk about taking "a Valium, three Vicodin, a beer," before going to bed (2006 June 13). These habits may not have started with William, but he certainly helps to perpetuate them.

W's fictive identities will have a huge impact on Draven's relationship style forever after. Krycek is written as the dom to William's sub, a violent kinkster who fills William's deepest, darkest needs. But his role isn't just sexual; Krycek seems to fulfill a role analogous to Carl Jung's idea of the Shadow, bringing

some sort of metaphysical balance to Draven's soul. As William says, "He is my dark side, my light half, the gray in between; my brother," his literal enemy turned into lover (2001, June 13). He describes the violence as healing and cleansing: "Defilement in a new and interesting way. Shame that tastes like redemption; submission that is, and will forever be, exoneration. Emancipation" (ibid).

He contrasts this to Dana Scully, who is "my light and my love and my utter salvation," and also his dutiful partner. How does she feel about Krycek? "Scully knows [about] that. She thinks it's good for me." It turns out that W is channeling not just Krycek, but Dana as well (Draven, 2002 April 18). This is perhaps the start of the Draven tradition of having each of their system members in a triad with at least two headmates in a partner system, with one playing the role of biggest fan second-in-command and another playing the Jungian shadow dom who ostensibly controls Draven's behavior (and is responsible for his redemption). This very specific framework will be repeated over and over again with subsequent partners, even now.

Draven's plurality is still discussed in veiled terms. In "Costumed", William dresses up as the Crow, has rough sex with Krycek at gunpoint, and then commits murder/suicide (2002 May 29). The author's note reads, "this one is a fic, pieced together from true events" so I'm left only with deeply uncomfortable connotations. This fic was posted near the end of their relationship, which makes it even worse.

W calls William NeoFox in "Come to Grief," (2002 July 2) and William uses the same name in "A Splinter In My Mind" (2001 June 12) and "The Boys Inside, or the Death of Kolyai" (2002 May 29a). The latter story gives an explanation for the

nickname; in it, William and Krycek go to kill someone, and the whole thing is one long callback to *The Matrix*, from wardrobe (William wears sunglasses in the dark, a long black coat, and lots of leather straps) to the fight scene. William describes time slowing down Matrix-style as, "together we slam into the knee-high railing behind us and roll over it as one man, smooth and slow and so like a movie." William also writes, "I feel as though all my muscles, every inch of skin, is working like a hologram, a projection. Like I'm not really here... like I've mastered the Matrix. NeoFox."

Neo will not make his formal appearance until 2004, roughly three years later, but the seeds are clearly already there. And it's telling, how William sees himself as the hero in the movie of his own life, a life that is based on pop cultural fiction. Over time, that blurring of fiction and reality will only become more pronounced.

In September 2001, under the name Fox, William publishes the piece of writing that got Kurt into such trouble on Usenet, now using the title "REFORMATting (Remaking the Self)." The online magazine Chaos Theory publishes it in Issue #14 (Greg Turpin, personal communication 3/2/2017); the article has changed barely at all in the ensuing two and a half years.

Neo will later refer to the Fox name as "a semi-pseudonym" and describe the time as "back when I was Thomas Anderson," (2004 November 8b) which opens up all sorts of questions as to whether he himself sees William as a real person, or merely a false facade to be stripped off for the Neo identity. No answer is forthcoming.

In April 2002, I find the first Wayback Machine capture for William's paranormal investigations agency, Black Fox

Solutions (2002 April 18). It's run in Rumford, Maine, not far from Farmington where Kurt grew up. William and W run it, though she's listed under the name Dana. It is in fact a recreation of the fictional Scully and Mulder's workplace!

Black Fox Solutions assists in such things as "UFO sightings, alien or entity abductions, psychic phenomena [...], telekinesis [...], strange visitations, unusual or prophetic dreams, spirit manifestations," and so on, but I have no idea whether Black Fox Solutions gets any business. The only other mention of it that I can find is an April 4th Boston Phoenix article that merely notes its existence (Wright, 2002).

Regardless, somewhere in the summer, it all falls apart. W's fanfiction site vanishes (2002 August 19), and Black Fox Solutions disappears, replaced by a blank page with the title "Aeternum Investigations," Angel's first agency (2002 August 5).

But Angel was around before that.

THE BEST FIEND AND DAD I CAN BE: ANGEL

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a television show about the eponymous teenager fighting evil in Sunnydale, California. Angel is her love interest for the first three seasons before going his own way and starting a paranormal investigations agency in *Angel: The Series*.

Draven's Angel gets his start the same way many of his headmates will: online role-playing. Angel starts in a Yahoo chat room, and while the claimed date ranges anywhere from 2000 on, the first hard evidence I have of Angel's existence is a series of Deadjournal posts from a follower named Bar on May 25, 2002.

It seems suiting that the first mention of Angel I can find is a theatrical drama involving break-up and betrayal. But the woman involved isn't W. It's a much younger girl who's still involved with her parents-- though she's "destroyed her parents' perception of her," "broke their hearts," and "her mom doesn't want her calling her motehr[sic] anymore" (as quoted by Bar, 2002 May 25b). The mom is referred to as "mrs. summers," but this clearly isn't her real name; it's a reference to Buffy Summers. All of this strongly implies that this person is hosting a Buffy to complement Draven's Angel, just as W hosted Scully and Krycek for William. I will thus call her Buffy I.

The chat log transcribed in Bar's post is the first clear nonfiction reference I can find to Draven's violent tendencies: "He's got a temper, and a very short fuse. I've heard him snap and yell at [Buffy I], while he's here." Angel's response is an

immediate, "THAT IS SUCH A FUCKING LIE!!" but considering what will come to light later on, I doubt it.

Bar's posts also contain the first notation I can find of Draven using suicide to bind a follower to them; she writes, "according to the Dead one's post in his equally Dead journal.. I'm the only thing that kept him from ending it" (2002 May 25c). His controlling tactics prove more fruitful here than on Usenet; Bar only becomes more devoted to him. "I love you, Angel," she writes (ibid). "You're one of the best friends someone could ever have. And like I said.. I believe in you. You're REAL. Not something dreamed up by some half-crazy person living in Maine, or even by Joss Whedon. You're Liam Kirwan, with a demon inside."

"Liam," I know, comes from the TV show; it was Angel's original human name. (And it might've meshed nicely with Fox's name, William.) I'm not sure where "Kirwan" came from; it's possibly an acronym of letters from all the system members' names as they appeared in chronological order: Kurt, ErIc (the Crow), Robin, William, ANGel. And as for the "demon inside," that's Angelus. More on him in the next chapter.

Anyway, within six months of the break-up with Buffy I and two months after the sites for William and W disappear, Angel has a new Buffy, an eighteen-year-old multiple with the Yahoo! ID of Buffy Draven (2003). Hereafter, I will refer to her as Buffy II.

During this time, Angel claims to be running Aeternum Investigations (2002 October 19), taking calls and investigating paranormal occurrences with various people from *Angel: the Series*, but it's hard to tell what is role-play and what is reality. For instance, Angel discusses a case in Simi Valley, California, and acts

as though the agency is in LA, but Buffy II's DeadJournal from the time lists her as living in Maine (citation available upon request), which seems far more likely. It seems most likely that they were enacting these Aeternum Investigations cases in Maine, as a sort of reality-blurring psychodrama with a metaphysical gloss that Draven call "bi-location."

What is bi-location? Draven describes it as, "a form of existing/interaction wherein our people [...] speak, interact, and react as if they're in a specific place in their own origin timeline, thus facilitating certain experiences that they need to grow, evolve, heal, or otherwise move on" (2018, May 8). In other words, to quote an ex-follower: "To the outside viewer, this looks like constant roleplay/LARP" (personal communication, 2017). But Draven takes it extremely seriously, and it can get violent: they describe "tears and screaming and maybe throwing things," pulling (unloaded) guns on each other, "sobbing hysterically, for a full ten minutes," and injuries including "a couple concussions" (2018 May 8). And of course, since it's all "real," the participants must continue until it is done, sometimes for solid hours; at no time can they quit, the way one could in a game. "I used to get bitched out about 'ruining his uber' or 'breaking uber' which is the terminology he would use to mean we all had to front Matrix personas like we were actually still in that world AND this one, all the time," an ex-follower reports (personal communication, 2018 June 18). "Real-life concerns were never allowed to take full precedence."

This is not acceptable behavior for plurals, whatever their origin. If two people need to hash something out, wherever they are, they can do it with a conversation. Under no circumstances is drawing weapons, screaming, or attacking each other

acceptable; neither is pretending that the subjective and the corporeal world are the same, or overlaying each other. That is actively blurring one's experience of reality to intensify emotion and create traumatic bonding, and is far better at breaking someone's psyche than healing it. But Draven acts as though the violence and intensity is a feature, not a bug: "turning that off would be muting people's legitimate responses to situations, and we don't do that" (2018 May 8).

But let's get back to Angel. In December 2002, he starts posting photos on what used to be William's website. Most of them are selfies, but he also posts pictures of medals from his competitions in Tae Kwon Do and talks about the weapons he owns, including, "My signature weapon. Black nunchaku with blue dragons on them," and a "dragon's-head sword cane" to which he adds "since the sword has to unscrew from the rest of the cane(even though two or three sharp twists of my wrist does it nicely), it doesn't qualify as a concealed weapon..... meaning I can take it with me more or less anywhere I go" (December 2002a, b, c, and d). Combined with his short temper and his later arrests, it's all rather unsettling.

A couple months later, Angel posts his formal coming out on his website, (2003 February 3). "I've been told I'm an excellent 'RP'er, that I 'play a rockin' Angel'," he writes, "and though I'm grateful for these compliments, it's time I explained to all of you WHY that is." He then posts what appears to be an IM chat log of a follower explaining Angel to someone else: "[William] sort of.. Channels Angel. [...] william's life is entirely ic [in character]." The follower adds, "Will...we call him 'the vessel' because it's sort of as if will's body had Angel's soul and was seeking the retribution it needs. [...] he's Angel."

It's the same narrative from *the Crow*, the seeking of revenge and closure. But the context of who William is never comes up; that system member will never be mentioned again, as far as I can tell, and it's unclear whether the follower even knows William's significance. Is William Mulder gone? Is he now just a hollow shell Angel is acting through? It's hard to tell. Draven certainly never bothers to clarify.

The web page isn't just a coming out, though. It's also a rant, very similar to William's from two years earlier, complaining about Angel's life and suffering being commercialized for the masses. "I was me long before pop culture became a 'staple'" he claims, (falsely: Angel had been on screen for at least three or four years before Draven's Angel appeared) and "it has managed, in more ways than one, to MAKE MY LIFE A LIVING HELL." He complains that people don't understand his guilt, his suffering, his aching to let Angelus out. "Do you KNOW how many teenage girls have said to me 'Oooh, Angelus is so much sexier than Angel.... I love the bad boys and oooh, those leather pants.' -sighs-"

It's uncertain if he includes his own teenage "wife" in that complaint, or the teenage girls who overwhelmingly make up his followers. The whole thing is a backhanded insult to them, a demand they bend over backwards to prove they're not like those other girls.

Angel goes on to explain, "I take my 'RP' so goddamned seriously. It's an outlet for me, the only one I have, short of doing my sword kata alone in the dark, Tae Kwon Do and the actual AI office, my writing and my dreams...."

Imagine being Buffy II, getting up in the middle of the night for a drink, only to find this man practicing martial arts

with a sword in the dark! But regardless, the AI office likely doesn't even corporeally exist; it's merely an extension of the role-play. And the role-playing isn't an outlet so much as a recruitment and grooming tactic. Angel, Sirius, Neo, House, Anakin, the Phantom, all of them gain followers through role-play, waiting until their fellow players are hooked before disclosing their identities. Followers think they're playing a game, only for it to take up more and more of their time, the boundary between fantasy and reality eroded into nonexistence. It becomes reality, a cause to save the world, a cult.

Even though Angel has long since deleted and purged his Deadjournal, some of his followers' accounts still remain, bearing witness to the breakdown of their reality. Connor describes staying up all night with the group, having nightmares and intrusive memories from the Buffy world (2004 March 18). Another follower worries he's having prophetic nightmares (Jon, 2003). They and Angel all mention a coming war (Jon, 2004; Connor, 2003 February 24a).

It's not just on Deadjournal either. Aeternum Investigations becomes Angel Investigations, and in April of 2003, Angel creates a current events blog for its formal opening, (2003 April 19) then a proper website (2004 February 8). On the latter is a special note with the words, "It has been brought to our attention recently that a lot of people [...] have been feeling something akin to 'a mounting concern'.... for something that may or may not happen, but nonetheless feels like it's going to. [...] These feelings and precognitive perceptions are highly subjective and personal [...] but [...] they all have a common denominator: A coming battle, some disaster or Apocalyptic event, or the need to gather together with people who have had

similar sights.... feelings.... experiences.... to [...] prepare for it" (Draven, 2003 October 17a).

Whatever the nature of this vague future hypothetical event, the web-page reassures, "We're here..... when you need us."

Naturally, the Angel Investigations homepage has a disclaimer that they have nothing to do with the Joss Whedon show (Draven, 2004 February 8). But what exactly do they do? Mostly, the site is a rehash of Black Fox Solutions; they even mention helping with "UFO or Abduction Sightings and Reports" (2003 October 17b). They also mention being available for "Bodyguarding, Protection, and Safety Companion Services," stating, "We put safe resolution of all conflicts as our top priority, using force only when *absolutely necessary and when there is no other choice*" (emphasis his) (ibid). Why would Angel consider himself up to the task of being a bodyguard? What are his credentials? He offers none, and his earlier fixation on impractical, highly decorated weaponry doesn't help.

The whole thing doesn't appear particularly convincing for adults, but perhaps it would appeal to teenagers who don't know what bodyguard duty actually entails. A proper martial artist wouldn't care whether their swords and nunchaku had dragon decorations on them, except as a sign that they're meant for decoration. To a child, however, such details might seem cool, a sign of maturity and worldliness.

Tellingly, the first thing Angel offers assistance in above all else is "Lost or Missing Children and Teens" (2003 October 17b). "Are YOU a 'lost or missing teen'?" The page reads. "Are you out there wandering, not knowing who to turn to? Are you in trouble with the law, with drugs or alcohol, or just lost in general? We can help. Whether it's a safe shelter, a hot shower,

and a phone available to call your family, whether it's a direction to be pointed in -- human services, a shelter, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program, other things -- we can help." And despite his apparent disdain for teenage girls, he wants them not just as clients, but as followers too. Buffy II is eighteen, but Bar, Connor, and Faith are all younger, and Connor in particular will become one of Draven's most devoted followers.

On *Angel: the Series*, Connor is Angel's son, but Draven's Connor is staunchly female (Connor, 2004 November 12). Nevertheless, Angel persuades her that he is her "true" father on a spiritual/metaphysical level (Draven, 2003 November 4) and she is metaphysically Connor, quantum-reincarnated from the show. It works: Connor takes to calling Angel "Dad" (2004 April 19) or "Pops" (2004 May 4) and in a later online survey declares that Angel knows her the best, is closest to her, and of all the people in her life, talks to her most on the phone and online (2004 November 12).

In the early grooming love-bombing stage, Angel leaves loving, attentive comments on Connor's blog posts. By November of 2003, he's saying things like, "no matter what happens, I love you and I'm here for you anytime, under any circumstances. You're truly my C.F. [Connor Finnegan], and i won't ever forget that... I owe you a debt that I can't ever repay, except to be the best fiend [sic] and 'Dad' I can be" (2003 November 4). A few months later, he tells her, "You're my hero. I couldn't be prouder," (2004 April 18) and compliments her on her devotion, saying, "You're the most loyal son anyone could hope to have, and I will ALWAYS love you" (2004 April 22).

Draven lies about his love, but he is sadly correct about Connor's loyalty. She takes to signing her posts with the name

he's given her, Connor Finnegan Kirwan Draven (2004, June 1), and all of her Deadjournal posts name her as "Kiddo AKA C.F," basing her identity around her relationship to Angel just as Buffy II did. She becomes so invested in Angel's Mission that when she turns eighteen, she has a fight with her parents over him (2004, November 10). "My folks have made it quite clear that that I am NOT allowed to use my [birthday] money to go visit Dad in Maine, which is pissing me right the fuck off," she posts. "I've been wanting to go visit Dad for little over three years, this isn't fair!"

Tellingly, Angel draws her fictional incarnation's portrait, twice, (2004a and b) but never her actual self. It seems he is unable to see Connor as she is, only as he wants her to be.

Connor isn't the only one, either. Much like Anthony Shriek, Angel has pretensions of becoming a painter, and he creates an art website, Draven's Domain (2004c). While he claims to be a "Symbolist/Surrealist" who is "inspired -- but not directed -- by Dali, Escher, Giger, Munch, and Bosch," his gallery is populated entirely with Buffy fanart of mediocre quality, clearly copied from the show (Draven, 2004a, b, and d). The flatness of the images, the odd heads floating over random textures, all suggest Draven copying images without understanding the underlying structure. For instance, the image below was likely copied from the photograph at left, but since Draven didn't understand the structure of anatomy and lighting, his shading ends up awkward, with an erased line down the right side of Connor's face and disproportionate attention drawn to the indentations above the upper lip.



(Promo image from *Angel: The Series*, vs. Angel's 2004 sketch)

There are only a couple paintings that contain any originality, and all show a novice's understanding of anatomy, lighting, and perspective. One depicts a blond-haired girl, presumably Buffy, and a black-haired man, presumably Angel, hanged on trees next to each other, reaching out to touch hands. Angel's caption reads, "This piece speaks to the dichotomy that none of us can exist without; Good and Evil, Heaven and Hell, dark and light" (Draven, 2003b). It certainly seems to mesh with the fixation all of Draven have on their partners cosmically, metaphysically balancing them, though I have no idea why both are being hanged. Is it a statement on being lynched, being misunderstood by the people around them? Who knows.

Ruin and Repent is more interesting. A self-portrait, it depicts Draven as Christ on the cross, a literal broken messiah (2003a) while what appears to be an apocalyptic volcano erupts in the background. Angel seems unaware of the egotism and grandiosity inherent in such a comparison.



(Ruin and Repent, Draven, 2003)

Draven accompanies the painting with a description: “We are all martyrs to our own cause. Alone, cast out, waiting for the crowd to come and watch us slowly wither to nothing. This piece speaks to our fears, our nightmares -- but also to our hope, our joyousness, our hope of salvation and redemption” (2004c).

For three sentences, this description says a lot. Purification and salvation is a theme Draven will return to again and again; recall that William also described his BDSM with Krycek as “redemption” (2001, June 13). However, this is the first time that Draven admits that their redemption requires others witnessing it. It’s not enough to save humanity; they need an appreciative audience. Otherwise, they are nothing. This will become a clear influence on their behavior to this day.

There also might be a more literal meaning to the painting; in the background, there is what appears to be an erupting volcano, or perhaps the Hellmouth of Buffy lore. Perhaps the

work is just a bald statement of Angel's role in saving humanity from a demonic apocalypse, via his own self-sacrifice (witnessed and reflected by others, of course).

Interestingly, Angel draws himself, not the fictional actors he uses when drawing all of his friends. It's as though he's the only person who gets to be real in his own mind.

Like Kurt's band, these artistic pursuits don't seem to come to anything; aside from one self-reported gallery show in July (2004f), I can find no mention of sales, shows, or reviews. This doesn't surprise me. Technical flaws aside, none of Draven seem capable of artistic originality; they can only riff off of existing works by other artists they admire--Kurt Cobain, Chris Colfer, or Joss Whedon. Despite their rants about "Pop Culture" or "PC," none of Draven seem capable of creativity without it. Which is fine, except that they keep trying to portray themselves as visionaries and professionals.

Through all of this, Angel isn't alone; he has Angelus with him.

DADDY'S GONNA KILL YOUR WHOLE FAMILY: ANGELUS

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Angelus was Angel's natural state, a soulless, murderous vampire who cared nothing for others. Angel would lose his soul, and thus revert to this state, if he ever experienced pure happiness. Draven's Angelus seems to have worked a little differently, being just another headmate.

Angelus appears around the same time that Angel does. Like his fictional counterpart, he's characterized as pure evil, "someone with no remorse and absolutely no conscience," (2003) the demon inside that constantly struggles with Angel for control. In reality, though, he seems to have been no worse than Angel, just more honest. He writes, "Maybe the Church of Angelus? I've heard that brainwashing is my thing" (ibid). Considering that Neo will found a literal church within a year or two, and indeed be accused of brainwashing his followers, Angelus's quip seems a little on the nose.

Like Angel and William, Angelus shows disdain for the fictional character who inspired him, musing, "wonder if that spiky-haired actor ever *actually* killed anyone? Ever got hard from the sound of a severed spinal cord?" (ibid, emphasis his). His site is filled with such mustache-twirling boasts of his misdeeds, such as "crucifying a woman in our basement once with strung-taut chains" and "using shards from a bottle of Merlot to imbed [sic] in the collar and chains to keep her in position" (ibid). He also taunts Angel, saying, "he's so much like a slaver puppy it makes you just want to shoot the bastard and get it over with. Putting everybody else first" (ibid). It's all a

strange way of backhandedly complimenting Angel's selflessness and devotion, putting his goodness on display to their invisible audience—how wonderful and brave Angel is, suffering Angelus's behavior to be such a good person!

Angelus also mentions that Angel is "desperately in love with that dark-haired Slayer," and posts an animated icon of Faith and Angel together with the remark, "they would make a good couple, though, eh?" (ibid). Although the date of the relevant web page is unclear, the Faith role-player was in high school for the entire period that Angel and Angelus existed. I don't have to spell out the unpleasant connotations; Angelus does it himself. "To hear him talk about it. [...] How she doesn't love him. How much he wants to prove he does" (ibid).

Because Faith's journals are mostly locked, and Angel's is long since deleted, I don't know what happened with that. I'm glad.

Angelus also makes a page in "honor" of one of the Buffys, with the song lyrics including, "I didn't want to hurt you/But you're pretty when you cry," "I didn't really love you/But I'm pretty when I lie," and, "But when I treat you bad/It always makes you want to stay" (Unknown date B).

It's not clear to which Buffy Angelus is referring; Buffy II lasts the longest, so perhaps it's her. Keep in mind, this is the same partner who blogged about feeding Draven breakfast in bed (Buffy II, 2003 March 29), and here they are making a "tribute" page all about hurting her. What is its purpose? To impress his "audience" with Angelus's nefarious villainy? To degrade and humiliate Buffy II? It's easy to dismiss all of it as posturing... but is it really? Obviously the crucifixion is nonsense, but is Angelus truly making up all of his violent misdeeds?

On his web site, Angelus also posts a lullaby, portraying himself as "Daddy" (Unknown date B). It's not clear who the lullaby is meant for, but the threat of violence goes through all of it... and some of it is most certainly will prove true. Among the verses:

"Daddy's gonna terrorize your friends.
"And if your little friends don't flee,
"Daddy's gonna kill your whole family.
"And once the ones you love are dead,
"Daddy's gonna climb inside your head.
"And once you've sweetly gone insane,
"Daddy's gonna tie you down and play."

The thing is, all of these lines are things that actually happened, or will happen in the future. Recall Buffy I, and Angel inciting their mutual friends to turn on her. And years after this, Draven will end up in court over accusations of domestic violence regarding their in-laws; an ex-follower claims that Neo attempted to stab his father-in-law. And as for getting into people's heads...

A couple days before their nineteenth birthday, Buffy II posts, "I left my husband" (2003 April 18). The system seems to be okay with this decision, and they add, "we've all reached some sort of calm at being out of that life, that lifestyle we had going." In a later post, they talk about a new system member appearing, with the remark, "I believe she stems from my marriage," which suggests the relationship was traumatic and quite literally drove them mad (2003 May 25). But they show no bitterness or resentment, only sadness.

Angel's followers are not so kind. True to the lullaby's words, they desert Buffy II. Bar calls her a "psychobitch" who's "Fucking Full of Shit" (2003, June 7) and a "selfish child" whose "husband's friends [are] more faithful than she is" (citation available upon request). Everyone else seems to stop talking to her. Within a couple months, Buffy II disappears from the Internet, just like W before them... though that won't keep Draven from stalking them for years afterward.

But they are not the last of the Buffys. There is a Buffy III! I can find very little information about her, but less than a year after Buffy II's departure, Connor posts, "Dad and Buffy are going to get married sometime in the future, and I personally couldn't be happier for them. Its going to be great finally having and [sic] actual family" (2004 March 18). That makes three Buffys and W, all in the space of less than two years... and W, Buffy II, and Buffy III were all declared by Draven to be fiancées or wives!

The relationship with Buffy III seems to blow up come spring. According to one of Draven's ex-followers, she later claimed to be a troll, but even that is uncertain: "at least [she] said she was trolling, to write a paper. [...] I always wondered if she just said that to get out of the relationship" (Personal communication). Draven sics their followers upon her just like Buffys I and II; one follower rants about "this most frustrating childlike person who conducted an illegal study using people online as her guinea-pigs" who "was causing a huge 'defamation [sic] of peoples character" and "that the whole college and university could actually be sued because she did NOT inform anyone of what she was up to ..nor did she give an apology" (citation available upon request).

This seems to be the end of Angel, along with his RP group-turned-apocalypse-cult. Angel and Angelus delete their Deadjournal and will never openly declare their existence again... except for one exception, years later.

WHO I'M MEANT TO BE: SIRIUS BLACK AND THE START OF NEO

Draven joins Livejournal in March 2004, and after the break-up with Buffy III, they start infiltrating the Harry Potter community as a Sirius role-player (2004 June 15). Immediately, Sirius starts in with hints that he's not really role-playing, using the pen name of "Pads" (i.e., Padfoot) when posting his fanfiction (2004 August 20) and also stating, "I was in the thick of my RP tonight(so involved and overtired that I kept forgetting I'm not Sirius; as silly as that sounds)" (2004 June 15). Like his headmates before him, Sirius insinuates and suggests his identity while still maintaining a veneer of plausible deniability should anyone call him on it. It proves a handy way to test the waters for a later coming out.

At some point, Draven meets their next partner, hereafter referred to as Ellen. Less than six months after Buffy III, Sirius posts a fanfic dedicated to her "for showing me that love is possible, that compassion and perfection are worth working at and that I *deserve* to be loved" (2004 August 20). He also dedicates the fic to Faith role-player from the Angel cult, specifically noting that she is now finally an adult, making Angel's earlier pining all the creepier. (For comparison, Draven at this point have just turned twenty-seven.)

Even more unsettling is that Sirius's choice of gifts to these two love interests is an explicit kinky story about himself and

Remus Lupin, who plays the Jungian shadow dom like Krycek and Skinner before him, offering moral purification through physical pain. The story is darker and more emotional than the M/M Spanking Archive stories, but has a similar flow: Sirius misbehaves, and so Remus teaches him “a lesson in humility” and delivers a “punishment” via bites and rough bare-backing without lube. At the end, Sirius asks, “Am I forgiven?” to which Remus responds, “of course.”

In the comments, Sirius says, "I can't really take credit for the writing. I just kind of.... transcribed it" (Anonymous, 2004). He then links to his individual Livejournal account (long since deleted and purged) with the words, "I've been fortunate enough(or cursed enough; two sides of the coin I guess) to be able to internalize a lot of things." Again, more implications, without coming out and saying he's Sirius Black.

Less than a month later, Draven joins the soulbonding community (2004 September 12). Their introductory post mentions none of the system members before Sirius, and certainly not the Buffys or W. Ellen is his fiancée now; she apparently has a soulbond of an original character who is one of Sirius's old girlfriends and apparently Harry Potter's godmother, implying that she and Sirius might've been married in the fictional universe (Draven, 2004 September 15).

Even though the relationship seems new, it's already showing strain, because Sirius is giving way to Neo. Ellen comments, "my partner will not let [Neo] out to talk to me as I have no one from the Matrix/Zion that I can channel to help aid Neo. Neo is becoming more depressed and anxious and my beloved partner is [...] getting extremely frustrated with me. Does anyone have any ideas as to what I can do about this so as to help

my partner and Neo feel he exists and build himself up again? [...] it is causing a lot of tension" (Ellen, 2004 September 16).

It's a strange question. Many (if not most) people can't choose their headmates; to expect a partner to create or host complementary system members on demand is presumptuous at best. But the exchange implies that Neo is incapable of feeling he exists unless he has other Matrix people around him, reflecting his identity, playing the role of his audience. This plays into what he and other Draven people have said before, but it's still wrongheaded. The Matrix universe is vast, covering many different times, places, and groups of people; someone from there might not know who Neo is, care, or want anything to do with him. Others may prefer to leave their roots completely behind, taking on new names and lives. Does Neo somehow expect Ellen to be as devoted to him as she is to Sirius, even though Neo's a complete stranger to her?

Clearly so, and the relationship's deterioration comes quickly. Within just three days, Draven makes an enraged community post: "My FIANCEE, the woman who I would still, even now, take a bullet for, took off last night...**And she took our daughter with her. Our daughter that calls ME 'Daddy'**" (2004 September 19, emphasis his).

That's quite a claim to make about a baby. According to Ellen, her daughter isn't even a year old yet at this time (2004 September 15). The baby was surely born while Draven was with one of the Buffys, and he's only known Ellen for a few months, tops; it seems unlikely that the baby would see him as her father, never mind call him Daddy. But in Draven's mind, both woman and child apparently belong to him now. With bold and

capslock, he says, "**I WANT THEM BACK**" (Draven, 2004 September 19).

Considering that Ellen had been reporting kidney failure, hospitalization, and medically mandated bed rest less than two weeks prior (2004 September 7), not to mention had a baby in tow, I can only imagine the amount of planning and sacrifice such an escape took. And she seems to have made a clean break; she completely disappears from social media not long after, except for a single LJ post stating that she's happier single (2004 October 25). It's almost exactly what Buffy II did, a year and a half prior, and W a year before that.

Meanwhile, Draven flies into a rage, making certain everyone in the soulbonding community knows that Ellen will "respond to this post with a 'what REALLY happened' bit, demonizing me totally, or perhaps making something up out of whole cloth to justify what happened -- because every time this has EVER happened to me, that's been the M.O. And everyone who's ever been connected to the Internet has started slamming me in serious flame wars in public [sic] because once they leave, their maturity level drops to about the level of a third-grader" (2004 September 19). In other words, he claims she will do exactly what he himself is doing. (She never does and neither did any of his previous fiancées, as far as I know. They all just disappear, and the only flame wars or slams I've seen have been with Draven as the instigator.)

Even in his possessive rage, Draven lets slide hints of who is really at fault, and why Ellen disappeared. He admits, "Yes, we had a row -- but compared to some others, it was barely anything at all" (ibid). And yet, somehow it is enough to make a severely ill woman flee her home in the middle of the night with a baby.

But Draven never mentions Ellen's ill health at all. Instead, Draven acts as though they are the one with the most to fear, claiming that Ellen's actions have put Neo's life at stake.

"Without someone here who loves me, someone who UNDERSTANDS and BELIEVES, without someone to bounce off of, to tell ME it's all right to be who I am and to love me and support me while I'm doing it... Neo is struggling mightily to not.... well.... die," Draven complains (ibid). "My people have always needed outside validation, for good or ill."

It's a moment of startling honesty. Draven doesn't actually care about Ellen or her child as actual people with problems or hardships. Instead, they are the audience, human mirrors, reflecting Draven's myriad images and identities—as Neo, as Sirius, as a father. It might explain why Draven seems incapable of being single for any length of time, and why they become engaged to all of their partners so quickly; they can't bear to be without their reflection. Suddenly, Bar's earlier claim that she saved Angel from suicide after Buffy I comes into context: to them, a break-up is a near-lethal threat, the deprivation of the all-important audience.

Over the next couple of months, the Draven system goes through an overhaul. Like Kurt and William before them, Angel and Angelus are erased from the system's history, never to be publicly mentioned again. Sirius follows soon after; he role-plays briefly on the LJ community *mundus_solutum*, but is gone by January 2005 (Draven, 2004 December 12). They no longer fit the new narrative, which is that Neo is the sole system member.

Draven plays this up for maximum dramatic effect, treating it as a near-religious experience. In November 2004, they write that they've always felt they were destined to do

something big. "I've been searching for the last twenty years for what that something was," they write, "and I've found it in the bond I have now [Neo]: he's pretty much swapped places with me, i.e., taken over as the 'host' person. And I'm fine with that. I've been waiting for it my whole life" (2004 November 8a). That same day, Neo posts, "there's nothing *else* right now but the 'essence' of myself: Thomas Anderson, Neo, the Neb II, past present and future, world without end, Amen. There is no other/no shared consciousness, no other [...] entity inside. Was there ever?" (2004 November 8b).

Unless all of their system history up to that point was a lie, then yes, yes there was. To add to the strangeness, Sirius is still actively role-playing on mundus_solutum at this time. Is he suddenly not real now, or was he a fraud the entire time? And who on earth is the "I" who posts about switching places with Neo the day prior? Is it Angel? If not, what has become of them? Have they become one being with Neo? Have they died? Neo never clarifies.

While Draven seems thrilled at this turn of events, Connor isn't. After years with Angel and his cult to prevent the apocalypse, her beloved Dad is gone, possibly dead, and so is his Mission; she's heartbroken. "I've been crying for the last 45 minutes," she posts (2004 October 20). "It seems I'm looseing [sic] everyone I care about in one swoop. Its killing me. I know who I am. I'm Connor Draven. Nothings changed. I lost Dad, and Faith, and...it hurts so bad."

Neo has no patience for Connor's pain. He tries to assimilate her into his own cult, possibly by taking on the identity of "the Kid" or "Mouse" from the Matrix franchise (Draven, 2004 October 10), but it never works out; Connor

admits she “didn’t exactly understand the whole concept of the movie” (2004 November 14). Frustrated at her inconvenient grief, Neo finally goes on the attack around Thanksgiving. He tries to drive a wedge between Connor and Faith, and when that fails, between himself and Connor. “If you still feel like calling me 'Dad', then fine, but frankly I don't see how you would, since you're so adamant about how bad it is that 'things have changed'," he sneers. “I HAVE changed [...] if you don't like who I am and how I feel, don't speak to me. [That means commenting in my LJ, as well.] If you can't realize that I have a hundred things I'm doing and have to worry about and have pet peeves like anyone else, don't speak to me” (2004 November 22).

Connor, chastened, gets back in line. She says, “I don't care who your [sic] channeling, you're still you and I still love you like I did before, and I support you like I did before. I do realize you have a lot [sic] to do, and I'm sorry if I pissed you off. Let me help, let me take some of the load off so you're not stressed. Anything. I wanna help. [...] I love you, Dad.” The comment thread ends there, with no response from Neo.

Why does Neo treat Connor so abysmally? I suspect because her devotion is now a detriment. Neo's charisma is based in part on the narrative that he's the only Draven, past and future: literally the One. He wants to peddle a dramatic story, similar to the first Matrix movie--an ordinary person realizes they are in fact a hero, a savior, and they tear apart the boundaries between our world and another, bringing purpose, excitement, and revolution to the people. But the story only works as long as nobody brings up the existence of past system members who've pulled the same gambit. Connor's loyalty to Angel risks Neo's

story coming apart, and he can't afford that; he needs it to build momentum.

And oh, he builds momentum. Within a month and a half of his first appearance, Neo starts posting on Fanfiction.net, under the name Systemic Anomaly (2004 October 19), builds for_zion, his primary cult community on Livejournal (2004 October 31a), and creates the first version of his website, Daemmerung (2004 October 31b). Around Christmas, he releases his first computer game, *Gnosis version N.Three.Oh*, (2004 December 26a) which apparently is intended to give a password that will "unlock" a "corridor" of Daemmerung, perhaps a special web page (November 8).

I played as far through *Gnosis* as I could. A nineties-style point-and-click adventure game, it was blatant in its agenda and recruitment message. For instance, the game starts with an IM conversation between the player and "TechGeek1" (shortened to T1, as in, The One) who discloses to the player that "they're sharing their mind with another person. Some people would call it multiple personality, some people would call it channeling or reincarnation [...] they need some help NOW, and they're asking you." The player is given three options to respond:

1. "Tell them they are in need of some serious psychiatric help."
2. "You'll humor them [...] for now. See how far it goes."
3. "You're curious, and more than a little willing to believe and tell them so."

It's clear which answer the game wants. Choosing the "get psychiatric help" response leads to an instant game-over and the

message, "with an attitude like that, you're not going to get very far in this game... or the world, for that matter." It goes on to say, "Quantum science has proven that there are infinite universes beyond this one -- belief has proven that that MATTERS." Never mind that science isn't about belief or faith; it's about careful testing of hypotheses. Draven's appeals to science are just a surface gloss over spiritual faith.

The more neutral response isn't much better. TechGeek1 says, "You're making fun. Sorry to bother you with my problems. Ciao," leading to a more protracted game-over. The game chastises the player with, "your friend saw through your 'false sympathy' and signed off [...] are you that insecure about the world around you that you can't entertain, even for a moment, the possibility that there might be something beyond what you know? Try thinking with your heart." As though that weren't enough, the next screen derides the player for their choice "to ignore T1's pleas for help" and condemns them to a fate of uncertainty and doubt. "You find yourself wondering if maybe T1 had answers that he wasn't sharing... or if maybe you just chose not to get the answers."

The whole thing is intended to harangue potential followers into believing what Draven wants them to believe. The focus is on feeling and believing, thinking with someone's heart, not reason, logic, or critical thinking. It even suggests that quantum physics has proven that the Matrix universe exists on another dimension and people from it can be channeled by people in this one.

However, if the player responds favorably, T1 sends them on an adventure across the rougher side of town in the middle of the night to help fulfill T1's "purpose." What is this purpose? "To

spread a message [...] that we are, in fact, able to break free from the system if we're only willing [...] to believe anything is possible." It's never clear exactly what that means, only that this message is dangerous and has brought T1 many enemies. Only the player can help T1 save humanity.

My adventure ended there due to what was either a game-breaking bug or incompetent design; it was difficult to tell which. Still, even that small amount showed me how malleable reality was in Draven's hands. Presumably, the ordinary player thinks they're playing an odd little game; they might not realize that "T1" is a real person hoping to rope someone into his real metaphysical battles and mission to save humanity, and that his purpose is exactly what it is in the game. A password to Daemmerung might seem like an amusing diversion, and the player might go down the rabbit hole, not realizing Neo is trying to persuade them that the game is reality, the Matrix within the . The whole thing is bait, intended to pique a person's interest without giving so much information as to turn them off.

What exactly is "the system" and what does it mean to "break free" from it? Neo is always a bit vague about the details. In his Daemmerung FAQ, he writes, "I'm fighting for freedom. Not just for freedom from the Machines: freedom from the captivity of doubts, limits, and fears" (2005, January 10). What are the Machines? Neo never flat-out says so publicly, but ex-followers tell me he means the machine uprising from the Matrix movies. Even Neo's own brother later describes it as "training an army for a post-apocalyptic vampire computer psychic zombie war" (Macabredivinity, 2015 March 4). Perhaps this is a revamped version of the apocalypse Angel discussed.

Understandably, Neo usually tries to avoid directly talking about what the Machines are; that's classified knowledge for followers who have proved their devotion. Mostly, he focuses on vague psychological liberation: "freedom from the captivity of doubts, limits, and fears," and "if I can reach one person, just one, free their mind and teach them that *reality is simply what you make of it*, that they're *free* to break away from the constraints and preconceived notions of humanity as a whole, that when you truly are seeking truth there *are* no limits, that belief really can change anything" (Draven, 2005 January 5).

All of this is nonsense. Anyone who has collided face-first with a glass door knows that reality is not what you make of it. Belief can not change everything, limits will always exist, and doubt serves a valid purpose; it protects from cons, swindles, and misplaced faith. Logically, none of Neo's statements mean anything. Emotionally, however, they can seem just deep and compelling enough for a prospective follower to project their own noble goals onto.

And where do these followers come from? Fandom and soulbonding communities. Followers go to Fanfiction.net and review Matrix fics with exhortations to join for *_zion* or read *Daemmerung*. Neo posts a context-less link to his new website on the soulbonding comm (2004 October 22) a Matrix roleplay comm (October 31b) and a Neo/Agent Smith slash comm (October 31c) testing the waters before formally disclosing his identity.

Considering the rants Angel and William made about fandom commodifying their suffering, it might seem strange that Neo would specifically reach out to a slash community that pairs him with his enemy and killer. But Neo is totally willing to take

advantage of fandom for his own purposes. He positions himself an authority, commenting, "I have a very 'unique' perspective on [...] Smith!slash" (2004 October 31d). A month or so later, he posts his own there, a non-consensual angst story about his sexual attraction to Smith, which he uses to stoke interest in Daemmerung (2004 November 28). He loves the community's name of Neo Ex Machina so much that he takes it for his own screen name on forums and Youtube (2006, April 21b)—instead of God in the machine, it's himself. A few years later, he will even offer a writer pointers on writing rape between himself and Agent Smith, stating, "I've *lived* through some of it" (2008 January 27a).

Neo's Livejournal title of "there is some fiction in your truth, and some truth in your fiction" is appropriately chosen; not only does Neo and the rest of Draven treat role-play and fanfiction as a form of reality, but also their own life as its own form of fanfiction. When I make autobiographical work, I state it as such; I do not lure readers in by pretending it's fiction, or that my fiction is autobiographical. To do so would be to take advantage of my readers' faith—the difference between an action hero getting punched in the face on a movie screen, and a real person getting punched in front of us. Most readers, I think, would feel conflicted or horrified if the non-consensual porn they read within the safe boundaries of fiction turned out to be a true statement of events. They're able to enjoy it because they know that nobody is really being hurt, which makes it unnerving when Neo himself offers advice on how to write his own sexual assaults. I dare say that most people would never do such a thing.

Some people ignore Neo and find him off-putting, but others prove more amenable. For many people, fiction and story

is a way to learn about life; it is all too easy for them to believe that their favorite stories are true. Many of them want to believe Neo's story, and he's able to take their affection for the Matrix and reattach it to himself. After reading Neo's fanfiction, a poster named Crowd sees Daemmerung and goes down the rabbit hole (2004 November 28); they will later become Neo's attack dog on Fandom_Wank. Others believe Neo's claims of being a savior or messiah.

Of course, Neo avoids stating that outright, weaseling his way around the matter in his FAQ: "Do I consider myself the literal meaning of the word 'messiah'[...]? Tough Catch-22 there. If I'm the One, which I've tried to accept and come to terms with [...] then 'the One' is their 'anticipated' deliverer: *'That his coming would hail the destruction of the Matrix; end the war'*" (2005 January 10, emphasis his). He then emphasizes that he doesn't want this responsibility, as though this fate is enforced on him by something greater than himself. He doesn't want to be the messiah, he insists; it's just that it's his destiny, and only a fool challenges destiny!

Neo's message of openness, freedom, and transcending society proves attractive to people who feel misunderstood and are looking for a place in the world. Neo gives them an ostensibly noble goal, a way to help humanity—and a way to avoid the Machine apocalypse. He gives soulbonders, multiples, and fictionkin a place to be themselves, ostensibly without judgment. Through fandom, he reaches people who perhaps always wished for that magical wardrobe into Narnia, that letter to Hogwarts. Neo offers a world of freedom, magic, and possibility; he gives people purpose and community... or so it seems, anyway.

“One thing I really actually miss about being a part of F_Z [for_zion] is the feeling of being a part of something, and actually doing something to fix the downward spiral that this world has taken, even if that all turned out to be an illusion,” one follower writes after escaping (personal communication, 2008). “Really what I miss more than anything is the fellowship - the ability to talk about oddball, far-out things with other people who didn't think I was automatically crazy for even considering such things.” It's a common sentiment, one I can remember from my own interactions with Draven. After all, it can be very tempting, when one feels like a freak, to go from “maybe I'm okay the way I am” to “maybe I'm special the way I am, intended for great things.”

Attracted by this potential for liberation and acceptance, people start to come to Neo. One of them is Trinity, Draven's final fiancée. In mid-November, she makes contact with Neo, saying, “I think I believe you...about everything” (2004 November 16). At his behest, she quickly makes an LJ (2004 November 28), fills out a Matrix free-association quiz he creates as recruitment material (ibid), and joins the soulbonding community (December 2), posting, “I am the soulbond of Trinity [...] I've been talking to he_dreams_awake [Neo]. He agrees that I am me.”

But Neo hasn't just persuaded her that she is Trinity. He's persuaded her that she's *his* Trinity, metaphysically destined to be his partner.

This is an important distinction to make. When a system member comes from a piece of media, they aren't necessarily going to have the same personality, relationships, or desires as another one—or even closely resemble the original. For instance, I know another Neo, completely unaffiliated with Draven or

their circles, who is a queer black woman. She has very little resemblance to Draven's Neo in any way, and would probably have no interest in Draven's fiancée, because that Trinity is not the one she knew in her world. That Trinity would be a total stranger to her, someone she would have to get to know and grow to like, regardless of whatever past history they might've shared in their other lives.

Neo, unsurprisingly, does none of that. Instead, he plays it out like a fictional cosmic romance, ordained by fate. When he reads the results of Trinity's quiz, he leaves a comment saying, "Some of it... well. Christ, I want to talk to you about it. Some of it I knew. [...] I'll help however I can." (Trinity, 2004 November 28). Within a month of her first contact with Neo, Trinity's calling him "My love; my only" (2004 December 16). By December 30th, they're discussing marriage. Less than a month after that, she moves in with him (2005 January 26) and writes, "my mother doesn't understand that we are SOULMATES destined to spend the rest of eternity either together or searching for each other" (February 7). A few days later, they're engaged or married, depending on which source is consulted (Trinity, 2005 February 21; other citation available upon request).

Sum total of time? Just under three months.

Trinity will become Neo's most devoted convert, and to this day, she is still with him, his primary source of financial and psychological support. Later on, she will become a convicted felon for him, arrested over a dozen times for the things she does on his behalf. Draven's hold on her extends beyond her actions and wallet to her very identity... or rather, identities. None of Draven will ever have to face life without a reflection again, for

Trinity will spawn many headmates to match Draven's—including an Agent Smith for Neo.

But she won't host the first of Neo's Smiths.

Neo pines for Smith from day one; asides from his "very unique perspective" on Smith slash, he has a Smith page on the earliest version of the Daemmerung website, reading, "Each thing depends upon its opposite in order to exist... Yin attracts Yang and Yang attracts Yin. The greater the difference, the greater the attraction... *If you're out there looking for me, then here I am: looking for you, too*" (2005 January 8, emphasis his).

Neo meets the first Smith—who I will call Smith I—through Fanfiction.net, a few weeks after first meeting Trinity (Smith I, 2004 November 29). Smith I has long since deleted all online activity, but the comments remain. Smith I joins Neo on Livejournal, and the two men develop a combative but intense kink relationship, similar to Krycek and William's. Trinity's relationship to Neo also mirrors the ones between Scully and William, Buffy and Angel, and Ellen and Sirius: the beloved wife and second-in-command. This pattern will continue to be repeated multiple times; Draven craves it so much that Sirius describes it as an "illicit drug" (2004 August 20), while William claims that BDSM with Krycek gives him the same effects as the painkillers he relies on, making life "stop hurting, only for a minute, only for a minute" (2001 June 12).

Eventually, Smith I will become one of Neo's greatest enemies, and made into yet another example of what happens to ex-followers/ex-partners. But at the start of 2005, the locomotive is only just starting to build up to full steam. In January, Neo makes the Livejournal community *nebuchadnezzar2* for other people from the Matrix universe (Trinity, 2005 January 16), and

in February, he moves his site to truthofthespoon.net (2005 February 6). In April, he forms [council_of_zion](#), for his [for_zion](#) advisers, and he and Trinity move to Washington near her parents (Draven, 2005 May 6).

There, Draven gives up the flimsy, short-lived charade of being singlet. John Constantine, Tyler Durden, and Greg House quickly join the party.

THE ALMIGHTY 'C' WORD: JOHN CONSTANTINE

John Constantine is mostly known as the sarcastic blond British magician from the *Hellblazer* comics. However, Draven's John isn't that one; instead he is the much more sedate American brunette version played by Keanu Reeves in the 2005 film *Constantine*.

Draven's John first appears in July 2005 and isn't particularly notable, by Draven standards. He gambles on cards for cigarettes, learns some stage magic involving balls of light that the Phantom will reuse years later, and seems to be a return to Angel's roots as a paranormal investigator (2005 September 13). He talks about gathering up magical gear, including "WWII shrapnel" for ammunition "and a few expired mortar shells I'm using to put together another 'version' of the old shotgun, when I get to it" (2005, October 9). Said shotgun was used to slay demons in the movie, and it never gets mentioned again, leading me to believe that it is never completed. Still, it makes me wonder how exactly John expected to get a permit for a shotgun, and who he intended to use it on... if this wasn't just more "bi-locating," that is.

John Constantine doesn't seem to have the highest opinions of Neo. "'The other guy' gets all the glory in this 'system'," he complains (2005 August 30). "He's not even a bond anymore, he's the primary 'entity'. I'm just... along for the ride. I'm not looking for any friends here - most of my friends seem to last about as long as a hooker's bedsheets. But still. Does get lonely, it does."

Constantine doesn't need to suggest more than that to gain some company. One of Neo's acolytes and roommates, Demos, hosts Constantine's acolyte from the movie—more on him later. Trinity hosts Constantine's love interest Angie (Draven, 2005 August 30), and according to an ex-follower, also a Gabriel and a Lucifer, two of the movie's antagonists (personal communication 2017).

Angie's story is sad. Constantine reports her pregnancy... followed by her miscarriage (2005 September 13). He shows no sign of sympathy or care, merely states, "Angela miscarried," before moving on to focus on his own suffering, and then his "illicit affair with a temporarily Earth-bound archangel who once tried to kill me." Meaning Gabriel, Trinity's headmate. Angie herself seems to come to some dubious fate never publicly discussed; Trinity later reassures John, "You know you had nothing to do with what happened to Angie. These things happen. We're here if you want to talk. Ok?" (2005 December 17a).

John never shows any similar sentiments. At best, he seems to see Angie as a flunky; at worst, he treats her like a shrew. The only notes he makes of Angela's presence all involve her doing things for him--bringing him magical gear (2005 October 9), wanting him to go to the ER (October 16a). He even rants about her, calling her "Detective Period" (2006 January 11) and ranting, "SCREW her and her self-improvement, screw her and her 'letting go of baggage'" (2005 December 15).

An ex-follower who lives with them at this time says that John Constantine's dynamic with Angie and Gabriel mirrors the same follower/leader/dom dynamic that William and Neo had. "Angela = Trinity, Gabriel = Smith" they report. "Everything

basically falls back into the same old Mulder/Krycek dynamic from back in the day, and is acted out during roleplay sexytimes [sic]. Which I couldn't really get away from or unsee, because one bedroom apartment" (personal communication, 2017 February 8).

In September 2005, John Constantine blows the rent money on Red King forearm tattoos like those in the movie. He posts photos of the newly-healed ink in the middle of the month (2005 September 13), and less than a week later, his household ends up in court on charges of "unlawful detainer," meaning that they are living in property without permission and won't leave (Goldberg, 2005). They are finally successfully evicted come October, and they move to Texas to live with another follower, which I'll discuss in the next chapter.

Despite the legal problems, John doesn't clean up his act; he shows the same violent tendencies and substance abuse issues that previous Draven folks had, which ends up triggering a fight between himself and Angie (2006, March 29).

"She gave me a skelp last night and called me a drunk... then cut out," John reports. "So I drank more. Threw some of my pain meds on top of it.... yeah, so what? Lung cancer, assholes. And THEN she comes home. Apparently she got me undressed and into bed....And get this: then, SHE apologized to ME."

Lung cancer? Pain meds? This requires some context.

During this time period, Draven first takes up the narrative that they are dying. They never let go of it since, to the point that they have now been on death's door for thirteen years, through a constellation of changing illnesses which have grown increasingly improbable over time.

For instance, by the time of the fight, Draven had claimed the following conditions within a two-month span:

- lung cancer (2006 March 29)
- going blind (2006 February 2)
- multiple sclerosis (ibid)
- spinal cord lesions (ibid)
- fibromyalgia (ibid)
- a heart attack (Trinity, 2006 March 24)

All of this could perhaps be theoretically possible, but they claim to have all of these conditions while at the same time recording and broadcasting Neo's radio show (2006 January 18), making soap for Neo's fundraiser (2006 February 9), stalking Buffy II (Buffy II, 2006), attempting to build a Turing-Test winning chat bot named Joe (2006 March 5), and aggressively proselytizing. These are the activities of someone embarking on a new beginning, not an end.

And then there's how Draven uses their health as a beating stick on their followers. After Draven's alleged heart attack, Trinity berates a follower named Matrix for being online and not on IM in Draven's hour of need—never mind that if they were in the hospital, they would not be allowed to make phone calls or chat online anyway. When the follower responds that she is putting them in God's hands, Trinity scolds, "I'd've rather he'd've been in yours...he cried all morning while they stuck and prodded him, because he couldn't CALL you...YOU, you know? He could have died...." (2006 March 24)

Ostensibly due to his poor health, John takes a number of drugs, which just so happen to correspond to the ones William

describes being interested in four years prior. Asides from the alcohol, John reports the following painkillers:

- codeine cough syrup (2005, August 28)
- cyclobenzaprine (October 9)
- oxycontin (ibid)
- oxycodone (ibid)
- morphine sulphate (ibid)
- Dilaudid (October 16b)
- Vicodin (December 15).

None of these painkillers are safe to mix with alcohol, and the side effects include issues with liver damage, respiration, coma, and death. And Draven knows it; even if they weren't an experienced drug-user by now, just two weeks after John's fight with Angie, they leave a comment in support of a fanficants post about the proper use of Vicodin, which mentions how dangerous it is to mix with alcohol (2006 April 17).

So John is obviously deliberately using his medication improperly. And he's not the only one; pretty much all Draven's system members up to this point reference their drug abuse. Kurt called himself an "ex-junkie" (1999 April 13), while William mentions his own "drug habit" and eludes to using heroin, along with Vicodin and mixing alcohol with Valium (2001 June 12). Angelus also mentions taking Vicodin in 2002 (October 31), making John's opioid and opiate use all the more concerning. (Both classes of drugs work the same way; opioids are just natural, while opiates are synthetic.) Dilaudid, heroin, Vicodin, and oxycodone/oxycontin are all opioids; morphine and codeine are opiates.

And those are just the drugs Draven publicly admits to taking. "'Neo' [...] is, not to mince words, hooked through the bag on hydrocodone-based [opioid] painkillers," an ex-follower reports (personal communication, 2006). "And this is a problem that goes back wayyyy into his teen and early adult years... He dropped out of a methadone program while they were in Washington State (apparently the cab ride was too long and inconvenient.) [...] [Trinity] and [Demos] (until the latter escaped) have been feigning maladies and visiting local emergency rooms around here in order to get pills for him after they refused to see Neo anymore, because he kept going in to try to get pills, and the ER docs recognized this. [...] [Draven] kept inferring that physical violence would result if he didn't get either his pills or his cigarettes." Suddenly, John's remark about wanting "to rip someone's throat out" because "it's been over two hours since I had a goddamn cigarette" seems to be more than just hyperbolic complaining (2006, January 11).

John's drug use adds a different dimension to his fight with Angie. Suddenly it's not just a matter of her hitting him, calling him a drunk, and leaving; it's them getting into a fight about his substance use, her leaving, and him responding by intentionally mixing his painkillers with alcohol, just to spite her. Combined with Draven's earlier tendency to threaten suicide when his partners left, it's not a surprise Angie returns and tries to placate him. Draven's underlying message seems to be, "If you upset me so much I kill myself, it will be your fault, and won't you feel bad then?"

But Draven doesn't die. The cancer and the heart attacks seem to oddly vanish, as does Constantine himself a week later. The drug issues don't, though. On John's heels comes Greg.

LET THE WHIPPING BOY RIDE: GREG HOUSE

Greg House is a drug addicted doctor, the titular character of *House, M.D.* In the TV show, he is rude to his coworkers and patients, sexually harasses his boss, has no bedside manner, but he always ends up right in the end.

The first hint to House's existence is Neo's signature line on a game-making forum, dating from April 21, 2006. It's a quote from the good doctor, reading, "There's no I in team. There is a me, though, if you... jumble it up a bit."

Draven's House creates his LJ a month later, and although he'll only be active for three months, he makes an impression with his sheer nastiness. He takes the LJ screen-name of *doctorgreghouse*, and with predictable coyness, Neo refers to him as "my alter ego ;)" when posting his *House, M.D.* fanfiction (2006, June 22).

Greg is almost as open about his drug use as John. Asides from giving fanfic writers pointers on the schedule of taking said Vicodin (2006 April 17), he posts about his evening plans of "a Valium, three Vicodin, a beer, and bed" (2006 June 13). One of his fanfictions are posted with the words, "if it sucks, blame the Percocet," (2006 June 28) meaning he's on yet another opioid.

Like John, Greg claims he needs the drugs for his health. However, the ailments he reports are different. John's lung cancer is never discussed again, nor the heart attack. Instead, Greg focuses on "nerve damage in my spine from MS [multiple sclerosis] and a severe injury," (2006 June 28) and a month later, claims to have had a pulmonary embolism in his leg; Greg lists the

drugs he get in the hospital, which include morphine and Dilaudid, unsurprisingly (2005 May 22). The multiple sclerosis will also end up being phased out after a decade, replaced with new and more diagnoses.

With the constant barrage of health crises, it's difficult to tell which, if any, are real. It doesn't help that Draven's maladies at least partially mirror the health issues his system members had in their original fictional incarnations. For instance, Neo is blinded before dying in the Matrix movies, while Constantine of the film has lung cancer, and of course, Dr. House in his TV show is famous for his chronic pain and addiction to Vicodin following an infarction in his leg. Over the ensuing years, the diagnosis list will only become more complex, and it seems to be somewhat (if not mostly) in service to Draven's drug use. "While there may be some legitimate medical issues there, it's no question to me that Neo's real handicap is the fact that he's addicted to pills," reports a disabled ex-follower who lived with them during this time (personal communication, 2006). "He's never been officially [sic] diagnosed with fibro, or brain lesions or spinal lesions, either. [...] He goes into ERs and says whatever he thinks will get him shots or perscriptions [sic] for pills."

Despite ostensibly having a heart attack, lung cancer, a pulmonary embolism, and multiple sclerosis all within two months, (plus the entire group becoming homeless, which I'll discuss next chapter), Greg still finds the wherewithal to join the *House, M.D.* fandom. He creates a role-play community with the appropriate name of willingtoliefor (2006 May 22) and churns out eleven fics in the course of the next month (2006 June 25). It's here that Connor comes into play again.

Despite Neo's pointed search for the Kid from the Matrix, Connor was never properly assimilated into that particular cult; she was still devoted to Angel, and never gave up the identity he gave her. House, however, gets her to join his RP as Dr. Robert Chase, and in a post suggestively named "Let The Whipping Boy Ride," they role-play a spanking scene filled with creepy Freudian overtones (Connor and Draven, 2006 June 8).

The scene plays out almost exactly like William's spanking fanfictions from 1999. Connor/Chase has apparently performed some slight, in the RP or possibly out of it. House gets high on Vicodin mixed with DXM, which might be role-play-only, but who can tell with all the reality-blurring going on—and it is a dissociative mixed with an opiate, which House discusses as desirable in his “Valium, three Vicodin, a beer” post. Regardless, an intoxicated House then suggests the spanking, telling Connor, "I'll assume your choirboy guilt [...] outweighs the fear of me tanning your admittedly nice little ass."

Connor is 20 at this point, but still sees Draven as her father; just two days after this role-play scene, she makes a birthday post to Neo, reading "Happy Birthday, Pops!" (2006 June 10). And House shows complete awareness of what he's doing, posting his justifications in the RP. "[House]'d known for quite a while that there was far more to Dr. Robert Chase than the [...] Daddy issues. He'd seen glimpses, little insights into Chase's long-standing guilt, into his need for... well... a father figure. Sometimes, when Chase hadn't known that he, House, was watching, House had caught Chase's expressions of almost awe, at the Diagnostician At Work™" (Connor and Draven, 2006 June 8)

So far, this sounds more like a description of Connor's relationship to Angel.

Connor says yes to the spanking. House is surprised, and even considers saying no, but specifically decides not to: "after all, Greg House loved nothing better than *experimentation*, learning what made diseases, conditions, people tick -" House even tries to justify it as being for Connor's own good: "House made people better; that's what he did. If said person was one of *his*... well then, so much the better" (emphasis his).

In other words, House is specifically interested in manipulating Chase/Connor just to see what will happen, and tries to paint it as noble, since after all, he surely knows what he's doing. In fact, this spanking will make Connor stronger! And like Ellen's child, Connor is now "his," which somehow is meant to justify the behavior further.

(As a side note, this isn't House's only interest in fatherhood; impregnating Cuddy is also a theme in his fanfiction, and one collaboration he writes has Cuddy describing him as "a perfect candidate [for fatherhood], as far as I'm concerned. Highly intelligent, good family history, few if any genetic problems" and well-hung in the bargain (cincoflex, 2006). Another story which House himself writes allows him to embark on a long jealous fantasy of marrying and impregnating Cuddy, possessively remarking that he "hated those faceless donors so much" because "They weren't him. Never would be" (2006 June 25). Tellingly, the actual act of child-raising is completely left out; the fantasy is focused on being the one whose sperm impregnates her.)

I'll skip the spanking itself. It plays out exactly like William's old spank wank stories—House as the stern father figure, punishing Connor's misbehavior, promising redemption and spiritual purification. House claims that "he certainly wasn't

aroused by this situation; in fact, he thought his balls had crawled up somewhere around the general vicinity of his spleen," but I don't believe him; even ignoring the system's fetish for spanking and domestic discipline, even ignoring how closely the spankings resemble William's earlier fics, House posted a fic with a secondary pairing of himself with Chase a couple weeks prior (2006 May 21). And even if his statement *is* true, even if it *isn't* sexual, it's still a BDSM scene being performed with no discussion and safety, with a top possibly on drugs and a bottom definitely convinced the man spanking her is her real dad.

Draven claims to have been in the kink scene since their teens (2008 June 13). If they're telling the truth, then House was an experienced kinkster before playing this scene, and he of all people should know that it is an egregious overstretch of boundaries to play a scene like that with his "adopted son." For someone who takes his online role-play so seriously and sometimes calls it "bi-location" to emphasize its supposed reality, one would expect better behavior.

Sadly, Connor isn't the last of Draven's claimed children, nor the last of the uncomfortable incestuous themes. Draven as a whole seems to be fixated on the idea of parenthood; they want a stern parent dom figure, but they also want to be a dad—as shown by the number of people whose fictional personas are Draven's children. Later, Connor will be replaced by even younger models who are twelve or thirteen. But let's backtrack to Neo for a moment.

WANNABE-MATRIXITE CULTISTS: TYLER DURDEN AND NEO'S RISE

Tyler Durden is the headmate of the narrator of *Fight Club*. He runs a soap business, along with the underground titular fight clubs. Draven's Tyler rarely appears, mostly inspiring little things behind the scenes.

As for Neo, he stays busy during Constantine and House's tenure. 2004 was the start of his cult; 2005-2006 was his rise.

Somewhere around this time, under the name K. "Thomas" Draven, Neo starts up Zero-One Web Design (Draven, Unknown Date D). It gives only two examples of past work for clients, and all are mediocre to poor at best. Neo can't bear to let go of his neon-green-on-black color scheme even when inappropriate, such as on a skateboarding movie site, and the scrolling icons are obnoxious and distracting. There aren't even margins; the text runs from edge to edge of the browser windows. Why use these shoddy examples as a work portfolio? Because they may very well be the only examples of Neo's work. According to ex-followers, Neo rarely worked for long, and his posts and theirs are full of his requests for money. His freelancer.com profile shows an 85% completion rate, and an ex-follower reported having to finish one of those gigs for him. All of Neo's ten reviews come from only four people, ranging from roughly October 2005 to July 2006 (Draven, Unknown E). Judging by the numbers, it's possible that Neo may have only done thirteen jobs, and not completed three of them. The highest paying of those gigs is for roughly \$150.

So mostly, Draven is dependent on others: followers, relatives, and Trinity's SSI payments. As someone who is on disability myself, I know from experience that SSI payments are only about \$700 a month, so when Neo claims, "I have a job, and Trin makes almost more than I do," that's disingenuous at best (personal communication, 2006 April 29); they're barely clinging to the poverty line and constantly in financial trouble. An ex-follower reports how vital a patron was to their survival: "they have a history of escapist behavior. All they needed was someone to fund everything so they wouldn't have to work, or deal with the 'real world' more than was absolutely necessary. In Maine, this was his [Draven's] Aunt and Grandparents" (personal communication, 2006 April 6).

By March 2005, when Constantine appears, things with Smith I are getting rocky. An ex-follower explains, "Draven wanted Smith 24/7, and that meant [being] on AIM chat or LJ as much as Draven could twist his/her/their arm to do so. I'm sure there was no resentment about it at the beginning, but [Smith] had an IRL life, job, school, responsibilities. And the cult situation nearly imploded those" (personal communication, 2017).

Finally, Smith I bolts. "S/he abruptly left the group on April 7th, 2005, citing that [Draven] was controlling and emotionally abusive," an ex-follower writes (personal communication, 2006 September 26). "In our conversations, [Smith I] told me that relationship with [Draven] also caused her to miss a great deal of school, effectively setting her back one semester towards getting her bachelors' degree [...] [Draven] also told us that [Smith I]'s RL boyfriend discovered her online relationship and threatened breakup/Bona-Fide Catholic Church

exorcism of the SmithBond if she didn't cut off all ties with [Draven], [who] frequently snarked and scoffed about her decision to maintain her *real* life instead of sacrificing everything for some guy she met on the internets" (ibid).

Indeed, Neo does not handle the break-up well. "In late May 2005," the ex-follower continues, "[Smith I] started emailing me about alleged harassment that she was receiving [sic] on LJ and across other forums, supposedly from [Draven] and [Trinity] and certain cronies of theirs [...] I didn't want to believe it was them [...] until [Smith I] traced the IP to a connection in a suburb of Seattle, address and everything. I hadn't told her that they'd moved."

In August 2005, when Smith I creates an Agent Smith Community on Suddenlaunch, Neo and his followers bombard her with threats to sue her and take the community down. An intrepid ex-follower is able to track the threat to one of Draven's current followers—Matrix, the follower Trinity will later berate for not being near the phone during Draven's heart attack. The threat reads, "Karma coming back to bite you in the ass, was all of this [sic] sh*t being smeared on Fandom Wank. [...] This board [is] being reported to the Suddenlaunch administrators because these so-called 'cult leaders' - recent local friends of mine - happen to run a 501(c) not-for-profit corporation, filed under charitable and philosophical [sic] purposes. Neo also happens to co-run a martial arts academy affiliated with the corporation" (ex-follower communication, 2005 April 28). The rest are eight paragraphs of personal attacks on such topics as Smith I's ego, artistic output, and sense of victimization.

I'll cover the nonprofit status and the dojo/monastery later; right now, let's focus on the threat's first statement. I don't

know what Fandom Wank post the threat references; I couldn't find it. However, I did find two Fandom Wank posts that Neo and his followers made in retaliation with the intent of trolling Smith I (Littlebottom, 2005; Crowd, 2005a and b). Apparently Neo sees turnabout as fair play.

The first Fandom Wank post involves too much link rot for me to make much sense of it, so I'll be focusing on the later post by Crowd. Crowd admits, "I am on Neo's friends list, and he is on mine. Likewise I am a member of his LJ community, which I joined a while ago with an eye toward possibly becoming involved before deciding that it was not in fact for me." Thus assured of their impartiality, Crowd goes on to mock Smith I for "her position that she was under attack from a 'cult' whose members were dedicated, I say, positively DEDICATED to tearing her down." She calls Smith I a "fanfic author," never mentioning the true relationship between Neo and Smith I, or the ensuing break-up.

In the guise of mocking Smith I for paranoia, Crowd straightforwardly lays out exactly what Neo and his cult have done to her. They post a letter Smith I sent to the members of their community, which reads:

"This cult-like group who has been harassing us recentky [sic] is lead by two individuals, a transgendered 29-year-old woman [REDACTED] Brennan who claims to be 'Neo' from the Matrix Trilogy and [his] fiancée, a 23-year-old woman [REDACTED], who claims to be 'Trinity'. 'Neo' and 'Trinity' claim to be Neo and Trinity from The Matrix Trilogy - and are 100% serious. 'Neo' and 'Trinity' are partners and live in Washington State..."

All of this is true, except that Neo is a trans man, not a trans woman (2008 September 26a, paragraph 31). But that is likely an error in language, not understanding.

Smith I continues on to say, "When someone leaves their cult, 'Neo' and 'Trinity' take it very personally and become enraged and attack them, and order people in the cult to do so as well. It was a peace loving and enlightenment [sic] seeking group once, but now turned into a group who are harassing people who left them, including me and our Agent Smith Community and memebrrs [sic] as well" (Crowd, 2005b).

I somewhat doubt that the group was ever truly peace-loving or enlightenment-seeking, but the rest is accurate enough. Angel sicced friends on all three Buffys after their respective break-ups, Neo tried to turn the whole soulbonding community against Ellen when she fled, and now Crowd is harassing Smith I. The earlier threat to shut down the Agent Smith forum is written specifically as punishment for calling Neo a cult leader and discussing him on Fandom Wank!

Crowd even makes a point to say that Neo gave his permission for this Fandom Wank post, quoting him saying, "please go crazy. FW is the place for this insanity." And Neo is proud enough of this to specifically request his legal name be posted with it! "My only stipulation is this: if you do, please included [sic] a tiny blurb about how we ARE an above-the-board non-profit group... and how my name isn't '[REDACTED]'. [o_O, legally, it's Kurt Draven, until I change it. Kurt Anthony Draven, in point of fact." He even appears in the comments anonymously to reiterate this information, making his stance crystal clear.

For such a short statement, there are a lot of disingenuousness and lies packed into here. Let's dig in.

First of all, yes, right before the Fandom Wank explosion, Neo founded an honest-to-god church, Veritas Zero-One. In August 2005, it gained nonprofit status (Washington Secretary of State, unknown), but Draven did not pay for the process; a follower supplied the money (ex-follower personal communication, 2006 October 1). That follower showed concern about it at the time, remembering, "To satisfy my own worries, I had [Neo] state again that the organization would be in name only and would only be used to add leverage to the message when necessary, as I was not actually convinced that it was a good idea" (ibid). Then, "I discovered that [Neo] was flaunting his nonprofit organization status as if it made him somehow superior to his detractors. I hadn't seen him at his worst before then, and I was infuriated by how he made no attempt at all to rise above the stings to his pride and practice what he preached."

So for Neo to claim he's a reputable nonprofit is highly misleading. The person who donated \$300 to make it happen specifically requested he not use it as a beating stick. In fact, they left for zion not long after, in part due to him going back on his word! So that is nonsense.

And it's true, Draven's legal name is *currently* Kurt Anthony Draven. But it wasn't always; as stated previously, that name seems to have been chosen as a composite of system members at the time. Robin Brennan wasn't their birth name either; that was apparently Robin Hood. I went and looked up his high school graduating class, and sure enough, the name that Smith I gives is listed as a name who graduated the same year as "Kurt Brennan Draven" (citation available upon request). The

whole school had roughly 800 students, so the idea that Smith I could somehow confuse Draven with another student who attended the exact same school and had the exact same age and last name stretches credulity.

If he was truly worried about his identity being spilled, Neo easily could've asked Crowd not to post it on `fandom_wank` and `i_wank`. He could've chosen not to wade into the comments and post his full legal name a second time. But instead, he is so determined to make Smith I look hysterical and disturbed that he tries to spin the whole thing as her lying, when in fact, he's the one lying about everything! Ironically, I probably never would've known his original name if he hadn't been so dogged about drawing attention to it!

And that's not all. Draven will not just use their legal name as fuel to gaslight, stalk, and harass an ex, but they will then whip right back around and claim that if anyone actually mentions this name, or the post referencing it, then *Draven* is the true victim of stalking, doxxing, and harassment, not Smith I! By this logic, his spraying his personal information everywhere is a legitimate defense against being harassed, while posting Smith I's information everywhere is totally deserved self-defense.

It's not the first time Draven do this. Years later, they post their state ID publicly on their Livejournal; they censored out their first name, but their last and middle name are still clearly visible (2008 December 15). It'd be one thing if they were young when they did these things, but they were twenty-seven at the time of the Fandom Wank post, thirty when they posted their state ID.

To boggle the mind even further, in posting Smith I's letter in its entirety, Crowd ends up also posting the links to Smith I's

evidence. Most of it has been deleted or lost so much context as to be incomprehensible, but one post contains comments where an anonymous jerk flames Smith I with, "Some of us [...] are getting really dam [sic] sick of seeing your posts plastered everywhere [...] It's become a waste of my time" (Anonymous, 2005 May 30). When Smith I responds, "Then, you'll just have to skip reading my posts, don't you **Neo?**" A different commenter comes back with, "I hate to tell you this, but that IP is coming from Washington, not New York," to which Smith I replies, "And Washington state is exactly where you and 'Trinity' moved to, 'Neo'. Now. Leave me alone. Stop harassing me." The mysterious Washington anonymous disappears.

On the whole, Crowd's post is merely a prolonged act of reality distortion, in the guise of mocking Smith I, and the commenters seem to agree. One named ecchaniz0r says, "Let's see. Wannabe-Matrixite Cultists versus singular ficcesr [sic]. The assshats making the INTARWEB SUE U threats are the fappers here" (Crowd, 2005 August 29b). The community turns on Crowd, and Draven will come to deeply regret posting their legal identity on a community devoted to mocking weird people.

Despite the flaming and public shaming, Smith I is the lucky one. They get away from Draven, make a clean start, and from what I've heard, devote themselves to charitable works. For all Neo's mockery, they achieve more than he ever will--and on some level, Neo is aware of it. "Smith cared," an ex-follower told me personally (2017). "Smith was our real leader. [Neo] never got over that, and never got over his paranoia that he might be losing followers to Smith's camp daily, even months after Smith 'left.'" Years, as a matter of fact, seeing as Draven brings it up two years

later in his "Article to End All Articles" on Truth of the Spoon (DK, 2007).

Smith I may have left, but Trinity stays, and Draven treats her abominably. Just two months after Crowd's explosive post and Angie's miscarriage, Trinity posts, "Week before last, Neo and I were having a really bad fight. The stress of our lives was getting to the both of us, and not really having anyone else to vent at, we were venting at each other in that way that only people who love each other more than anything else can. We screamed and yelled and made each other cry in heartbreak" (2005 October 13). After "three days of non-stop fighting," Trinity leaves Neo, only to end up going back. "A few days later, a cop showed up at our door," she writes (ibid). "They had been sent by someone to do a wellness check on me... *eyeroll* Not going into it. We were worried that they might have been there for another reason that I'm also not going into. Don't worry, nothing anyone needs to be concerned with. Neo sent me into the bathroom and told me not to come out."

Strip away the emotions, the talk of love and stress and feelings, and you have a woman describing three days of being screamed at, to the point that she leaves and the cops are called, and then being sent to hide in the bathroom. Not to mention that "other reason" that Trinity mentions, which is the date with the Kitsap Superior Court over that charge of "unlawful detainer" (Goldberg, 2005). This might be the first time that she gets dragged into court over Draven, but it's far from the last.

Six months after Smith I's departure, Trinity starts channeling her own Smith (2005 October 7). As far as I can tell, Neo treats him exactly the same as the first Smith, and they continue their kinky Jungian shadow relationship as though the

partners are identical. They fulfill the same metaphysical needs Draven expect from all their doms: "Neo and Smith were always the Balance. The Yin and the Yang. The Dark and the Light. The One and The Zero. The Beginning and the End," Trinity writes (ibid). "The two of them complete each other 'literally' [...] they have sex and are probably the most functional gay couple that I know [...] they are naturally perfectly balanced to begin with."

Even as she writes this, Draven, Trinity, and Demos are in the process of getting evicted due to the unlawful detainer case and John Constantine spending the rent money on tattoos. Trinity reports their plan to head back to Maine on October 9th, but "we're about two hundred dollars short for our train tickets [...]. We've sold everything we have [...] I know that we're guided by the Source, but we're still not in great situation here."

Over time, Draven will claim multiple times that they never solicit donations and make no money from Neo's Mission (DK 2007, Chapter 6 "In Summation," paragraph 16; personal communication 2006 April 29). This is codswallop. Sometimes they ask outright (2008 September 26a and b). Other times, they have Trinity do it (2008 November 19a; 2017, May 29). Most of the time, though, they don't have to; they and Trinity will merely report being on the edge of financial disaster and followers, caring for their friend and leader's welfare, will offer money, web-hosting, their cars, and their homes. Neo thereby gets money without the indignity of outright asking, but it's splitting hairs to act as though he's not relying on that generosity. One ex-follower reports, "I had \$300.00, which I sent them. They used this to get a hotel room. When I got paid again, I sent them another \$500.00, which was supposed to be for train tickets back to Maine....except that they didn't get on the train, because [Neo]

‘was sick.’ [Trinity] would call every other day asking for still more money, which I sent. Finally, I got a loan and sent them \$800.00 - most of which they blew, the rest of which they used for bus tickets down to Dallas, since they’d used too much to make it to Maine. I later found that most of this money had gone to finance [Neo]’s vicodin habit” (personal communication, 2006, March 26).

The household is happy for the “voluntary donations.” They move to Dallas, and move in with a follower named Seven.

The crew starts proselytizing quickly; in December, Trinity posts that the whole household is “putting together fliers to leave/pass out places around the DFW [Dallas-Fort Worth] area” (2005, December 17b). She urges followers to do the same, saying, "this doesn't have to be a major thing. Just slip a stack of cards or whatever into your school bags, purses or wallets and put them up while you're out and about. If all of you could just do this a couple of times... there would be breadcrumbs for people all over the country to find... Maybe even all over the world if we got EVERYONE involved."

What do these cards and fliers look like? I don't have images, but I have found slogans from rough drafts back in April. (Demos, 2005 April 23). One is made up almost entirely of recycled song lyrics from *Pokémon the Movie 2000: The Power of One*, reading,

"The Power of 'One' ..."

"Begins with believing;

'Then starts in the heart'

'flows through the soul'

'and changes the world.'"

'BE that One...'

Another says,

"I've talked to him...

Thomas Anderson."

'After the battle I call'

"One plus negative one"

'he is here and has taken'

'up the sword for us all'

'to fight a silent war in this world.'"

(Quotation marks not added; there are so many I just left them as is.)

The Pokémon lyrics become prophetic, but more on that in Tony's chapter. The important thing is, the slogans are made entirely of bread crumbs and bait. "One plus negative one" is a reference to the battle between Agent Smith and Neo, their metaphysical "balance," while "Thomas Anderson" is Neo's original name in *the Matrix*. The slogans are specifically intended to call the franchise to mind, to get someone to believe in Neo as a savior, a crusading knight. There's no hint of concrete actions or ways to improve the world, besides from, "FREE your MIND." Demos even notes that it's intended to be sly, to avoid turning off potential followers with flat honesty: "here I promote Neo in the most indirect way possible, but I leave them with a morbid curiosity about a figure they Know too well, but never have 'heard of' in that way. And the only way to quell that: give them a site...and they are sure to follow. ::grins::"

Like that of many of Draven's followers, Demos's story is sad. A spiritual seeker, he got sucked deep into Neo's cult in his late teens, and in June 2005, he left home to become, according to Neo, "a student of our philosophy" (2005 October 6). Ex-followers report it a little differently: "basically [sic] dem ran away from home because of some fight he had with his mom, ended up moving [sic] in with neo and trin... finally [sic] he got a job to support neo's broke ass and with his first pay check he went and got a bus ticket back home" (personal communication, 2006 August 7). Demos ends up living with the crew for roughly six months, just long enough for him to end up in court for the unlawful detainer case and get visited by the cops on a separate matter (Demos, July 27). Another ex-follower reports that he "went from being a new age dreamer type to a full-on alt right white nationalist. [...] he proselytized to me about white genocide and lambasted social justice warriors, and I blocked him on facebook" (personal communication, 2017).

Right before Demos escapes, in December, Neo ends up in the local news. "Suspicious Device Reported Near Dealey Plaza," the headline reads (nbc5i.com, 2005). "Device Determined to Contain No Explosives."

It appears that Neo created "a green, plywood maze with a rodent inside running on an exercise ball. Attached to the ball was a kitchen timer with wires hooked up to a small circuit board or computer hard drive." The art project also includes doomsday messages with words like, "Not enough time," and "Judgment is near"; another newspaper article supplies, "Open your eyes before it's too late" (Hashimoto, 2005). The Dallas Bomb Squad is pulled in and "determined the device contained no explosives" (nbc5i.com, 2005).

Neo doesn't do this alone. Followers help. "I still hate it that we did that," one later tells me (personal communication 2017). "We left a live animal in possible distress for up to an hour [...] What if it froze? What if they put it down? IT WAS A LIVE. FUCKING. ANIMAL. Draven didn't even care. I had an anxiety attack all the way home and freaked out so badly that I cut myself. Draven just sneered like 'that's not even a cut' and cut a huge gash in his stomach to show me what a real cutter was capable of. He threatened to cut me or my tires after that."

But the art project isn't enough. Neo embarks on a new series of projects, despite his proclaimed cancer, heart attack, encroaching blindness, multiple sclerosis, and fibromyalgia. Come the new year, he starts his podcast, called "Radio Zero-One," or "Kismet Radio" (2006 January 18); the archives are still available on iTunes. A few months later, he starts trying to make his AI chat-bot as some grand statement on the rights of sapient machines (2006, March 5), releases his second computer game, *Devil Theory: Synchronisma* (2006 April 21a) and creates his Youtube channel, NeoExMachinae-- the same name as the Neo/Smith slash comm on LJ (2006 April 21b).

In February, Neo claims to have had "a half vision inspired by 'the spirit of Tyler [Durden]'" inspiring him to say, "We need to make soap" (2006 February 9). It becomes his primary fundraising effort for a monastery/dojo (citation available upon request). An ex-follower described the goal as such: "His dream, apparantly, [sic] was to have all the redpills [followers] come together at the Four Corners and create an all-redpill community dedicated to spreading and living by the message. This was gradually toned down to the founding of a martial arts/philosophical training center in his city of residence.

Hearing things like how he would finally be able to build the giant *swoosh, swoosh* machine arm that he saw in his visions and how he was starting on the dojo development by designing the uniforms first was finally beginning to make me feel very *tired* of it all" (personal communication, 2006 October 1). Perhaps this explains the "martial arts academy" mentioned in the threat to Smith I.

Like many of Neo's ideas, the soap venture doesn't go well. "It was ACTUAL LYE SOAP. It felt and smelled terrible," another ex-follower later tells me (personal communication, 2017). "He was selling this stuff on ebay. Under the name of, I kid you not, 'Paperst Soap Company' [Paper St Soap Company was Tyler Durden's business in Fight Club] [...] As usual, he lost interest after a week or so, and ended up not fulfilling orders." Indeed, a complaint/joke among ex-followers at the time is, "All that, and I never even got the soap."

And where does all of this soap get made? Seven's apartment.

Seven is another one of Draven's "children." "He told me he'd thought about 'Adopting' me," Seven reports, "after which he had a short meltdown over AIM because he was concerned about the fact that I didn't seem as overjoyed by the prospect of finding my 'Dad' as he thought I would/should be. I was still trying to get my mind around the idea that I'd actually 'found my Dad,' but [...] was sort of freaked out by the whole idea" (citation available upon request).

At first, Seven is devoted to the household, but as time wears on, they realize that Neo has no intention of paying any rent or utilities (citation available upon request). He relies on Trinity's disability payments for money, but because she didn't

register the move to Texas with Social Security, her payments stop. And even at the best of times, Trinity is apparently unreliable with money. "[Trinity] kept telling me that her family had gotten on forever somehow by not paying their bills, that I always had money as long as I had checks, that going into the hole was nothing to worry about," one ex-follower states (personal communication, 2006, March 26). Another one predicts, "Trin's going to end up getting hauled in for bad checks" (personal communication, 2006 May 22). Indeed, by this point, she already has.

When Seven asks Neo to pay his way, things get ugly. Neo "threatened me with a goddamn KNIFE because I asked him to pay his half of phone bill when we were living together, (because threatening people with physical violence when they piss you off is NORMAL FUCKING BEHAVIOR according to him)" (citation available upon request).

Seven reports him to the cops, runs out of money, and leaves the cult after the household is evicted in May 2006. House retaliates with a horrific email which includes the lines, "Even rapists and murderers have a right to medical care. [Except, at this point in my mind, for you. Have Mommy take care of you. I hear potato peelers are good for those pesky genital warts.] Let's HOPE you NEVER meet me in a dark fucking alley" (citation available upon request).

The cops refuse to take Seven's accusations seriously, and Neo faces no consequences (citation available on request). He quickly moves on to another follower for financial support, persuading a twenty-year-old college student to "run away to join them in the new hotel room that they are now holed up in," according to an ex-follower (personal communication, 2006 May

28). "They are using her as a bank account, they are using her as a free cab service, and they convinced her to change the security code on her bank card so that her parents couldn't cut it off." Apparently she isn't the only young person that Neo has his eye on either; that ex-follower also states that Neo "kept trying to convince [20-year-old], [REDACTED] who is 18, and [REDACTED] who is 17, to all move away from their parents and [...] into the ONE BEDROOM apartment."

Combined with Draven's behavior towards their other teenage followers, not reassuring, and the ex-follower reports Draven seeing his young "children" as potential sexual partners: "Draven regarded [REDACTED] as a 'spiritual son' but the subtext was that there was also an attraction and it probably would have turned sexual real fast. [REDACTED] was 16 at the time, in early 2006" (personal communication, 2017). It seems that Draven treats parenthood as a sexual kink dynamic; this will only become more pronounced later on.

Fortunately, on June 14, 2006, the ex-follower reports that the 20-year-old's local relatives "prevailed upon her to get the fuck out of that situation. Thank God" (personal communication). Deprived of the follower's money, Neo sends Trinity to demand her disability back-payments, which save them from homelessness for the rest of the month.

Despite being financially unstable, living in a hotel, and ostensibly on death's door, Neo still keeps his ears pricked for any sort of criticism and relentlessly tracks those who've left the group. An ex-follower reports, "he actually goes out and LOOKS for LJ posts and forums with mentions of himself so he can join and flame his detractors if they say something critical. [...] he actually begged me on AIM to help him find a linked reference

on a forum once that he couldn't find but that his Site Stat Tool insisted was there [...] He was practically in tears about the fact that he couldn't find it, that people were talking about him and he couldn't see what they were saying or respond to it" (personal communication, 2017).

These aren't just ex-followers of Neo either. One of the only signs of Buffy II's online existence after Deadjournal is a Johari Window she creates around this time, where friends and online passerby can pick positive adjectives to describe her. Angel appears to say (with deep bitterness and sarcasm) that she is "clever, loving, dependable, proud, self-assertive, trustworthy" (Buffy II, 2006). At the time, I wasn't sure it was the same Angel, but an ex-follower later claimed that he "harassed/flamed her via IM from my computer on at least one occasion while he lived with me" which was around the same time (personal communication, 2008 January 8).

In May 2006, someone with the screen-name of Birgit Riddle (not an ex-follower, but a friend of one) writes a Batman fanfiction, Conspiracy Fears with a mental patient named Mr. Andrews that seems to have been based on Neo (AKA "Mr. Anderson") and his cult activities. Like Neo, the character "started making devices that looked like bombs and had messages saying that the end was near, but instead of containing explosives, they only contained [...] mice." The story ends with Andrews becoming a victim to the supervillain the Scarecrow and spending "the rest of his days in Arkham [Asylum], screaming or babbling incoherently."

Even though Neo is never directly named, and the reference would only make sense to someone already familiar with him to begin with, Neo takes it as a personal attack. He

somehow tracks the fic down and leaves a review saying, "Reported. Have fun with that. ;)" (2006 May 11). His attempt to get the story deleted is a failure.

Ordinary ex-followers also get the brunt of his wrath. An ex-follower relates a conversation with a friend joking about Neo, being careful to never mention him by name. Even so, he appears to comment with a guilt trip: "Have a *very* satisfying life. I won't read or answer any other e-mails from this post. Too busy, you know, with that tumor thing" (2006 July 4). He even mocks her for possibly thinking he's stalking her, even though there's no other way he could've found the conversation: "Don't worry, the scary Matrix crazies aren't hovering and trying to OMG ONLINE STALK YOU. [Smith I] syndroma [sic], ahoy. I was bored."

With such unrelenting harassment, threats of violence, and reminders that he's watching them, most of Neo's ex-followers go quiet, at least publicly. Even now, it's very difficult for me to find any public condemnations of Neo, and I suspect it's because of how he treats any sort of criticism. Still though, word travels through private or locked channels, and this will facilitate Neo's fall later on.

But let's pull back from Neo for a moment and focus on the other headmates from 2006-2008: Hannibal Lecter, and Edward Elric.

TEMPORARY WALK-INS: EDWARD ELRIC AND HANNIBAL LECTER

Hannibal Lecter is the genius sociopath of *Silence of the Lambs* and its sequels and prequels. He is most known for eating human beings. Edward Elric is the teenage protagonist of *Fullmetal Alchemist*, a sobriquet he earns after sacrificing an arm and a leg to alchemy and replacing them with metal prostheses.

Sadly, I don't know very much about either Edward or Hannibal. My first indication of Edward Elric's existence is in November 2006, when Draven requests screencaps from a specific *Fullmetal Alchemist* episode involving the characters of Ed and Izumi, his teacher (2006 November 8).

In December 2006, they appear again in response to an Ed/Izumi fanfic on Livejournal, which is based around Izumi as a mentor and mother figure to Ed, even as they have rough, dubiously consensual sex. It is a dark, twisted fic, suiting for someone who fetishizes and sexualizes parenthood the way Draven does. One commenter remarks on the characters' "closeness that borders on incestuous," and Draven agrees, adding, "FMA is highly personal to us... and you nailed the best of it" (2006 December 23). It's classic Draven-- who exactly is "us"? Why is it so personal? He encourages questions, entices and insinuates, but the creator doesn't respond, leaving the bait untaken. He moves on.

Things progress over the next month. Draven states an intention to go to Seattle's Sakura-Con in April, saying, "I'd hate to waste the 80 hours of work that went into my automail..." and

when another commenter mentions having a "Roy Muse," he responds, "You sound like the flip side of me. Scary, that" (2007 February 1a and b). Again, not stating outright, just heavily implying.

The next day, Draven gets a new state ID, and the photo is in full Edward Elric garb--hair dyed blond, a red jacket, and a black shirt underneath (citation available upon request). Neo will later publicly post this ID, with the name, address, and ID number partially censored, onto his Livejournal, with the strange statement, "this at least can 'verify' that I'm who I say I am" (2008, December 15). This document will later end up getting posted on Encyclopedia Dramatica, much to Draven's displeasure.

The following year, Connor's LJ ends up hosting comment threads about Edward Elric and the new arrival, Hannibal Lecter. Neo specifically mentions in a comment that he's looking for role-playing opportunities, and that "Edward Elric's an option" (2007 March 9). He also states, "I just created a journal for the Good Doctor Lecter," but I never find it.

Hannibal interacts with Connor directly, leaving anonymous comments introducing himself as "one of Neo's... how do I say, 'temporary walk-ins'" and posting a nude pencil sketch "of Neo's girl... my model's in her body, at any rate" (2007 March 8). Yes, Trinity is now hosting Clarice, as seems to be traditional.

Despite the picture's signature of "hl," Connor doesn't make the connection at first. When she asks who Hannibal is, he replies, "I'll leave you to figure it out by the initials. You're a bright boy." He continues acting in this mysterious way, telling Connor that he's giving her "an opportunity for the truth" and that she may ask him whatever she likes. He treats this as some

grand gift, telling her that it's something that "the psychiatrists of the world would salivate over like starving dogs." He also swears Connor to secrecy, saying, "I also don't mind you discussing our discussion in said journal [...] so long as you DO NOT TELL ANYONE where I am... in any form." Connor, who's long since learned to obey Draven's edicts, says, "Don't worry, I won't. [...] I wouldn't want to risk it."

Anakin will later repost the same drawing, twice, and he lies both times about Hannibal's existence. The first one keeps Hannibal's signature, but he claims "the 'HL' at the bottom is the model, not my initials" (2008 June 25). Then he reposts it again on DeviantArt a few months later, with the "hl" signature clumsily cropped out and replaced with "Draven 2007" (2008 September 26c). Apparently unable to resist explaining himself, Anakin lies, "The only (very minor) changes I made were to include a block for my signature, which was illegible in the original scan; and to lighten the scan up just barely." He also notes, "The model, incidentally, was my wife. (She loved the original portrait, when it was done; I wonder if she'll love it up here on devART. (*grins.*)" Considering that statement, it seems doubtful that any of Draven ever asked any of Trinity's permission, the three times they posted it.

The last I see of Edward Elric is in February 2008, which is the date on the International Alchemy Guild license that Draven posts (Anonymous, Unknown). Since the only other system members active around this time were Neo and possibly Anakin, it seems most likely the license belonged to Ed.

That is all I know about these two Draven members. Considering the ephemerality of the Internet, the length of time

that has passed, and the difficult-to-search nature of Livejournal, I can at least take comfort that I found them at all.

PROPHET, PROMETHEUS, SUPERMAN: NEO'S PEAK

Their adventure in Texas a failure, Neo and Trinity move back to Seattle somewhere around summer or fall 2006. There, they continue to take advantage of other followers' generosity, rack up more court cases, and cause another accidental bomb scare.

On November 30, 2006, Draven is a respondent for charges of domestic violence against Kenneth Anthony Parker and Russell Aaron Smith. I don't know who they are; roommates, possibly, or unknown followers. Both men petition for orders of protection and receive them until December 4. Then the judge decides there isn't adequate reason to continue the orders of protection, and both cases are dismissed (Parker, 2006; Smith, 2006).

Draven and Trinity both end up in court again on January 19, 2007 (State of Washington vs. Draven, 2007). This is the controlled substance false info violation; they will both plead guilty to a felony, be sentenced to fourteen days of confinement, followed by twelve months of community custody, and be forbidden from owning firearms. They never pay what they owe, which at present is almost \$3000.

On January 25 and February 16, Trinity ends up in court again (citations available upon request). I have no idea what either case is about.

Undaunted, Neo re-starts his podcast, Radio Zero One, in March (2007 August 2). It runs roughly every night for four months and then goes on hiatus forever after, possibly because of

evictions and his reliance on a follower named Blackbird to organize, transcribe, and notate it all. More on that later.

It's already apparent that Neo's breadcrumbs tactics are deliberate and premeditated, but in the first episode of his podcast, he outright admits it (as quoted by Blackbird, 2007 March 7). He says, "you send a 19 year old mailclerk [sic] a note saying 'OK Johnny, I know that you're looking for something. I might be able to help you find it. Logon [sic] to this site at this time. Here's your code.' Then they go, and they look around, and when they walk home that night, they're going to be thinking 'well how do they know me? What does this have to do with anything? How did they find me and what is this mysterious thing that they can show me?'" He also cynically states, "if you single out someone, tell them that they've been chosen or gifted, or if you make a very small group of people privy to something private, it is by human nature that they will, you know, meet their friend after school and say 'hey, guess what happened to me.'"

At this time, Neo is almost thirty years old; wouldn't it be more natural for him to say "after work," instead of "after school?" Unless he's specifically targeting children and teenagers, people who are young and still unworldly. (After all, I too was in my late teens when Neo spoke to me.) Neo calls this tactic "viral marketing taken to the next level - much more personalized" (ibid).

The next podcast episode includes a "rant about neo's uniqueness," "Neo's self neglect (food, sleep, etc)," and the various superpowers that Neo, Smith, and Trinity receive from their Matrix version selves, "(smith's strength/brainpower, neo's

visions and such, trin's strength)", (Blackbird, 2007 March 8) while episode three includes Neo reading poetry (March 9).

Despite their dicey legal circumstances, Trinity and Neo end up in the local newspaper again a month later. *The Stranger* reports, "Seattle Center security witnessed two individuals carry a 'device' onto the campus, leaving it attached to a metal pole with a note" (Spangenthal-Lee, 2007 April 13). The photos show it to be a cardboard cut-out of a man with the face removed, stuck to a pole and connected by wires to a bowl of red Jell-O mounted on a tripod dome. The installation is accompanied by a "manifesto," which starts with, "Good morning, Seattle. It's time to wake up. I watch you all. Every day" (ibid).

Like in Dallas, the local bomb squad is called to investigate, where they "assessed that the device was 'non harmful' and removed it for disposal" (ibid). However, this time, the article includes an interview with Neo!

Neo is probably delighted for the opportunity to spread the message of his philosophy, gain followers, and build his cult. *The Sun Journal*, after all, treated Kurt credulously in 1999; why should *the Stranger* treat Neo any differently in 2007?

But that is not how it goes. The journalist reports with barely restrained incredulity that "[Neo and Trinity] enjoyed the action in the Matrix films, **'but they didn't really accurately portray our lives'**...and they were totally serious" (emphasis his). He calls Neo's website "terrible" and consults an art critic about the "device." She "stared at the photos of Neo's device for a solid five minutes before declaring **'It's just terrible. There's a million reasons why.'**" (Emphasis his.) He ends with reporting that a Seattle Center PR rep "called it 'a non-event.'"

Spangenthal-Lee isn't done. He writes another article about Neo and Trinity a few days later (2007 April 19) with equal derision: "Melding pop-science and undergrad-level philosophy, Neo and Trinity say they represent an 'international revolutionary group' that's 1,200 strong." He also seems unimpressed with what he calls "the group's fuzzy philosophy."

Neo is furious, and to this day holds a grudge about what he sees as character assassination, painting Spangenthal-Lee as some predatory interrogator. Over a year later, he calls it a "nasty, condescending blog article" and claims that Spangenthal-Lee made "a mockery out of everything we stand for and then to have the blatant and heartless nerve to bring things into a public forum - things that he literally FORCED out of me during the conversation; he simply REFUSED to drop the subject - that would be grounds for a *lawsuit*, with anyone else *sighs.* He's also the one that confuses '120' with '1,200'" (2008 July 28, paragraph 4).

All of this is more twisting the truth; Neo himself is infamous for hounding his followers for information and then dragging it into public forums like Fandom Wank or Livejournal communities. And unless Neo is counting every headmate of every follower Draven ever had, that 120 number is grossly inflated as well. To my great fortune, the Wayback Machine happens to have an archive of the for_zion community profile (and thus, the membership roster) from two weeks after the disastrous newspaper articles (2007 May 3). At arguably the height of Neo's fame, his primary cult community has only 29 members—and four of those screen-names belong to himself and Trinity, while at least three others belong to a single person, instantly knocking the true number down to 24 at most. And

even that is presuming that there are no other duplicate accounts, no trolls sneaking in for laughs, no ex-followers who haven't managed to get dumped from the roster.

Even among that small group, there's a lot of overturn and burnout. The next Wayback Machine archive, from only four months later (2007 September 20), has raised the membership quota to 31 screen-names, but while five new ones have joined, three have left. Whether those who left were never deeply involved, or fell from grace the way Draven's ex-partners did, it's safe to say that Neo's following is nowhere near the size he says it is. At best, he seemed to have a core following of maybe a dozen people at any given time, and at most five of them involved with him offline. (And often, that offline following drops to just Trinity.)

But anyway, back to Spangenthal-Lee's Seattle Stranger articles, where like many a time before, Neo's followers descend upon the newspaper comments section to attack the reporter and defend their leader. This does not succeed in making them look like a benign group.

One follower, appropriately named Zeal, posts a manifesto, insisting that they're not a cult. "No one pushed Alice down the rabbit hole," she says (2007). All her life, "something was missing, and [I] found it through Neo. This has changed my life in a great way." She describes Neo as "a sentient being who cares more about every single one of us than he does of himself" and "some kind of Prophet." Another follower claims the reporter "mangled and misquoted Neo," and that the Mission is "not in any way about 'saving the world'" (mit-x, 2007) which is a complete reversal of Neo's earlier messianic claims.

The Zero-Six contingent's defenses of Neo make it clear that it's not about his cause but him. For instance, when an unrelated Slog commenter recognizes Neo's forearm tattoos as coming from the movie *Constantine*, Trinity appears to claim that "it's an alchemy symbol [...] [that's] been around much longer than the movie," and claims that Neo got them because he studies alchemy, "as in the old science version, not the fluffy bunny new age crap." Again, this is nonsense; alchemy symbols come in all sorts of shapes, styles, and versions, and Constantine specifically chose the exact form and location of the sulfur symbol that his fictional version had—he clearly based his choice on the movie, along with his study of alchemy itself. Another follower, apparently completely unaware of John, Angie, and Gabriel's existence, says "It was the only thing about the damn movie(*Constantine*) [Neo] liked for long" (DK, 2007 April 19). In the process, they erase Constantine's existence, perhaps in hopes of fortifying Neo's narrative as the One, rather than the One of Many.

Spangenthal-Lee doesn't back down, and neither does the newspaper. Indeed, Draven's followers descending en masse only proves the point. The reporter never engages with the commenters, doesn't get into a fight, certainly doesn't remove his articles. He stays silent and lets his work speak for itself, which Draven seems incapable of doing.

It turns out that defending Neo isn't just a matter of personal investment; it's in fact a tenet of his philosophy! He codifies it in his book, *Codex Veritas Neo*, which he puts up for free download on his site and then self-publishes (2007 June 29).

When I first started writing about Draven, other plurals from this time period spoke up to say that they had read Neo's

book and it didn't seem so bad. Which makes sense: after all, this book is carefully curated and written by Neo himself to look as inoffensive and harmless as possible. But it's not. I can not discuss Neo's cult in proper detail without analyzing this book.

First of all, I must discuss the book's design. The fonts are constantly changing, as are their colors—certain selections are blue, bright red, purple, turquoise, or lime green for no purpose I can fathom. The pages were clearly made using the default Microsoft Word settings, with a size of 8.5 x 11 inches and side margins of roughly an inch and a quarter; no thought was given to making it more appropriate. At times it is physically uncomfortable to read. The images are not sized appropriately, and are generally poorly made, confusing in message, and muddled with too much text.

None of this is surprising; none of Draven had any experience in design or self-publishing, nor the money to hire someone who did. But it reflects how Draven treats even their ostensibly most important pursuits: focusing on trivial surface details, rather than the structure underneath. And while there are plenty of poorly designed books out there, Draven specifically wants his to be attractive to new followers. It's intended to be someone's first introduction to the group. What does it say that such an important work is made so shoddily?

But let's move on to the book's content. The cover illustration (created by a follower) depicts Neo standing astride two planets, one being our blue Earth, the other a post-apocalyptic red wasteland—perhaps reflecting the red and blue pills of the movie, though if so, that would imply that taking the red pill and becoming a follower leads to disaster. Wearing his trademark black trenchcoat and sunglasses, Neo holds out two

handfuls of light to the viewer. Surrounding the image in four different fonts and colors are the words, “You are dreaming. It’s time to wake up now,” “Codex Veritas Neo,” “The New Vision Towards a New Reality,” and “THERE ARE OTHER WORLDS THAN THESE” (2007 June 29).

The first chapter is filled with glowing testimonials of Neo’s followers; one describes Neo with “move over Superman ‘cause he’s coming to save the day” (pg. 5). But more interesting is that follower’s description of Neo’s voice: a “warm, comforting blanket” that “is filled with so much love and compassion that at times I’ve [...] simply wanted to weep” (ibid).

It’s true, Neo has a very soothing, rolling, hypnotic voice; it’s on display in his countless Youtube videos, podcasts, and voice posts. But that’s not a coincidence. Other cult leaders use the same vocal techniques. David Sullivan, a sadly now-deceased cult authority, describes infiltrating a cult and how after only two weeks, he was hallucinating the cult leader’s voice: “what’d happened with the hypnosis, the constant shouting and talking and guided imagery, is his voice does get inside your head. And so what he does is a technique that’s called a voice roll that a lot of preachers use” (Koehler and Sullivan, 2011, 52:30). When the interviewer asks him for details, he explains and partially demonstrates using his own voice: “you use your voice in a way that it slowly builds, and it goes up and down, and builds to a natural crescendo, and sometimes it will come up to great peaks and I can’t do it right now, I’d be shouting, raise it up to where you’re shouting, then plummet down and you get this very subtle, slow, seductive voice that feels like it’s going inside your head. [...] It has a kind of rhythm to it, and it’ll be this long protracted story, and it lulls you, taking you through these

emotional states when you're unaware of how it's manipulating you [...] you can do this with your voice—the masters of it in our culture are Southern preachers” (53:30).

Draven uses their voice similarly, and even in poor-quality recordings, such as on their voice posts or Youtube videos, the effect is still noticeable, though difficult to translate into text. On me, the effect was stupefying; even while constantly pausing the recording to try and textually transcribe, even with poor audio quality and a hearing impairment making speech comprehension difficult, I had a hard time remembering what he was saying, had to work to keep my wits about me. It reminded me of a teacher I had who was cursed with an impressively droning voice, only far worse, because instead of trying to learn about state debt, I was watching a man try and actively manipulate me into believing in the impending Machine apocalypse. Plus, my teacher only ever inhabited the dull end of the vocal scale; he never goaded his students' emotions into an inferno with screaming, ranting, or sobbing the way Draven does. I imagine the effect would be more pronounced and far more acute on someone who trusted and liked them already.

This effect also is mirrored in Draven's writing style: long run-on sentences and paragraphs, going from the quietest of details to the most intense drama, intended to lull the reader and inspire emotions. Indeed, many of the compliments of their fanfiction refer to exactly that (Anonymous, 2004; Various, 2006).

I must agree with Sullivan, that this can get inside someone's head. It sounds crazy, but I felt the effects myself. Even though I was never a part of the cult, even though I knew what Draven was doing and had no personal relationship with

them, I was reading so many of their words and listening to so much of their voice that it insinuated into my mind. I would have nightmares about Draven. Even when I didn't, I would wake up in the dead of night, unable to stop playing it back in my mind. It was poisonous and horrifying, and I would have to take long breaks from the work. Even after interviewing ex-followers and being pursued by Neo himself, I found myself internalizing his beliefs and opinions, that I was a vindictive stalker out purely to get him and to make fun of him. This book has suffered from my desperate attempts to make it as boring as possible, as dry as possible, just to try and moderate my own response to it.

And all that is with me, who never had a personal belief in Neo or his spiritual framework, who never truly knew him. Imagine the effects if I were a follower, a person who truly believed Neo was my friend, my father, my savior! If I found myself dreaming about Neo or hearing his words replay in my head, I might truly believe that he had supernatural powers, that I was living in the Matrix and that he had control over it! It sounds absurd, but I can not emphasize enough that the effect, however subtle, is real.

The reader need not take my word for it; it's on full display in the Codex's rapturous follower testimonials. One follower leaves a poem comparing Neo to Prometheus or a Christ figure: "Precious is the man who knows the truth / And holds the fire to change the earth / Who suffers the burns and burdens of man" (pg. 4). Zeal, who commented on *the Stranger* article, contributes much of what she said there, and more: "After reading about what true prophets went through and experienced, so much resonates with what he experiences [...] I am now convinced that this is what Neo is: a prophet" (pg. 8).

Trinity goes further, claiming that Neo has "psychic abilities (such as his apparent ability to heal certain afflictions of the body)" and "Neo is something miraculous... he has been touched by the Divine" (pg. 4-5). But Trinity didn't come up with this idea on her own; Neo himself was claiming healing powers years prior, stating that he fixed Trinity's sprained shoulder (2005 May 6). Except he didn't; an ex-follower a year later reports, "[Trinity] is using a pre-existing shoulder condition that has never healed properly to go to ERs and get prescriptions written" for Neo's drug habit (personal communication, 2006 May 20).

Even in a book of propaganda voiced by the devoted, made entirely to present a squeaky-clean image, the violent undertones leak through. One follower says that Neo "loves even his enemies!?" and that "I was ready to rise up, along with others, and give those violent detractors 'what was coming to them', but he would shake his head and tell us no. He cared about them so much that he didn't want to see anything bad happen to them, even if they did deserve it" (pg. 6). This follower refers to Neo's detractors as "haters" and "attackers," as though they are sources of physical violence (ibid). Really, though, what these people are doing is "openly mocking him, having a laugh at his expense" (ibid).

Zeal agrees, saying "they spread lies or say things to hurt [Neo]" (pg. 7). Reality is constantly reversed; ex-followers like Smith I are rebranded into liars, violent attackers, while Neo's own acts of stalking, harassment, abuse, and violence are completely erased: "Neo will stand there, smiling and with open arms to them" (pg. 6).

It's not just the followers alluding to violence, either. For all his declarations of being peaceful and all-loving, Neo still refers to his actions as a "war," "a revolution," and claims that "your mind is a weapon" (pg. 13). Spreading his word is "fallout" from a "logic bomb" (pg. 53). Even in a book ostensibly all about peace, he can't resist thinking in terms of an action movie fight, like in the Neofox days. He even ends one parable with "Lock and load" (pg. 13).

In Chapter Two, Neo regurgitates some of his "parables" from Daemmerung, Truth of the Spoon, and Livejournal. Here, he dances around the idea that the Matrix and the System are real, instead claiming they're all a metaphor, only to then suggest that maybe they're not. It is exhausting and dizzying to read, slabs of bloviating prose constantly saying one thing and meaning another.

For instance, Neo refers to human beings as "batteries," like in the Matrix (pg. 11). Then he immediately reverses and says, "Batteries of a machine race? Hardly. 'Batteries' of the System that keeps people contained within their own limitations. By accepting it, [...] they power the self-perpetuating machine." And then, *in the very next sentence*, he reverses again, saying, "But in the end, is it really so far of a stretch?" The Matrix might exist, except it doesn't, but maybe it does, though! The constant contradictions dizzy the reader's critical faculties into submission.

Ex-followers laugh at the idea that the Matrix is a metaphor. "Yeah, the 'it's all a metaphor!' is a lie he drags out for outsiders," one reports (personal communication, 2017). "Everyone on the inner circle is hip to how much it is all *not* supposed to be a metaphor. He talked about Deus Ex [the

interface to the Machine City in the Matrix franchise, who helps Neo sacrifice himself as a Christ figure to save the Matrix] and the Machine gods and the Machine Arm and the Second Renaissance all the time. But he was very vague about it. There was never a discussion about how the second renaissance was going to actually go down (thus avoiding the pitfall of 'delayed rapture syndrome') but just that something vague was going to happen and that he had to 'fight' it."

I don't need to take the ex-follower's word for it; basic common sense proves Neo's true beliefs, because if the Matrix is just a metaphor, then why does Neo have the identity he does? Why does he persuade his followers that they are characters from the franchise, including Niobe (AKA Faith from the Angel cult), Trinity, and Agent Smith? Why does his original FAQ from Daemmerung include the answers to such questions as, "Do you have memories of your life as Thomas Anderson?" "When did you learn to trust Morpheus?" "What did that slop stuff you ate on ship taste like?" and "Are there condoms in Zion?" (Draven, 2005, January 10)

In the Codex, Neo is unable to resist going back to Angel's old claims of the apocalypse, but rather than Whedon's supernatural demons, it's now the Second Renaissance of the Matrix franchise, which is also treated with bilious coyness: "I will NOT stand on the verge of nuclear winter, or knee-deep in ashes with the scent of burnt metal on my tongue, I will not stand amidst the wreckage of shattered pods – metaphorical or not – and watch crumpled remains, of any being, literal or otherwise" (2007 July 8, pg. 12). "I'm not here to tell you with 100% certainty that the world is going to end in a great Machine war, with humanity's own creations rising up against them. That sounds

ridiculous, really. I'm simply here to offer you a glimpse at several possible futures,"(pg. 40). But he brings back the imagery again and again, suggesting its reality even as he claims it's metaphorical.

In Chapter Three, he addresses the "'Core members' and 'crew' of the Zero-Six Contingent" and goes into the beliefs required to be part of the group (pg. 47). It's here that defending him becomes a formalized requirement: "If someone attacks the group with no reason other than pure malice - someone who just likes to 'make fun of the crazy people' - and you're there to see it, and are a part of the group, you won't simply stand by and let them spill wrong information everywhere," Neo orders. "All that we ask is that you - neutrally, as least - try and defuse misinformation. Open their eyes before they get them stapled closed with ignorance of our real intentions" (pg. 52).

On the surface, it seems reasonable, but the Stranger article shows how it works out in practice: Neo siccing his followers en masse on any criticism, with even the slightest joke at his expense being transformed into psychological violence. And for all his claims that he's victimized as one of the "crazy people," he's totally fine with painting ex-followers as delusional, psychotic, or otherwise mentally ill when it serves his purpose.

Another requirement for followers is to "trust us to know what we're doing... don't come in and try to change the path we're on, adjust it to fight your own personal cause, or tell us what we 'need to do'" which hints at the hierarchy of the cult (pg. 48). For all his talk about equality, Neo is in charge; nobody is allowed to adulterate his mission. Perhaps he's thinking about Smith I's attempt at creating a separate Matrix group.

Neo also mentions the machine gods, though he dances around whether they exist or not. "There isn't an overriding 'Machine consciousness' in this world, that I'm getting these visions, these images, from," he says, "but sometimes I 'open a window' to a world where there is and receive the 'transmissions'" (pg. 26). He calls this "precognition," presumably one of those "psychic abilities" that Trinity mentioned earlier. Why the Machine consciousness can interface with his organic mind, and why they'd be able to tell the future in a world where they don't exist is never made clear. It doesn't have to make sense; it only needs to entice.

Neo also mentions a vision of "a mechanical angel of death" that "towers over you with a thousand eyes. And every time one of the eyes blinks-- [...] something dies" (pg. 33). He claims it was created by human apathy, that the only reason others can't see it is "either because you don't choose to look and it's proverbially hiding in plain sight, or maybe because it's between the walls of reality" (pg. 33). That's the closest to public admittance of the thing's reality that Neo ever makes, and he claims that after he came out of the vision, "half my hair had turned gray," which needless to say isn't true (pg. 35).

Neo will create a replica of his machine god of death later in the year, calling it metaKISMET; it is a simple kit robot covered in painted eyeballs and dismembered doll parts. Neo uses it for a Robothon combat match in Seattle, ostensibly to "make a statement" against "creating [...] self-sustaining entities - to use as killing machines," (2007 December 6) which makes about as much sense as protesting cockfights by participating in one. He submits metaKISMET to the Robothon Judges' Awards, but wins nothing (Anonymous, 2008, April 4).

Back to the Codex. The final chapter ends with a reprint of the manifesto Neo used in the Seattle bomb scare and some final words of support from followers, including Zeal and a new recruit, Blackbird.

Blackbird's recruitment is a classic cult story. In the Codex, he describes being in a time of great life transition, wanting to free the world and searching for truth. "I had to find the answer somewhere. I knew it was within me, but I just didn't know how to recognize it," he writes (pg. 67). In this time of psychological uncertainty and vulnerability, Neo steps in to offer structure and purpose. "I ran across Neo's website during a particularly intense search one night. I read through it and realized - that thing that was missing... it was love." He closes the book with, "I'm behind and with him 100% on this. It is all that I care about. I want love to spread throughout the world - to permeate every being and cause a major change for the better" (ibid). He joins for_zion (Draven, 2007 September 9), becomes the painstaking organizer, transcriber, and notator of Neo's radio show, and creates the Livejournal account radio01podcast.

In the Codex, Blackbird is reported to be living in California, but that soon changes. Like Demos before him, he moves in with Neo and Trinity, and becomes their acolyte. But his timing is most unfortunate; a week before the Codex is released, on June 21, 2007, Draven and Trinity end up in court for yet another lawful detainer charge (Lunde, 2007). An ex-follower from the time explains, "They did their 'Radio Zero One' show late into the night, with the door wide open because the heat was 'unbearable', so naturally, the very loud music and talking and such disturbed the neighbors. They had many noise complaints against them, then the landlord eventually asked

them to leave. They dug in, refusing, and the sheriff was called to assist in the eviction process" (personal communication, 2017).

Once evicted, the whole household moves in with a complete stranger who works at an adult supply store. Draven and Trinity had previously gone there and schmoozed his phone number out of him; now they persuade him and his wife to let them stay (ex-follower personal communication, 2017). The wife, astoldmiel, later shares her experience on Livejournal, stating, "Since none of you wish to listen to BlackBird's account of what transpired, I will tell you all in my own words what really happened and what led me to decide to expell [sic] Kurt and Trinity from my home" (2007).

Astoldmiel describes the household coming in on July 18th, driven by Trinity's mom after the eviction. They have Neo's long-suffering dog, Menemsha Blue, with them, and astoldmiel reports, "I told them that they had not informed me about a dog. Thereupon Kurt began to bitch out Trinity for not saying anything." The dog is apparently horrifically afflicted by mange, and in a few months will die from it. Astoldmiel claims it "was allowed to urinate on my floors and carpet" and "each time I asked them to clean it up Kurt would throw a screaming fit and only grudgingly clean it up. When I asked him to put the dog out he screamed that the dog was a service animal and refused to comply." (For all his claims of Menemsha Blue being his best friend, these statements show how Neo neglected his dog; a service dog owner should always take it out when it needs to, and give it the care it needs.) Neo also apparently orders cable behind astoldmiel's back after being told no, and constantly proselytizes to them.

Astoldomiel also notes Neo's abuse of Trinity. "He would send her to the market for him, to make his food, and do his wash. He treats her more like a glorified maid than a girlfriend/fiance [sic]. On one occasion she became stranded in Seattle and was unable to return. Kurt began to storm around, screaming, and yelling at her on the phone, then stormed through my house slamming doors and swearing he was going to kill himself. Then he stormed out of the house into the rainy night. I followed after him to make sure he did not in fact step in front of a semi truck as he said he would. While out there I witnessed him screaming at Trinity on the phone in a very unhinged sort of way. He was swearing at her, calling her a 'fucking bitch', calling her useless, and raving up and down the street."

Blackbird is treated similarly badly. "They decided that BlackBird could not stay in the room with them and froced [sic] him to sleep in the living room, and pointedly refused to allow him entry." He is also encouraged to proselytize too.

Finally, astoldomiel and spouse have had enough and evict Draven and Trinity on July 31st, less than two weeks after their arrival. Astoldomiel notes that while cleaning out the room, "We found various odds and items that belonged to us that had mysteriously ended up in their room. And a plastic bag full of an unknown white powdery substance that looked like cocaine, which I refused to handle without gloves as I packed it in a trashbag." They put the stuff outside and call Trinity's mom to pick them up, all while Neo screams threats and insults.

Blackbird does not get evicted. Astoldomiel reports, "BlackBird remains with us because he was respectful, helpful, courteous and has become a good friend of mine. He works

every day as a temp laborer till he pins down a full time job. Then he will endeavor to save his money to get back on his feet. He never once threatened Kurt and has done nothing illegal."

As far as I know, Blackbird does indeed get back on his feet and recover from his time in Neo's cult. He also tries to bring Neo down; another ex-follower tells me that he made at least one post collating sources on Draven's history, and eventually Neo gets him banned from Livejournal under claim of doxxing (ex-follower personal communication, 2016 December 18). All of Blackbird's comments and posts are scrubbed from the site, leaving no online evidence of his existence besides from the radio01podcast account and the Codex entry.

But Blackbird's struggles aren't in vain; he manages to get Zeal out of the cult as well. An ex-follower tells me, "During the confrontation with Blackbird, Draven edited one of his emails to make it look like Blackbird had threatened Draven, and forwarded it to Zeal. Except he forgot to remove all the text...which included the unedited email, further down" (ex-follower personal communication, 2017 May 13). They continue, "Zeal actually emailed me about it - and she was after my time, and we had NEVER spoken before. She told me she'd been warned not to talk to me, but wanted to know if I'd seen any shenanigans like that when I was with the group. I told her exactly what I'd witnessed, and she deleted her LJ and bailed."

Without any other housing, Draven and Trinity move back in with Trinity's parents. It takes less than three weeks for that situation to self-destruct as well; on August 17 and September 5, 2007, they end up in court yet again for even more domestic violence charges, this time against Draven's in-laws (Prissel, Phyllis vs. Draven, 2007; Prissel, Steve vs. Draven, 2007).

Both parents request orders of protection, and Phyllis's request is granted. (Steve's is denied, due to not showing up.) Phyllis's order expires a year later, and is not updated. An ex-follower from this time claims that Neo or Trinity tried to stab Trinity's stepfather, but I've been unable to find details (personal communication, 2017).

Regardless of what exactly transpired, it seems to have made quite an impression on Draven's in-laws; they move abruptly and leave no forwarding address. An ex-follower reports running into Draven and Trinity a few months later, and "they had apparently gone to Trinity's [sic] mother's [sic] home in Bremerton and discovered that they had moved. And apparently they had no idea [sic] it had happened. They were walking along furiously ranting about how they couldn't believe that they had been betrayed by those traitors" (personal communication, 2008 January 25). This will be the end of their association for some time.

In the midst of all this chaos, Draven ends up a defendant in court on a separate matter in October, but I have no more info over what the matter was, or how it turned out (Draven, 2007 October 26). All I know is the case is closed.

Neo's cult has been troubled from the start, but as more and more people escape and share their experiences, the cult starts rotting out completely. Even his iron-fisted tactics can't scrub his reputation clean. Of the seven followers who are referenced in the Codex, and thus presumably the most devoted, Blackbird and Zeal, get out within a year, while another acts as an incompetent double agent (personal communication, 2016). Even Trinity's parents pull away. Thanks to the newspaper articles, word spreads about Neo's behavior, and his reaction to

criticism only makes the matter worse; he sics his followers on everyone who criticizes him, including a thirteen-year-old child whose parents intervene (ex-follower communication, 2016). Indeed, Neo's now been around enough that followers are tiring of his lack of progress and his constant demands for housing, money, adoration, and labor.

Neo tries to renew interest by guilt-tripping his followers and discussing bigger and bigger projects, none of which go anywhere: a second Codex (2008 May 12), the monastery (2008 February 11; March 18), another robotics project (2008 April 24). He claims to have more visions and that he foresaw an earthquake (2008 May 17).

Throughout all of this, he claims to constantly be at death's door... though most of the causes have changed since the heart attacks and lung cancer days. Instead, he focuses on the multiple sclerosis (2008 September 25), plus seizures (2008 January 7), pneumonia (2008 March 13), viral meningitis (2008 June 15a), and gallstones (2008 August 10). He also suggests that his visions from the Matrix world might be killing him (2008 January 12). He alleges that he nearly drowned in his bath tub from them, making sure to paint a grim picture of Trinity finding his body, "cold and blue, in the cooling water. And the worst thing is, she wouldn't ever have known why. She might even have thought that I did it on purpose... even though I'd never do that," despite the fact that he's already threatened to commit suicide to manipulate her multiple times (2008 March 18).

The demands on his followers are intense: they post testimonials to his greatness on Youtube (Draven, 2008 January 26; January 27b; February 26), are called to submit things for the Codex II (2008 May 12), and constantly have to proclaim their

loyalty and devotion (Trinity, 2008 April 17). They proselytize online and off, and if Neo takes criticism, they defend him (and sometimes stalk, defame, and relentlessly troll the nonbeliever). They supply him with web hosting, organize and notate his podcasts, and give him living space when he becomes homeless.

But Neo is never grateful, never satisfied. He never stays stable for long, and no amount of reassurance or validation seems to ever be enough. But come March 2008, everything suddenly slows down. Neo stops posting Youtube videos for about a year; his blog posts become more sporadic. Why? Because Anakin has taken over, and he's even worse.

SOMEONE CEASES TO BREATHE TONIGHT: ANAKIN

Anakin Skywalker is otherwise known as Darth Vader. I presume he needs no further introduction.

Anakin creates his Livejournal on April 2, 2008. Like other system members before him, he has a fixation on children and the act of fatherhood, but he'll take it further than previous system members. A boy called Blaze gets the dubious honor of being the system's next "son."

At the age of twelve or thirteen, depending on the citation, Blaze first appears in testimonial for Neo on February 22 (citation available upon request). Then, Neo calls him merely "someone with more to lose than almost anyone," but after a month, Blaze has been promoted to "bestest bud" and "the son I never had a chance to have," as though Connor never happened (2008 March 26). Come April, Anakin is also describing Blaze as "my apprentice," even creating a video as "tribute to my real-life student and 'psuedo-son' - whom I love very much" (citation available upon request). Anakin specifically credits (or perhaps enforces) responsibility for his moral reformation as resting on Blaze's young shoulders: "He just may be my redemption. Or maybe the tears in my eyes when he hugs me and says 'Thanks for teaching me... Dad'" (Draven, 2008 April 23).

Blaze disappears in a couple of months (2008 May 24). I'm not sure why. It's possible that Blaze's parents intervene, uncomfortable about their child going to visit the hotel room of a homeless man in his early thirties to be his son/padawan and have indoor light saber fights. Or perhaps Trinity going to court again

scares Blaze off (Trinity, 2008 April 21). Regardless, he thankfully vanishes.

And what of Connor? She's still around and still devoted, but Anakin treats her as abominably as Neo and House did. More on that later.

In late April, Anakin joins a Vader/Palpatine slash community and starts advertising his new role-play community, mynewempire (2008 April 27). Both mynewempire's description and Anakin's advertisement of it makes it sound like a perfectly normal RP, though seeded with the usual breadcrumbs and grandiosity. In his ad, he says, "This may be one of the most ambitious LJ RP's out there... if only for both the supreme darkness of the overall tone... and the disturbing allowances, 'pairings', events, and implications." Once, in the comments, he admits his Anakin is "a step beyond character" and asks, "Are you familiar with the term 'soulbonding'?" but that's only more of Draven's insinuations and suggestions, intended to entice rather than disclose.

Here, incest is not just an undertone; it comes to the forefront. Under the cover of the RP being mere fiction, Anakin feels safe describing Palpatine's role: that of father, BDSM partner, and lover. In him, Anakin "has found the praise, acceptance, and yes, discipline, that fall over him as naturally as an old worn cloak. 'Always a slave; you just change Masters once in a while'" (2008 April 27). He also states that the accepted pairings of the RP will be Obi-Wan/Anakin, Palpatine/Anakin, and Padme/Anakin, two of whom act as fathers to Anakin and all of whom Trinity will channel, along with Mara Jade, Anakin's daughter-in-law... though the only time I see him clearly refer to her is as his "underling" (citation available upon request).

True to form, and in the same pattern as Angel and William before him, Anakin comes out about the role-play all being real a couple months later (2008 June 15a). In "A Metaphysical Coming Out," (2008 June 15b) Anakin says, "this journal is not a role-playing journal for me. It is not a muse journal, it is not even a headvoice journal. When I created the mynewempire RP, it was an outlet for my pain." He claims that all the players knew this going in (2008 August 25a, paragraph 2), but I doubt it. Why advertise a game to strangers as a role-play if he's going to tell them what it really is? And if it's all supposed to be about Anakin's pain, why remark in the comments, "Now, if I could find some equally talented and dominating writers-slash-muses for the game, to dominate my poor, er, Vader" (2008 April 28, formatting his)?

No, it's obvious what Anakin's intent is: to lure in strangers who think they're playing a fun little game, because he knows that openly admitting what he wants will send them screaming in the other direction. They are to play the role of Anakin's reflection, his audience to his redemption, because, in Anakin's words, "how does one actually DO that, in THIS world, with a decided LACK OF PEOPLE to be involved in it?" (2008 August 23b).

To make matters worse, Anakin specifically states that he serves Palpatine in "ways that are not always entirely voluntary" (ibid). So role-players in his group aren't just playing at kinky coercive sex through fiction; Anakin is painting them as his real-life abusers, when he's the one actively seeking them out, lying to them, giving them their roles, and calling it a game!

But back to Anakin's coming out about the game being real. In his video he cleans his slate of any wrongdoing

committed by past members of Draven, reframing such accusations as acts of bigotry: "it's uh not only hurtful but offensive to accuse, assume, or hold responsible one person for another when they've made a lot of effort to let you know that these two people are individuals" (2008 June 15a). In this way, Anakin tries to erase all the jail time, domestic violence charges, orders of protection, and threats of violence that other Draven members have accumulated. He's a new person! He can't be judged by Neo, William, Constantine, House, Angel, Angelus, Sirius, or Kurt's examples! The slate gets washed clean, again and again and again.

But Anakin's slate isn't clean to begin with. Even at this early point, he claims to have murdered many children and can't even say for sure that it was the wrong thing to do. In his coming out, he talks about how he's here for "making amends for all the dead children," (2008 June 15b) but most of the time, he tries to make excuses for himself. When Connor calls him out on killing innocents (Draven, 2008 May 31) Anakin replies, "No one is innocent. *No one!*" and goes on a megalomaniac rant about how "the Jedi killed, too; your precious *Jedi*," and how that makes them just as bad as him, and how he has brought peace to the Republic. In August, Anakin asks if anyone knows the names of the children he slaughtered—apparently it has never occurred to him to wonder before (2008 August 25b). He even states he's not that bothered by what he did: "I'm crying no tears of remorse, at this second in time. But some equivalent of the 'still, small voice' had spoken within my heart, and so I had to ask." Not exactly a great sign of his potential for redemption.

Strip Anakin of his space opera trappings, and he's just a self-declared torture artist (2008 May 10), whining about how

Obi-Wan doesn't condone mass child murder (May 23). But because he's Anakin, it works. Not many, but some Star Wars fans are taken in by the idea of participating in the redemption of their favorite tragic villain, and they treat Anakin like his worst excesses deserve reward. After Anakin makes a post about torturing people to death that day, a follower responds with, "I'm sorry you suffered so much today. *more hugs*" (Draven, 2008 May 10).

Anakin does not make such sympathy easy. Besides blaming Obi-Wan for his behavior and trying to claim the Jedi are just as bad as he is, he tries to pretend his current behavior doesn't count against him any more than Draven's past behavior does. He even makes a poll as to whether it's ethical to try him for the war crimes he hasn't performed yet (2008, August 23a). (He also frames this poll as "hypothetical" so as to get ordinary Star Wars fans to vote, not realizing what they are truly being asked.)

Of course, the answer he's obviously looking for is no, except Anakin has already committed war crimes by his own definition! He admits to slaughtering children, murdering adults, and torturing others, all the while insisting that the Star Wars world is real! He wants to have his cake and eat it too—all the charisma and allure of the possibly redeemable bad boy, but not the jail time. He's trying to blur the lines of not just role-play and reality, but also good and evil, to see if he can manipulate other people into accepting it.

One follower catches wise to it too. In the comments, she says, "the person in question has already: 1. Murdered innocent children. 2. Abused (and possibly contributed to the death of) his pregnant wife. 3. Acted as an accomplice in the death of Mace

Windu. 4. Killed the Separatists. ...Given that the first item on this list alone would be enough for a life sentence, I wonder if adding in subsequent crimes (to be committed in the future or not) would just be superfluous" (Draven, 2008 August 23b).

Anakin takes it unusually well, but it's a fluke. Another follower, lumy12, protests how Anakin's accepts that criticism, "but dare I mention it, I'm a horrible person. Why is that?" (ibid). Like Kurt before him, Anakin goes into spin and deflection mode. He tries to claim that lumy12 is reacting to a completely separate issue, an email from before. He makes it out to be lumy12's fault, saying, "I love the insecurity that results in 'Ouch' = 'You're a horrible person'."

Lumy12 points out, "The time stamp is after you got my email," but then caves to the guilt trip like so many others before her, saying, "I'm sorry. I don't want to fight with you" (ibid).

Another follower, jedinemo, finally has enough of Anakin's behavior, and on July 9th pegs him perfectly: "I will not succumb to the endless call to prove my loyalty/friendship/caring by performing what ever tasks you deem necessary. Friendship does not ask the other to 'decode' the hidden meaning in a post. Friendship does not intimate that caring is demonstrated only by jumping through the requisite hoops. That's not friendship, that's manipulation" (2008 July 9).

Just as with the poll, Anakin clutches his pearls and claims that the problem is jedinemo's interpretation of his writing style, that they're being "fucking ridiculous." Trinity's headmate Mara Jade also immediately steps up to bat to defend Anakin: "you have gone a bit overboard, and that is an understatement." It's a complete repeat of Kurt's behavior on Usenet a decade prior, and proof that none of Draven have changed in the interim.

Jedinemo would know better than almost anyone Anakin's demands, seeing as they role-play as Emperor Palpatine in mynewempire, and thus Anakin's dominant. For someone who claims to be a "lifestyler" (2008 April 27) whose discipline "[falls] over him as naturally as an old worn cloak," (April 28) Anakin proves to be a whiny, disobedient submissive who resents being asked to do anything he sees as beneath him. When jedinemo's Palpatine requests Anakin to do the Star Wars equivalent of turn on the air conditioning in their online role-play, Anakin acts as though he's being asked to siege Rome, whining, "am I so expendable that something of this minor magnitude requires my personal attention?" (2008, May 18). Trinity's Mara Jade jumps in to also protest the unfairness of this entirely digital request, asking, "What do you think he is? A delegate for the Pony Express?" Anakin shuts her down, but continues complaining, "I'll fix it, Master, if you insist, but I am *not* a child... either figuratively or not. I say this endlessly, endlessly! How do you expect me to be efficient at anything" and never actually does it. Eventually, Palpatine gives up in disgust.

With such complaints over a minor request, the imagination fails at Anakin's reaction to being asked to do anything time-sensitive, important, or offline. And indeed, Jedinemo eventually stops commenting.

On August 2nd, Anakin registers himself as owned property to Sidious... (2009 September 25) but this isn't jedinemo's Palpatine, but Trinity's. Like Neo with the Smith switch in the past, Anakin treats both doms identically, and roughly a year later, he posts the video of his collaring ceremony,

claiming it a "TPE [Total Power Exchange] Declaration" (2008 August 6).

Note that TPE is not a dynamic where the sub is expected to be bratty, whiny, or disobedient. Indeed, in most forms, the sub is supposed to give up all ability to say no, leave the relationship, or do anything without his master's approval; the submissive is considered to be the master's property with no limits or boundaries. In fact, it's come under fire from other lifestyle kinksters for violating rules of consent; as Cliff Pervocracy says, "if it really does exist as advertised, with no limits and total obedience, it would be a goddamn travesty to do SM play under these circumstances" (2008).

Seeing how Anakin obviously doesn't care for total obedience, the title seems more to express how hyperbolically kinky he is. Nobody in Draven can bear to go halfway or be mediocre in anything; they always have to be the most extreme, the most intense. And so, Anakin can't be simply an ordinary sub; he ostensibly becomes Sidious's legal property and child, and even fills out adoption papers (2008 December 2, after paragraph 37).

Ageplay or parent/child role-play on its own is not necessarily abusive. But the whole point of it is for a consenting adult to role-play the role of a child, not literally be one. The only way to do it safely is to be free to stop or step out of role at any time. But Anakin is absolutely adamant that there is no difference between role and reality, and he is determined to declare himself Sidious's legal son and property in perpetuity. He has no conception of separating his fantasies from reality—which makes his eagerness to be a father in turn to children like Blaze all

the more unsettling. What exactly are his intentions regarding them?

Speaking of BDSM and groomed children, Connor never does manage to please Anakin for long. When her beloved grandfather ends up in the hospital, Anakin chews her out because "I spent the night in th ehospital [sic] night before last," plus he's emotional, sleep-deprived, and more tellingly, "out of pain medicine" (Connor, 2008 June 23). Really, his ostensible poor health is just the excuse; what really seems to enrage him is that Connor might care about someone besides him. When Connor stands up to him, she gets slammed with bile and sworeed at in Huttese.

It's neither the first nor the last time Connor gets screamed at. After Anakin posts some bloody photos of BDSM without a cut or warning (Connor, 2008 June 27), poor Connor makes the mistake of asking, "OMG! Are you okay?!" only for Anakin to treat her with disdain and sarcasm. When she apologizes, he denounces her behavior as "immature and it's *rude*." When Connor then tries to empathize with Anakin's suffering by talking about a time that she herself was beaten in the Angel universe, Anakin just jumps on the attack, furious for implying anyone has suffered as much as him.

This isn't the only time that Anakin posts gruesome photos without warning, nor that he excoriates someone for being upset by them. On September 11, he posts more bloody photos of himself, again without a cut or warning (2008 September 11c, after paragraph 25). He mentions Darth Sidious being there and taking the photo, but takes grave offense when a commenter reasonably assumes that means BDSM. The commenter has since deleted their comments, but Anakin's rage-

out remains: "this ISN'T SEX PLAY. IT ISN'T LIFESTYLE PLAY. Nor a hobby, a kink, or anything else. It is what it is. If it bothers people, they don't have to read it; that picture was OLD, and might have been a SHAVING CUT- you didn't ask, did you?" He leaves the photos public and un-cut.

The household still has the same money issues as before. In July, Anakin spends \$85 on a custom Star Wars tunic, which puts him short for the rent (2008 July 2). Despite his claims that he couldn't have possibly known and the landlords are "insane people," such financial instability will lead to the household getting evicted a couple months later.

On September 8, 2008, Draven and Trinity move to small-town Nebraska. This is not intentional. They intend to go back to Draven's family in Maine but never finish the journey. Anakin states, (2008 September 26) "we were [...] dumped here with no warning by the 'friend' who was driving; he packed his car in the middle of the night and left us." He tries to make this sound like an act of terrible irresponsibility on the driver's part, but driving from Washington to Maine is roughly five days each way, and Anakin certainly wasn't paying the driver. More likely, being trapped with Draven and Trinity in a car for days on end became so intolerable that the follower bolted.

Draven and Trinity will only spend a few months in Nebraska, but the time will prove significant, because it will signify the wheels finally falling off the bus of not just Neo's cult, but Draven's life in general.

For a little while, Anakin plays the whole thing as a joyous accident, fate at work, saying, "I'm starting to believe that all that has happened to me comes back full-circle to my own... redemption? Amends? Second chance?" (2008 September 18).

Within a week of his arrival in Nebraska, he makes a Deviantart account to open up fanart commissions (2008 September 11a). He also claims to be working towards volunteering at a battered women's shelter and building a rocket-powered pod-racer for an all-ages fundraiser (2008 September 16); it won't be the last time Draven tries to position themselves as an ally to abused women and children, but it's certainly the most brazen. He also plans to start "LIVING A DREAM," creating a junk shop business for upcycling junk for repair and art (2008 September 15). Taking the name of "K.A. Draven," he makes business cards (September 18), buys a domain name, and sets up his IRS business documentation (September 15). He and Trinity also discuss buying a house, for Neo's long-awaited monastery (September 18). Things seem to be looking up.

But despite Anakin's manic assurances, there are signs of things not being quite right. Anakin is no better an artist than Angel was; his gallery has barely anything in it, only two mediocre sketches copied from Star Wars screen-caps, along with Hannibal's old drawing of Clarice and an unfinished self portrait. Also, Anakin seems more focused on the trappings of his junkshop business—the business cards, the website, his outfit—than the substance. He has many plans, but no products. And since Trinity is on SSI, which forbids saving any more than \$2000 at a time, it isn't clear where the money to pay for the house will come from, especially since they were just recently evicted due to financial instability.

On top of that, Anakin mentions being on poor terms with the hotel management right off the bat, due to the noisy BDSM he and Sidious get up to: "[Sidious] worked... very hard, the last two nights, to find [...] an implement that would make the

least amount of noise... don't want to disturb the neighbors, would we" (2008 September 12). But disturb them they do: a week later, Anakin reports that "my master will emerge from the woodwork to beat me senseless [...] because we've gotten complaints apparently about the repetitive whacking noises from our room in the middle of the night. So we slowed down a little until we find a better place" (2008 September 17). Apparently the idea of taking a break or switching to a silent form of play is unfathomable.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Trinity and Draven are evicted from their hotel room a week later. Draven leaves a rambling, incoherent voice post about it (2008 September 25), claiming the hotel management to be completely unreasonable: "Well, the mother who was the owner was right; her son the psycho really was a psycho. He apparently complained because we were up all night." He claims that the hotel broke anti-discrimination laws for taking his dog from him, and that their complaints were total nonsense.

The rest of the voice post is tangled and muddy, with Anakin making contradictory claims. They've been evicted and they're in a Motel 8, but he doesn't know where they'll be living; he and Trinity still have the house for the Monastery, but not until November, and he still seems absolutely convinced they can pay for it. Despite the harried circumstances, he wants to get back into role-playing, and he insists that the pod racer fundraiser is still going and the junk shop will still get created. He also insists he's not on drugs, except for things given by his dentist, which is a strangely specific denial to make.

The next day, Anakin does the thing Draven claims to never do: he solicits donations, both on his own Livejournal and

on a community called `glbtq_disabled`, which he joins purely to beg for money (2008 September 26a and b). But even when he's trying to get sympathy and money for wrongful eviction, he keeps letting slip hints as to what actually happened. He mentions, "people had complained about 'strange thumping noises' coming from our room at night," but neglects to mention that there was any validity to them. In the comments, he goes further, claiming to have a "hairline fractured" cheekbone from an "accidental blow to the head" (September 26b). When he goes to the hospital and asks for Ultram, which he insists is "a NON-NARCOTIC PAIN RELIEVER, and the only one I will TAKE" he claims the doctor calls him mentally ill and gets the cops to escort him out.

Once again, a short statement contains a lot of disingenuity. Draven first posted about the broken cheekbone way back in April (2008 April 18), five months prior. Normally that would be enough time for it to heal. However, June 26th is when he posts photos of his post-BDSM face, which includes blood dripping down his cheek. If the cheekbone injury is real, then doing impact play at all, especially involving his face, would be a terrible idea. Why on earth would he be taking such a risk?

Maybe because Anakin admits to taking painkillers with his beatings (2008 August 19). This is never recommended. After a "session that lasted AN HOUR AND A HALF," Anakin quotes Sidious as saying, "don't take your medications right after a correction, one would think that... defeats the purpose, doesn't it?" while Gabe (Anakin's "medic," probably also channeled by Trinity) says, "Are you a fucking PSYCHO? HE HAS A PRE-EXISTING CONDITION, BACK OFF!!" The pain pills get taken.

Furthermore, Ultram is not non-narcotic. It's—you guessed it—an opioid, like so many of Draven's preferred drugs. Combined with his addiction issues, it is not a pretty picture, and the doctor's reference to mental illness and request for the cops to escort Draven out of the office suddenly makes more sense.

Anyway, through begging and selling of their possessions (including donated items from followers), Trinity and Draven manage to rustle up roughly \$200, but Anakin reports in a series of voice posts that he can't access it because he has no bank account or credit card (2008 September 27a, b, and c). He wants a friend to come and take the money and then transfer it to another card, which they will then send to him, but unsurprisingly, this convoluted solution doesn't work out. Draven and Trinity end up in a Christian rescue mission for a few days, until Anakin claims he can't handle the anxiety of being separated from Trinity, and insists he'd rather be on the street than stay three more days. They move into a different hotel when Trinity's disability payment comes in (Draven, 2008 October 1).

All through this, Anakin still insists that everything is going great. Their new place is great, the house in November is still going to happen (*ibid*), the junkshop is going to happen (October 2), and the pod-racer is almost done (*ibid*). He creates a radio show for himself, called Radio Free Anakin and describes himself as "proud, thrilled, psyched, hyper-excited-crazy" (November 7, paragraph 11).

None of it ever happens. A couple days later, Anakin leaves a distraught, short post: "I am alone. [...] My Daddy is gone" (2008 November 9).

Stripped of Anakin's narcissism, what that means is, Trinity's in jail, and she won't be returning home until the 19th. Without Trinity, Anakin has no money; he only has his hotel room due to the rescue mission, and that will only last until the 15th. Anakin asks, "I don't suppose anyone, you know, wants to loan the recovering Sith Lord several hundred dollars to bail someone out of jail?" (November 11a). Nobody does.

This is the only time that Anakin even obliquely refers to Trinity being arrested. The way he acts, a reader could be forgiven for thinking that Anakin is the truly wronged party. He bemoans his loneliness, his health problems (ibid). He doesn't eat, doesn't sleep, worries he'll die without her (November 12). "I can't stand being alone," he says (November 11b) and indeed, this very well might be the first time he's been alone since 2004. In Nebraska, his sole acolytes are Trinity and the follower taking care of his dog, both of whom are unavailable. Barely anyone comments online. Without followers constantly affirming his identity and reflecting it back at him, he seems unable to cope. Nevertheless, he keeps blogging, despite sporadic phone and internet access.

On November 13, 2008, there's a surprise in Anakin's voice posts: he and Neo have integrated, becoming one being. However, both continue posting in their respective LJs regarding their respective goals and going by the same names, and neither ever makes mention of it again. Strange.

The moment Trinity gets out of jail on the 19th, she rushes to Draven's side to care for them; one would think he had been the one confined, not her. "I want to thank everyone for taking care of Anakin while I was away," she says in a voice post (November 19b). But the bad news isn't over yet, though none of

it comes as a surprise: both junk shop and the monastery house are stillborn. Trinity rants, "The house we were supposed to get? The dream house with the basement I promised Ani for the junkshop [sic]? The one we told the woman that NO MATTER WHAT, NO QUESTIONS ASKED, WE WERE ABSOLUTELY 100% IN OUR WANTING OF? [...] do you think she held it for us? Do you think that she [...] tried to get a message to us? No...what this lovely woman did was called our cell phone ONCE, got no answer...and rented the house out from under us to someone" (November 19a).

I'm still not sure how they thought they could afford the house in the first place, considering the circumstances. And it sounds like the woman did her best to get in contact with them, but considering their homelessness and phone issues, why should she have bent over backwards to hunt them down when she had a buyer already? She probably dodged a bullet.

Regardless, Draven and Trinity become homeless yet again and Trinity goes to the LJ community glbtq_disabled to beg for more money (November 19a). When one person comments sensibly, "I don't feel that LJ is an appropriate place to ask for money, as it's impossible to check people's credentials" (littlejen123, 2008), Anakin tears into them with characteristic defensive rage and martyrdom. "We may the the [sic] only people online - at least, according to your cynical view of it - who actually ARE who they say they are," he declares (November 20). "It's SNOWING. Unscrupulous. Yeah."

On December 2nd, Trinity's disability payment comes in and they scrape into another apartment. Anakin still insists he'll make the junk shop happen, but by now, even he doesn't seem to believe it. And sure enough, come the 19th, they're given yet

another eviction notice. This time, Anakin claims it's entirely due to discrimination against him and Trinity's sexualities, genders, and disabilities, (December 19) but who knows how true that is? And even now, Anakin focuses on how all the stress is making it hard to be a good person: "We have not a cent, no food in the house, and nothing for Christmas [...] even as I [...] *strain* for redemption" (ibid, paragraph 18).

After that, the household loses phone and Internet, and posts become sporadic. Finally, on January 25th 2009, Anakin announces that they're back in Maine, living with Draven's little brother—though within a week, Anakin announces he's short on rent yet again, with pneumonia and a mass of tissue in his lungs (January 31). Total time spent in Nebraska? Four and a half months.

Anakin posts for a while still, but it's basically curtains for him after this; the Nebraska months have left irrevocable damage. Trinity and Draven's legal, housing, and health troubles only worsen from here on out.

Without a reliable Internet or phone connection, Draven can't influence their followers like they once did. Not that there are many left by this point; since Anakin has no mission except maybe possibly hypothetically becoming a decent person at some unknown point in the future, many of Neo's followers take no interest in him. Neo himself posts so rarely that some followers honestly think he might be dead (ex-follower personal communication, 2016). Even the devoted fall away. It's one thing to distribute fliers, pay for web hosting, and try to save the world, another to attend to Neo's constant financial woes, especially when it's no longer clear if Neo even still exists as an independent person after his and Anakin's integration.

By September 2009, Anakin is basically gone; he makes one final "I'm still here" post almost a year later (2010 August 5) and then disappears completely. Neo mostly follows suit. But before they leave Livejournal, Angel has one last hurrah...

DADDY'S SECOND CHANCE: ANGEL, ANGELUS, AND NEO'S FALL

Angel actually comes back a few times, but only for brief instants. He harasses Buffy II on her Johari Window while living with Seven (Buffy II, 2006), signs a comment "N/A/G" for Neo, Angel, and Greg House (citation available upon request). Nothing of importance.

But a few months after the failed Nebraska venture, Angel and Angelus come back again for a little longer. In April 2009, they create a secret Livejournal with the dubious title of "Redeeming Angel." Angel's first entry makes the new account's purpose explicit: "I'm here to reconnect with my son." (April 17). "I made a whole new Journal, just, mostly, to interact with you and maybe try and reconnect with some of the people who always *loved* you?"

I'm not sure if that's a typo and he means to say "people who always loved me," or if he's arguing that his system's behavior towards Connor has been loving the whole time and that Connor should be reconnecting with him.

In that same entry, Angel makes a reference to being "hyper" from "Slayer blood." Does that mean that Trinity is now hosting a Buffy IV, or another Faith? Is it all more role-playing/"bi-location" shenanigans? It's never brought up again, so who knows.

Regardless, after five years of abuse and neglect, Connor finally gets showered with affection again. "Here I am, Junior Kiddo," Angel writes (April 17). **"Your Dad... your Dad's here now."** (Emphasis his.) They make her a video, entitled "Daddy's

Second Chance: My Good Son." In the video description, he even shows some semblance of regret, describing himself as "broken-hearted by his repeated failures," though not enough to actually describe what those failures are, never mind apologize. The video description ends with, "This is dedicated to my 'real-life' son. I love you, Kiddo."

Conveniently, the video is twenty seconds too long to post to Youtube. Rather than cut any of it and risk making a public statement about Angel's existence and relationship with Connor, Angel instead makes it a private download for Connor alone.

Connor is over the moon at first, and who can blame her? After years of waiting, things look like they are finally going back to the honeymoon days. "I'm just...so glad to have you back," Connor says. "I love you" (April 17). Even Anakin starts treating her arguably better, joking about spanking her like House did years prior (citation available upon request). It seems like their relationship is finally repaired.

But then things go awry, somehow.

Maybe Angelus is the sticking point. Angel pleads for Connor to reconcile with Angelus, insisting, "We're not separate people. We never were... we never *can* be" (2009 April 17). This is not a light statement to make, considering that Connor herself described Angelus as "evil,duh!" and insisted "ANGEL ISN'T ANGELUS.Don't let me ever catch anyone say any different,got it?!" (2003 March 8). Combined with Angelus's own jokes about murdering Angel's wife and getting erections from breaking spines, I'm not sure how they expect Connor to react. But still, Angel hammers home that they are a package deal, stating "I - well, um, we, actually, [...] are here" (2009 April 19).

"When you said we," Connor replies in the comments, "you ment [sic] Angelus, didn't you..." She doesn't seem enthusiastic.

In that same third entry, two days after the secret blog's creation, Angel announces, "I may be incommunicado for... mmm... just a couple hours, maybe" and him and Angelus vanish again, seemingly for good this time. Did they integrate? Who knows?

Meanwhile, Connor makes her own post a couple days later, mentioning she's going to a doctor (citation available upon request). Despite her recent contact with Angel, she seems unhappy; she writes, "This may sound horrible; but I hope there IS something wrong with me...cause at least then it'll explain why my life is so fucked up, ya know. Because I honestly, sincerely don't get how I ended up like this." Even then, though, she signs her blog post with, "A harsh, cruel world is still one worth fighting for," a lesson that none of Draven ever seem to learn. Despite all they have done to her, Connor still seems to retain a basic goodness at her core; over the course of my research, I have read countless posts and comments from her, and never once do I see her expressing cruelty or malice, not even to Draven ex-followers or ex-partners.

The same day Connor posts about going to the doctor, Neo posts a Youtube video with the subtitle "Neo's Broken Heart," asking why people have forsaken him (April 21). "I woke up screaming last night, screaming in the night, crying, begging, pleading, what have I done? [...] how have I failed you all so badly? [...] Please, somebody tell me, I'm screaming into the abyss. What have I done so wrong to lose you, if I've lost you? What have I – where have I gone wrong? What have I not shown you,

what have I not done for you? Is it not enough? Those of you who believed in me once. What have I done?"

Is he talking about his cult, or Connor? Regardless, the guilt trip fails. Nobody is there to watch the video. There are no comments, and even now, after eight and a half years, there are only 135 views. Neo's audience, his mirror, is gone.

"Was it a fad? Am I over now? Am I a has-been?" Neo laments (*ibid*). Yes, he is. People stop commenting on his LJ posts. His biggest community, for zion, is never updated after 2010. Neo keeps making grandiose plans, but nobody responds. It's been five years, and despite immense amounts of financial support and labor from followers, Neo has achieved very little except two accidental bomb scares and a string of legal difficulties and evictions. His least negative accomplishments are a self-published book, two computer games, a radio show, and a website, all of which followers helped with and all of which are used solely for recruitment—a start, rather than a finish.

Neo's second-to-last Youtube video mentions that he's now spreading his Mission in-person, through magic shows and busking (2009 April 29). "The current moniker Trinity and I [...] are recording under is DELIRIUM SYMPHONICA," Neo says.

This is true, but Neo isn't the one doing them. He's giving way to Erik Dessler, the Phantom of the Opera.

GOD DAMNIT, I'M THE PHANTOM:

ERIK DESSLER

Erik Dessler is the civilian name of the Phantom of the Opera. He has had many incarnations through prose, film, and theatre, but Draven's version is most related to the musical theatre version popularized by Andrew Lloyd Webber, known for his doomed obsession with opera star Christine

The first sign of Erik Dessler (hereafter referred to as the Phantom) is on Anakin's Livejournal. Anakin posts links to one of Kurt's old songs from a decade prior and talks vaguely about Broken Messiah, but then he posts a guitar solo from *The Phantom of the Opera* (2009 March 18).

Like most of Draven's obsessions, this proves not to be mere fandom interest. On April 1st, Anakin comments that he's working on a "super-secret" song for "the Colgate Country Showdown" in June, even though he admits it's not his genre. The song is entitled "'Daae/Dessler': One Touch." The "Daae" part is a reference to Christine Daae from *The Phantom of the Opera*, channeled by Trinity, and that snippet of song still remains on the Erik's Delirium Symphonica Myspace under the title "Just One Touch" (2009a). Clearly it's not actually Anakin working on it.

The Phantom has higher aspirations than just music, though; he also has pretensions of being a magician. He lists "Dessler Illusions" as his work experience on LinkedIn from 1999 on (2017 October), and also names his next Myspace the same thing (2009b). In a Youtube video, Neo announces the Phantom's activities, though he takes credit for it: "I've been doing shows

three times a week as a street magician downtown, and also been performing acoustic guitar" (2009 April 30).

Why does Neo avoid discussing the Phantom directly? It seems Draven wants to make a clean start. Perhaps Neo and Anakin's Livejournal activities have brought down too much scrutiny and criticism. The system mostly abandons their existing accounts on Livejournal and Youtube and start whole new ones, focusing their new online presence on Twitter, MySpace, and Facebook, none of which I am adept with. From this point on, the system will reboot again and avoid naming all past members, with the sole exception of Neo.

On May 4, Anakin mentions working on "the amazing magic act promo video." He also mentions moving, but it turns out that's a euphemism; really, the household's been evicted again (Draven, 2009 May 18). As usual, he blames it entirely on "the psycho managers" who "broke in, changed the locks, [and] tossed everything in the Dumpster except what they could steal." At this point, Draven have been evicted at least seven times since 2005, twice by the courts, and never once has it been their fault.

Nevertheless, the Phantom's work proceeds apace. A couple weeks later, he creates his Facebook page, *In Amorata: The Ghost's Love Story*, with the reality-blurring subtitle "What if the World's Greatest Love Story... Was True?" Here, he announces his greatest ambition: a "the world's first fusion of full-scale stage magic and 'modern' operatic theater musical. Part homage, part autobiography, and part re-telling [...] 'IN AMORATA' is an immersive expedition into the worlds of love, prejudice, fear, obsession, and the very nature of reality" (2009 June).

The plot of "In Amorata" reflects Draven's relationship to Trinity, and gives an unsettling look into his perceptions of her. "Josanna Devore is lost in a bleak and hollow world of silence and mourning. Finding that to [sic] her life no longer has any meaning or purpose, she exists in her self-imposed seclusion until the night a traveling carnival [...] pulls into town. [...] She sees a magician performing in the carnival, and "once he sees her, the Magician is instantly convinced that Josanna is, in fact, the girl he once loved and lost in another lifetime... a lifetime he believes he lived as a familiar face from a story everyone knows." This "drives him to pursue her relentlessly [...]. No matter what he must do to win her affections; to convince her that she is, in fact, the girl he is certain she once was." Ominously, "the Magician begins to go to ever greater lengths to obtain the love of his fixation... no matter what the cost, or to whom."

Even ignoring the stalking subtext, the story sounds very similar to Neo's grooming of Trinity, minus the magical carnival. There's the obsession, the absolute conviction that her life is nothing without him, the persuading her of her fictional identity.

On his Myspace, the Phantom posts newspaper photos of his street magic shows from May 12 and June 28, along with a couple others that are undated. The June 28 photo is of a "Coffin of Death" illusion involving the Phantom lying in a box which has been pierced by many sharp objects, and on June 22, 2009, he attempts a Guinness World Record for "Most Swords Pierced Through Live Magician in Box" (2015 July 19). However, he doesn't seem to have won it; it's listed only as an attempt, and I couldn't find it in the Guinness World Records database myself.

On July 18, the Phantom performs at Mainely Brews Restaurant & Brewhouse. Also during that month, he creates his twitter account, SvengaliPhantom.

The Phantom then vanishes off my radar for a while—he might have lost Internet access. In 2010, Trinity leaves a voice post on Neo's Livejournal, saying they've moved yet again and that Draven has had yet another health crisis (April 25). "Before I get anybody [...] who might possibly think drug-seeking behavior, Neo had ten teeth taken out! [...] the crap that comes out of your teeth that comes from having really bad teeth can be effective to your heart! Hello, heart palpitations, not drugs, heart palpitations! [...] Genetically bad teeth, not methamphetamines." The frontiers and illnesses may change, it seems, but the specter of substance abuse always remains.

They move again a few months later (Draven, 2010 August 12). Then they disappear from my view again.

In March 2011, the Phantom creates his Youtube account, though most of the videos from the first year are made private, unlisted, or deleted entirely. The sole exception is a video where the Phantom does simple sleight of hand using two balls of light (2011 March 30), seemingly identical to those that Constantine used in his selfies years prior (2005 September 13). In April, the Phantom rejoins Livejournal as drphantasm, but never really posts anything.

A couple months later, the Phantom does a firewalk to "raise awareness for the Children's Cancer Fund at the local EC [Elk's Club], at the end of a short show for a couple of dozen people. [...] We're hoping the photo will raise donations" (2011 May 15). I'm not sure how much money is raised, if any, and whether it ever made it to the fund.

The rest of 2011 is taken up with a blizzard of arrests. In August, Trinity is arrested for theft (citation available upon request). Draven in turn is arrested in late October for threatening with a weapon (Morning Sentinel Staff, 2011 October 24). His 180 day sentence is suspended, and he's given a year of administrative release, or informal parole (Judy of the Waterville Police Department, personal communication, 2016 June 14). Just a couple days later, Trinity ends up in court again with a collections agency, implying that her debts and bad checks have once again caught up to her (citation available upon request). In December she's arrested twice on warrants (citation available upon request).

The Phantom marches on, apparently using the arrests and stresses as further motivation to continue his work, rather than abandon it. On March 20, 2012, he releases selections of "In Amorata" through Bull Moose records (Bull Moose, unknown). In June, he responds to someone else's blog post about work/life balance with a passionate defense of his art at all cost, claiming that the desperation of his circumstances only make his work that more important (Draven, 2012 June 19). He states that "we're broke; [...] I went without my blood pressure pills for three days for lack of \$4. Often we don't eat. But [...] if [I] don't at least complete it I'll have endured all this for nothing'." He mentions how Trinity and him are in terrible health, and "all I kept thinking was that I promised her and myself that I would do this, and how much would I regret it if something happened to one of us while my script/score was sitting unfinished in limbo because I just 'didn't get to working' that day?"

Stripped of the bohemian aspirations, all the comment states is that even when they are starving, sick, and Trinity is in

and out of jail and on the verge of collapse, the rock opera is what's most important. "It's worth the sacrifice," he insists. "I can't IMAGINE giving up now, and not a small part of why is because I feel idve [sic] wasted the last few years, that all that I've done isnt [sic] enough yet to justify the things we've had to endure" (ibid).

Trinity gets arrested again on a warrant in August (citation available upon request).

On August 13th, the Phantom creates his Wordpress blog, mindofthephantom. His first post of any substance is a rant about fangirls, carbon copies of those from William and Angel a decade prior (2012 August 13, paragraph 3). "When I refer to 'fans' or 'fangirls' within this text, I use it in the sense of rabid, giggling and gushing, 'Oh, Erik's so SEXY!' type of people: people who would run the other way the instant they saw a deformity in real life," he states. But then he whiplashes right back around to sorrowfully remarking, "here is something a thousand fangirls would have thought they'd die for – a true, honest, no-frills, no-fiction, no-ulterior-motive chance to ask their questions of 'the Phantom'... and have them answered. [...] And yet... no one asks" (ibid, paragraph 23).

And that, it seems, is the Phantom's (indeed, all of Draven's) real frustration: not that fangirls exist, but that they aren't fangirls of *them*. None of Draven ever seem to realize that many people enjoy fictional characters because of that fictional remove; they might enjoy reading about or watching someone like the Phantom of the Opera, who (depending on the version) is an obsessive blackmailer, kidnapper, stalker, and murderer, but that doesn't necessarily mean they want to meet him in real life.

And Draven's Phantom is no more ethical than his fictional counterpart. In that same post, he describes himself as a

challenge to deal with, at best: "I'm that crazy opera-writing magician-and-composer who'll send someone into the stationary [sic] store at five minutes to closing to buy a nib for my pen" (ibid, paragraph 17). "When I stop in mid-sentence or suddenly freeze, someone hands me the closest pen; I take in a deep breath and everyone around me covers their ears" (ibid, paragraph 15). He describes, "the screaming, the panic and terror, the frustration and the fear; the throwing things and mirror-smashing and self-hatred, the inability and incapability to deal with 'normal' people and the 'normal world,'" (October 7, paragraph 38) but he never makes the connection that this might be why he's "alone, once more and for always, and no one ever told me, EVER TELLS ME why" (ibid., paragraph 29). He seems to think that his tantrums and destruction of property should be as charming in real life as they are in fiction.

And that's not the worst he admits to either. He reports that his latest shadow dom partner, Emily "Mama" Giry of Trinity, is teaching him that actions have consequences. What actions, exactly? "Oh, I don't know — blackmail? Violence? [...] booby-trapping the side stairs(because of the disrespectful, drug-dealing upstairs neighbor, or leaving bloody doll eyeballs outside his door in a plastic bag after he called Christine a c**t and she would NOT let me physically kill him)" (2012 October 7, paragraph 8).

Giry is described nearly identically to Darth Sidious. The Phantom claims that she "raised me from the time I was twelve" (ibid, paragraph 48), calls her Mama (paragraph 17), and her job is to keep him in line. "She's my strength... AND my limits" he states (paragraph 51), and he gives her credit (and responsibility) for his redemption, just like so many followers before. "If [...] I

had been free to simply rage out in my terror and my fear like an uncontrolled child, if I had simply been given unlimited leeway because 'God damnit, I'M THE PHANTOM!' or any number of variations on the 'God DAMNIT it, I'm (blank) so NOBODY GET IN MY GODDAMN *WAY*!!' theme... [...] I would most certainly be dead now. [...] IN AMORATA would never be finished. None of my life would EVER be redeemed" (ibid, paragraph 52).

In Amorata is never finished anyway, and certainly none of Draven is ever redeemed. But that is not Trinity's, or anyone else's fault but their own. How can anyone be Draven's limits when they give themselves unlimited leeway?

The Phantom, besides his half-finished stage magic rock opera, also attempts to get into film. He apparently gets the idea after writing one of his "memoirs" (fanfiction), he finishes with the statement, "Perhaps... film? Ah. That excites me..." (2012 August 21). A week later, he makes a three-part Youtube series called "I Am The Phantom," all of which are now gone (2012 August 30). He also does a short video for TLC, which never goes anywhere (2012 October 7). Undaunted, he decides to try making a documentary about himself, but that project is also aborted, never completed, and most of the Youtube videos are now gone, deleted or set to private. All that remains are two interviews from 2013; one with the Phantom (2013 February 21), and one with Trinity's Christine and the Phantom's assistant (2013 January 30).

The Phantom's interview is nothing new—just another rant about fandom and pop culture co-opting his pain. Christine and the assistant's interview is mostly playing up the Phantom's genius, since he's the one interviewing them. Only once do things slide off the script; when asked how he feels about the

Phantom's identity, the assistant replies, "To be honest, when I first met you, it was a little creepy." But then he quickly goes on to say, "But now that I see how you act, how you move, how you look at things, I know you're that person."

In the interview video description, this assistant is described as "the only local person to know the extent of Erik's identity, his life, his memories, and what it's like to exist in close proximity to him." It's him who appears in the photo of the magic act from May 2009; he couldn't have been more than eighteen at the time (citation available upon request). In August 2012, the Phantom describes his "best(and physically, here, only) friend" and that might be the assistant as well (2012, August 13). Perhaps he fulfills the same role as Demos and Blackbird in the past, becoming the acolyte. Regardless, in January 2011, he's arrested for "domestic violence criminal threatening" (citation available upon request). I have no idea if it's related to Draven or not.

As for Trinity, she gets arrested another couple times, once in September 2012 on "a warrant and a charge of criminal trespass at Goodwill Industries," and again in late October on a warrant (citations available upon request).

For his part, the Phantom spends that time period posting "jokes" that aren't actually jokes on Twitter, including, "Roses are red, violets are blue, marry me willingly or I'll force you to," (2012 October 13) "Some call it stalking, I call it love," (2012 October 20a) and introducing himself as "a crazed stalker" (2012 October 20b). He also engages in the Draven tradition of role-playing (2012 October 28) and dispenses guilt trips for not having as many followers as he wants, insinuating that nobody cares about him. "ANYONE CARE to give Erik a shout-out?" he asks (2012 October 29). He leaves his usual breadcrumbs, enticing with, "What is it

like: living, learning, losing, watching endless legions parade my story, gush over actors behind my mask and swoon to someone else's music, while I am left only with the real memories and my nightmares? You can ask me" (2012, October 25). But nobody bites; there is virtually no activity on the account at the time.

In mid-November 2012, he starts posting parts of his rock opera on soundcloud. Over the course of three months, he posts twelve songs: "Josanna," "Nocturne, Angelus (the Invocation)," "March of the Freaks," "Dr. Phantasm," "Tell Me How ('Josanna': Reprise i)," "Overture," "The Magician (Now You See Me)," "Ruthless Refrain," "Inside Your Heart," "Josanna, My Love," "Live Without You," and "Haunted" (2013 February 10). As far as I know, this is the furthest stage of completion that In Amorata ever gets, and the only remaining proof that any of it was made at all.

In January 2013, Trinity gets arrested yet again for criminal trespassing (citation available upon request). She's fined \$100.

The following month, one of Trinity's friends posts a video voicing her support of Draven, very similar to the testimonials of Neo's day (nvywif, 2013). Like Neo, she references the hate and threats from doubters. "To the people out there who want to write hate mail, death threats, yell at them in the street, think before you say something. You don't know somebody's situation, you don't know anything about anybody's life except your own. [...] Erik and Christine, they're not out looking for trouble, they're not out looking to start anything, they're just looking to get their story out." I don't know if, where, when, or from who this backlash happened. Since Draven locks up their documentary vids, any evidence of it has long since been erased. For all I know, it's merely rehashes from the Neo and Angel days.

Come March 2013, the mindofthephantom Wordpress is abandoned. The Phantom, in his last post, says, "I have been having some rather severe medical issues, both... well, let's say mental and physical; including abdominal surgery and a host of other issues, while Christine's vision has deteriorated [...] Things... have not been good" (2013 March 23).

In April, Trinity's arrested, again, on a warrant (citation available upon request).

The household becomes sparse on social media for a while. A month later, the Phantom reports, "I am alive. Been in and out of hospital, very ill; will have no home Internet access 'til June the 1st or immediately thereafter [sic]. [...] am actually at yet another medical facility" (2013 May 18a and b).

Things continue going downhill. Trinity's arrested again in early October on a warrant (citation available upon request). The Phantom, not to be outdone, posts a few weeks later, "No 'Net at the Lair, been laid up with unpredictable [sic] seizures and have incompetent physicians. Frightened" (2013 October 24).

Eventually he does return to Twitter, though sporadically. In April 2014, he sends a tweet to Courtney Love, Kurt Cobain's widow, to say, "If you want to make a musical I will give you body parts for the chance to be involved" (2014 April 10). Later, Draven will try and contact various fandom figures related to their other system members, including Robert Downey Jr. (2015 July 15a) Carrie Fisher before her untimely demise (2016 October 9), and Eliza Dushku, who played Faith in *Angel: The Series* (2015 December 11). As far as I know, none of them respond.

Come May 2014, Trinity is arrested again for two warrants (citation available upon request). As usual, Draven remains focused on the attention he feels entitled to, with the Phantom

tweeting that he might have pneumonia or something worse (2014 June 8) and that "I actually wish I had more followers. Finally, a chance to spread music without the bias of appearance or station, and such a small pool" (2014 June 12). It's a little surreal seeing him so certain he'll have the time to spread the music and gain followers, even as he claims to be on death's door.

At least there's some good news coming poor Trinity's way; she has surgery to help save some of her vision (citation available upon request). It's about the only good thing that seems to happen to her during this entire period, and it's the last thing of significance to happen during the Phantom's tenure, as far as I can tell.

On the whole, the Phantom seems to have had little to make him stand out from the rest of Draven. Kurt's music was more successful; Angel's painting at least got one show; Neo had more friends and followers and attention. Even Anakin, for all his melodrama and complaining, was more able to get people invested in his redemption. But after the disastrous Nebraska venture, things seem to be in decline. Their housing appears to be unstable, and Trinity gets arrested eleven times during this period alone. They seem to have lost most of their following, due to sporadic phone and Internet access.

Another part of it, I suspect, is just time catching up to Draven. It's one thing to act the tortured, melodramatic artist as a child or young adult, but it's far less charming on a grown man entering his late thirties. And all of Draven's skills appear to have stagnated. Despite ten years passing, the Phantom's art skills are no more polished than Angel's. What little of his magic I have seen in Youtube videos or archived MySpace photos lacks showmanship or originality; his sleight of hand is basic, and his

Coffin of Death is unconvincing, a cardboard box with sharp implements carefully arranged around Draven's body. There's no shame in starting simple, but the Phantom is specifically portraying himself as an expert who's been doing magic since 1999. Lies aside, none of Draven ever really improve, because improvement requires criticism—from self and from others. And none of Draven can handle that.

All fields require a constant cycle of compromise, failure, and (hopefully) gradual improvement. All require the knowledge that we as people can only come up with imperfect solutions to any given problem. Part of being an adult is accepting that risk of failure in hopes of improving the future. And since none of Draven can handle their imperfections, they perversely doom themselves to stagnation—because perfection is the enemy of good.

Internet film critic Lindsay Ellis made a video series about the evolution of the character of the Phantom of the Opera, in its myriad incarnations. In the one about Andrew Lloyd Webber's version and the sequel, *Love Never Dies*, she makes the following statement (2016), which I feel states the Phantom's (and all of Draven's) failings perfectly:

"Phantom's character arc, in the good ones anyway, is about maturation. He is a genius in some regards, sure, but in the realm of intra-human contact, in love, he is a child. He never made it past toddlerhood. 'Oh sure, just because I'm shooting fireballs at you, you abandon me, FINE, I'll kill everybody!' Cuz he's never been shown love or compassion himself. Other people are basically toys to him; that's kind of a thing that happens. Him letting Christine go is the first time in his life that he really recognizes someone else's humanity. That act of sacrifice, putting

someone's needs before your own, is one of the most painful lessons that he or anyone can learn. That's adulthood. [...] Just because your life sucked doesn't mean you can march up to people and declare that they owe you something."

None of Draven ever learn that lesson. Even with Trinity's constant affirmations, support, adoration, discipline, and panhandling, he never grows out of the "FINE, I'll kill everybody!" stage. And the next system member is even less ethical than he is.

CHERISH YOUR LIVES, MOTHERFUCKERS: JIGSAW

In the *Saw* movies, Jigsaw is a masterminding antagonist. He's not a serial killer, of course; he simply puts people into sadistic traps where they have to murder each other or grotesquely injure themselves if they have any hope of survival. His proclaimed motivation is to make people value their lives—the darkest version of bringing excitement and meaning to the lives of the people, which is what the more “heroic” system members of Draven strove for.

Due to online purges, I know very little about Draven's Jigsaw. Tony will later claim he existed as early as 2010, but the earliest concrete dates I have of his existence come much later, in 2015. He apparently designed some *Saw*-inspired traps that Tony Stark will later claim credit for in his StarkTech Custom Gear/Metaverse Cosplay business. They include an exsanguination collar (citation available upon request), and a “reverse bear trap” that looks like a combination of muzzle and vice (citation available upon request). Draven will claim these traps were made in 2010 or 2011, but Jigsaw is still building in September 2015, when Trinity posts a photo of one of “JS' traps in progress,” another kind of collar (citation available upon request).

The only other evidence I have of Jigsaw's existence is a single Facebook post about *Saw IV* (2017 October 21). They talk with Draven's younger brother about the movie, and remark, “He's still in here, incidentally” (comment #2).

Draven continues, “I've dreamt of doing an immersive trap house for Halloween SINCE 2011. [...] But designing traps meant

to be realistic enough JUST to scare the shit out of paying customers is harder than designing... well, you know. [...] Every time somebody gets too traumatized to go on, they can exit the 'exhibit' and leave [...] and the last person standing to have gone through the most/made it through, wins" (comment #9)

Draven's younger brother replies, "Knowing you, 'winning' will just be getting some 'shame on you' lecture about how humanity is a cancer and they are perpetuating the problem by choosing to remain." He then adds, "I'm all for it" (comment #14).

That is all I know about Jigsaw.

THE SAFETY PIN ARMY: TONY STARK

Tony Stark, better known as Iron Man, is a superhero from Marvel Comics known for his brilliant mind, metal superpowered suit, and drinking problem.

My first sighting of Draven's Tony is on March 2, 2015 on Facebook, when Draven comes out as multiple, again: "I am, in all absolute and deadly seriousness, what we used to refer to a decade ago as a 'soulbonder', and what I've seen referred to online as 'fictionkin'; although if you've known us at all, you know we haaaaaate those words, because their associations are horrendous." They explain the quantum reincarnation form of their multiplicity, and that "I'm just the body meant to facilitate Purpose" (paragraph 5).

They bring up their history, but reverse the roles of victim and perpetrators, stating that "I've been on Fandom Wank(involuntarily)" (paragraph 13) avoiding the inconvenient detail that Neo dragged his exes on there first. They also bring up the eight-year-old Seattle Stranger article as "cyberbullying," with Neo as the innocent interrogated victim, rather an active participant who then had his followers attack the newspaper (ibid). In the comments, Draven also refers to Buffys I and III as "A NIGHTMARE," (2015 March 3) even though neither of them have been around in ten, fifteen years, and as far as I know have made no contact with Draven the entire interim. All in all, they paint a picture of perfect victimhood, none of which they're responsible for.

Draven divides their system into "primaries" and "floaters." "The primary people 'own' the body, sort of collectively co-front when needed [...] basically, the ones who front 24/7" (ibid). They list Tony as one of the primaries, and add that he's been fronting a great deal (paragraph 24).

Commenters pledge their support, including Draven's younger brother. "The only time it was ever weird, for me, was when you were talking about building a religious monastery and training an army for a post-apocalyptic vampire computer psychic zombie war," he says (Macabredivinity, 2015 March 4), but reaffirms his love.

Trinity gets arrested once again a few weeks later on yet another warrant (citation available upon request). As far as I know, none of them mention it publicly, but it's a sign of continued poor times for the household. They become homeless again in early July (Stark, 2015 July 17), moving into a Econolodge. Draven takes the opportunity to try and get a hold of Robert Downey Jr., tweeting, "So... with everything horrible that's happened to us in the last 10 days, do you think if I tagged @RobertDowneyJr he'd ever answer me back?" (July 15a). The next day, they tweet, "Guess not" (July 17).

Unsurprisingly, Trinity reports that the homelessness is not their fault (2015 October 10). "We got to be this way, not because we were evicted for non payment, not because we were destructive or caused property damage, but because our landlord got foreclosed on, and then the building was condemned," she states (paragraph 2). Strangely specific denials, seeing as they were evicted for all of those reasons in the past. In a further unsettling irony, she also claims that they were evicted "because I dared to complain about the constant noise of the couple across

the hall from us, who had the local police called on them on a regular basis for domestic violence" (ibid). The noisy couple down the hall sound exactly like Anakin and Sidious, or Neo and Trinity.

Despite the circumstances, the system still has its usual attitude towards critics. On July 15, the same day he's trying to reach Robert Downey Jr., Tony gets a Facebook page shut down for harassment, apparently because they found out about the Seattle Slog articles and started spreading them around. "Why the blue and unholy FUCK do I worry about what a handful of fuckwits [...] who run a relatively tiny fan page on Facebook think about me and Trin? I'm homeless, waiting on brain surgery(yeah, nice timing, asswits), and I will still have a thousand times more fucking class than them," he posts (2015 July 15b, paragraph 14), and in the comments (#3), he adds, "Wait until I've finished building my suit... And use it to raise awareness for the 'not killing each other out of hatred and fear' concept." More on that later.

Within the day, the group is shut down, but Tony's still angry. "If I had 'true' DID and was being mocked, it'd be a viral outrage and some judge would award me half a million dollars," he states (paragraph 11), "But because I believe they came from elsewhere - all for a reason, regardless - it's a joke, eh? Did you miss the 'yes, I HAVE been evaluated by a psychiatrist(more than one, quite actually), and they accepted it as a "spiritual belief" part of the post?"

It's a peculiar, subtle strain of ableism—to claim that because he doesn't have a mental illness, he's being harassed more than if he did. It also doesn't ring true to my experience. Trolls' behavior hasn't changed much since I was diagnosed; I'm still

considered equally crazy and plenty of people believe DID doesn't exist. Regardless, as far as I know, Tony's crusade is successful. The critics are stomped, publicly anyway, and Tony's commenters voice their support.

A couple months later, Draven takes on a new diagnosis: intracranial hypertension (Trinity, 2015 September 2). It is extremely rare, and the symptoms apparently mimic a brain tumor, thus its other name of *pseudotumori cerebri*. It mostly replaces multiple sclerosis and cancer as the main cause for Draven's health issues—as far as I know, Draven never mentions having MS again after this. Tony and Trinity also start a gofundme campaign to try and break out of their homelessness (Draven, 2015 September 7), but it's unsuccessful.

After years of refusing public assistance, Draven finally applies for disability (October 10, paragraph 9). Trinity reports that he "receives nothing yet, as Social Security still has ninety days to make their decision," but that's misleading. The initial SSDI/SSI decision is usually just the beginning. The majority of applicants are rejected the first time; they must then appeal the decision or request a hearing. The exact timeline for how long it takes to wade through all that ranges highly, but the Social Security Administration lists average wait times for hearings as ranging from eleven to twenty-seven months, depending on the city; when I applied, I was told to expect at least a year. And that still presumes one fills out the paperwork and makes appointments in a timely fashion. That is challenging enough under any circumstances, never mind while homeless and without reliable transit, and none of Draven are particularly reliable even in the best of times.

The household has more financial trouble on the way. Trinity's disability payments aren't enough to keep the household afloat, and they can't afford their hotel room. While Trinity panhandles daily (2015 October 10) and despairs that she's "lowering myself in the eyes of all of our friends to keep us in a roof" (2015 December 6), Tony opens up StarkTech Custom Gear (later Metaverse Cosplay) (2015 November 24a). "Looking for a prop for your next cosplay or con?" the first post reads. "Want a weapon, item, logo/coat of arms, plan, or similar item custom-designed just for you, to fit your unique needs and specifications? [...] Tired of wishing your stuff actually DID something, instead of just quietly sitting there pretending it did? [...] Then you've probably come to the right place."

On the same day, he posts a video of a "fireball-launching lower exo gauntlet that I built as part of my Iron Man (Mk. II) series" (2015 November 25b). But it's not just part of a series; in his Youtube video description of the flamethrower at work (2015 December 13), he notes that he made it specifically "to see if I could add actual weapons to my Mk II exo version," that is, the Iron Man suit. All this while he's supposedly desperately sick and in need of brain surgery; what exactly does he think he'll be using the suit for?

It's surreal to see Trinity's desperation mirrored against Draven's blithe lack of priorities. Building custom gear requires tools and a workshop—difficult while homeless and sick. Trinity appears to be doing whatever she can to keep them floating, even though it keeps leading to her arrest for trespassing, theft, and bad checks, but Tony's making weaponry that could possibly burn the hotel down. It's like he's so busy playing out his fictional role as superheroic genius that he can't see reality in front of him.

Trinity sees what's coming; she mourns being denied a Christmas with housing (2015 October 11). She describes humiliation after humiliation, despair after despair as she desperately panhandles for money to buy food and medication for Draven, who is apparently too sick to assist (2015 December 5), despite his work on his Iron Man suit. "Lie to me guys," she begs (2015 December 3a). "Spin me a pretty tale. I was the virtuous little girl of the story, I always was. I could do anything, because I had all the right reasons on my side."

In a moment of utter exhaustion and despair, she describes succinctly and accurately the power Draven has over her, why she believes in them so. "I tell myself stories..." she says (December 3b). "Once there was a dutiful young maid... And they give me the drive I need, because I repeat them often enough to myself, they become real. Thus, the power of belief in the Story. So, if I tell myself... 'In this glass is the ability to go see [REDACTED] in New York. We will be there for the big convention, when it's warmer.... [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] will be there... and I'll wear the Burdened With Glorious Purpose hoodie I haven't bought yet... [...]' It will be real. And the glass will have the power of absolute possibility etched into it."

What is Draven, if not a storyteller? What is the life they have crafted for Trinity, if not endless reiterations of the Story? And what is Trinity but a never-ending series of supporting characters—not just in the real-life Story, but the fictional ones that inspire Draven so? *The Matrix* is Neo's story, not Trinity's or Smith's. *Constantine* is John's, not Angie's or Gabriel's. One can argue that Clarice's story is *Silence of the Lambs*, but even then, Hannibal Lecter is the one who gets *Hannibal* (book, movie, and

TV series), plus *Hannibal Rising*. If their lives are the Story, then the system members of Draven are the heroes.

With that framing, Tony's behavior makes perfect sense—he's acting out the role of a fictional protagonist, and a fictional protagonist in his favorite stories never stoops to such mundane mediocrity as panhandling or begging. Like Angel's painting of himself on the cross all those years ago, Tony plays the "broken messiah," the desperately sick, homeless martyr on the verge of death, but he also plays the role of the "Prometheus," the "Superman" who's creating a fireball-flinging super suit, bringing fire to humanity and saving the world, both at the same time.

The only problem is, reality does not conform to the dictates of fiction. Two days after the post about the Story, Trinity and Draven are evicted (Trinity, 2015 December 6), but Draven keeps playing their roles. A few days later, they upload pictures of a rocket that Tyler Durden apparently made for the Fourth of July (2015 December 9). I don't know where they live afterward, but they keep posting.

Throughout all of this madness, Trinity has been hosting her usual complementary headmates to Draven's, namely Pepper Potts (Draven, 2015 July 4). By May 2016, though, she's also hosting Steve Rogers, Natasha Romanov, and at least one other guy, all of whom are sexually involved with Tony. How does this come up? Trinity posts (as quoted by Draven, 2017 May 1), "Due to our good friend Becky's thoughts on teaching our boys and men not to rape, Tony and I were having an in-depth discussion on the subject early this morning."

Tony shows disdain for men who sexually assault, and Trinity quotes him as saying, "I'm Tony fucking Stark. If I can learn to curb some of this, anyone can." To which Trinity replies,

"Yes, but you have boyfriends, a fiancée and occasionally [sic] a Russian assassin sharing your bed. You don't need to look else where [sic] anymore."

For such a short post, there's a lot tangled up in it. What exactly does Tony mean by "learning to curb some of this"? Rape culture? Sexual assault? When, exactly, did he learn? After Kurt, who tried to play the romantic brooding bad boy for Tiffani? After Angel, who pined over a Faith role-player who was in high school? After House, who role-played a spanking scene with Draven's "adopted son," or after Anakin, who joked about it? After the Phantom, who like Anakin insisted that his dom be his metaphysical, literal, in-all-practical-ways parent? I argue that Tony hasn't learned, especially since Trinity outright equates his raping others as infidelity, and that the sole reason he isn't doing so is because she is fulfilling all of Draven's sexual needs with an array of over twenty partners, at least four of which are devoted to Tony alone. And Tony apparently agrees with this assessment so much that he reposts the screencaps a year later (2017 May 1)!

Meanwhile, in June 2016, I start working on this write-up. At the time, I only know of Neo, and I don't know if he's even still alive—at least one person thought he might be dead. Foolishly, I post a little of what I learn about Draven, including a link to Neo's book, archived on his website by the Wayback Machine.

At the time, I don't know that Draven still keeps obsessive track of all mentions of themselves. Furious at being once again criticized in public, Draven slaps me with a DMCA notice (Lee, 2016 June 8a) to get the book post taken down (despite the fact that he put the book up under a CCA license). When I post about the matter, Neo creates a tumblr account, quantumviable (with

the title "Confessions of a Cult Leader™"), and sends me some harassment, all the while claiming that I'm the one stalking him (Lee, 2016, June 7; June 8b). He claims that "because of my peculiar mental fucked-upness, I literally cannot just let it go," that I'm "quoting it out of context," and that he's "too fucking sick to deal with alllll this tired drama again," as though this is merely some high school theatrics and not twenty years of abuse, arrests, and cults. He warns me, "If I see copyrighted writings, I'll file a DMCA complaint. If it looks like you're trying to encourage your six followers to bother me, I'll report you again. Offline, if I have to. You're bonkers. I'm not 'active', there's no 'group', I'm not anyone's 'leader'" (Lee, 2016, June 8b) He then tops off that impressive heap of lies with the claim that he "may need cancer treatment." I wonder if that is in addition to or instead of intracranial hypertension, the brain-cancer mimic? He never mentions it again anywhere, as far as I can tell; it's purely something to shame me with.

Neo then goes on a spate of deleting his sources out from under me. He locks his he_dreams_awake LJ account, and deletes the for_zion, radio_zero_one, and teachingsofneo. When in an act of incompetence, I accidentally show that I know of his Facebook, he purges that too, and then blocks me, even as he posts on tumblr how immature, illogical, and childish I am for blocking him (2016 June 8). His IP address checks me every day for a week, and then leaves.

By Draven's standards, I get off very easily. Compare Neo's few days of tumblr harassment and a week of watching with the four years Angel pursued Buffy II, or Neo's Fandom Wank excoriation of Smith I. However, even though Draven has no dirt on me, doesn't know me and thus can't manipulate me as

effectively, I can state with authority that his tactics are effective. Even today, looking at the quantumviable posts makes me anxious. He actually manages to half-convince me he has cancer, and that he is the innocent victim of my harassment campaign. For a while, I debate quitting the write-up entirely, questioning my motives and my morality. A complete stranger on the Internet, one I know has a history of manipulating and guilt-tripping others, still manages to manipulate and guilt-trip me!

Fortunately, all of Draven seems to believe that I'm an incompetent illiterate child. They leave all of their other accounts unlocked and mostly untouched, and I'm able to work around the holes in my research. After taking a break, I continue working, more quietly and sensibly this time.

Draven can't seem to avoid leading groups for long though, despite his claims. On September 2, 2016, Tony creates a video, entitled "How Pokémon GO Saved My Life." In it, he reverts from his cancer claims back to intracranial hypertension, along with type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and spinal damage (but not multiple sclerosis). He claims that before the game, he had spent the prior year in bed, but the game inspired him to finally go outside again.

Within a month, Tony creates a Youtube Channel under the name Pokémon Trainer Triumphs and two Facebook groups around *Pokémon Go*. Pokémon Trainer Triumphs is ostensibly for disabled people to share their triumphs in the game, but mostly, Draven uses it to celebrate theirs. In one of his videos, Tony states, "I really want all of you to share in my journey - it's a lot of what keeps me going," (2016 October 6) suggesting that he still sees himself as the hero, everyone else as the audience. The Youtube channel description reads, "I wanted to [...] share my

adventures, and document the experiences I have... and the experiences of others like me, who wanted to share," but the latter part feels like an afterthought tacked on; he certainly doesn't post anyone else's videos on the channel.

Trinity asks for money to float a loan so she can buy Tony the latest update to *Pokémon Go* (2016 September 10). Draven also starts dressing up as Ash Ketchum, including one photo of them holding a stuffed Pikachu and with a caption reading Ash's signature catch phrase: "Pikachu, I choose you!" (Trinity, 2016 September 4). I wouldn't be surprised if Ash became a system member, though I never see an open admission of it.

Ash is certainly among the character types Draven prefers. Remember the old slogan Demos created for Neo back in the Constantine days, rehashing song lyrics from *Pokémon the Movie 2000*? The song "the Power of One" is intended to be about Ash, who is a literal prophesied Chosen One to help save the world and bring balance to the legendary bird Pokémon. It's the same messianic story that Draven have rehashed, over and over.

But *Pokémon Go* groups aren't the only ones Draven starts in the fall of 2016. In November, there is the presidential election. Tony will later claim credit for Neo supposedly predicting Trump's rise to the presidency: "I told you. A dozen fucking years ago I told you. About unchecked hate, about the triumph of illusion over objective reality, about bigotry being taught not inborn, and that we were closing in on apocalyptic loss if people refused to see it. I cried on the radio. We made videos. We screamed into the abyss so loud and so long that we lost our voices" (2017 August 13). Fortunately, the nature of Neo's apocalypse was so vague in time and scope that it's hard to disprove.

In the wake of Trump's rise, Tony creates the Safety Pin Army. (He also creates public pages to support them, StandFightAct and ApocalypseNot, but later purges them.)

What is the Safety Pin Army? According to the group's description, it's "a network to volunteer to be a safe ally or buddy in an emergency - or any unsafe - situation for anyone who feels threatened" (Draven, 2016 November 12). Innocent enough on the surface, but not so much in reality. In the now-deleted "Stand Fight Act" page, Tony posts that it "was supposed to be a far-reaching, national, 'militia'-type organization of people whose info would be added to a hotline and a developed app, so that anyone who felt unsafe or needed help or accompaniment would have support one text or click away" (2016 December 10). In the now-deleted "ApocalypseNot" page, made at the time of the Safety Pin Army's formation, Tony goes into more detail. He writes, "There is a (secret) Facebook group to gather people in one place; you can PM or request to be added. By tonight, there will also be a Google doc posted in that group to gather people's information, so that we can start building that database RIGHT AWAY. And if you know anyone that could help get the word out - if you have a blog, if you write for an online magazine, etc. - PLEASE let us know" (2016 November 16). He also sets up a radio show, which nobody listens to (2016 November 10).

The whole thing seems like a Frankenstein's monster of past Draven projects—Neo's radio show, combined with a more high-tech version of Angel Investigations' bodyguarding service and Neo's aspirations of saving the world. But Tony isn't as successful as Angel or Neo were. In less than a month, Tony's lamenting how big a failure the group has proven to be (December 10). "Our radio broadcast we worked hard to set up, a

place where your voice mattered; we got an average of two listeners every other day, and maybe three shares. We printed out safety flyers, made badges, tried to collect and organize, but it seems as if 80% of people online want to feel as if they're 'rebelling' by telling stories in secret groups, writing 'kind letters', and your average postage stamp of solidarity... before going back to their lives. [...] Help me. Tell me what you want. Tell me what I have to do to hold your interest. Tell me where to share things. [...] Tell me what we're doing wrong."

It's not a hard question to answer: Tony is exactly the kind of slacktivist he's ranting about. That he even says "tell me where to share things" proves that his focus is all wrong—to actually organize a militia requires working with already existent groups and causes, the ones with boots on the ground and stronger info security. But Tony focuses only on Facebook, only on spreading the word. He seems completely unaware of any other form of activism, and why should be? It's all he's ever done.

And then there's the question of, if his health is so poor, how can he be relied on to intervene in an offline emergency, or organize the vast team of volunteers he hopes for? Indeed, Tony doesn't even manage the responsibilities he does claim! He never creates his planned app or hotline, and he doesn't even manage to update the Google Doc with the less than ten people who do sign up (citation available upon request). The inaugural broadcast of the ApocalypseNot radio show has only two people in the chat and never comes back after its first broadcast (November 10). By January 2017, Tony's stopped posting in his own group, abandoning it.

The following month, Tony solicits donations for 826NYC and the Brooklyn Superhero Supply Company, raising \$300 from

5 people by livestreaming a playthrough of *Resident Evil 7* (2017 February 17). It is the first hard evidence I've seen of any of Draven successfully contributing to anyone other than themselves.

In late March, Steve Rogers (channeled by Trinity, as usual) makes a peculiar post on Facebook, saying, "Tony has spent the evening doing what Tony does best... Helping to bring the military into the future by adding advanced AI and robotics into the mix" (Trinity, 2017 March 29). Most assuredly this is written to seem far more important or grandiose than it actually is... but still, is Tony actually assisting the military run by the government he hoped to organize a citizens' militia against just a few months prior? And what exactly is he doing? It's not clear: "The Navy wanted the help of gamers to come up with ideas to pair man and technology for the first generation of [the] Singularity. They make it sound like a game." Like Trinity with Neo, Steve expresses awe and claims that "this should say something for his skills crossing over [...] But saying that Tony is impressive with tech because he's Tony is a little circular." Strangely, Steve adds, "And as none of this has anything to do with weapons, Tony doesn't have to break his promise to himself," which begs the question why the flamethrower gloves don't count.

Speaking of those gloves, Tony returns to them in October 2017, claiming that he's "considering making [them] available as a self-defense accessory for people who might be walking or jogging or - particularly - in hostile situations. Lightweight glove containing a concealable barrel that fires small bursts of flame upon pressing the button. It'd certainly back up anybody with hostile intentions, in my opinion" (2017, October 6).

Even by Draven's standards, this is a bad idea. Why on earth would you embed something that shoots fire into flammable fabric gloves? Tony doesn't even put a safety cap on the things! Fire also does not drop or stop a person; an attacker set on fire seems more likely to harm everyone and everything around them in their panicked flailing. And even if everything did work out as intended, how on earth would that court case go? Setting someone on fire is a terrifying thing to do, extremely dangerous, and risks everything around them. It is one of the worst tactics of self-defense I can imagine.

But isn't that a perfect emblem of Tony's flaws, and that of Draven as a whole? The gloves might seem impressive, might look useful, but in reality, they are all surface and no substance, achieving nothing but fortifying Tony's self-image as a technological genius superhero. Not only are they functionally useless for their intended purpose, but they are in fact actively dangerous to everyone around them, including the wearer.

I can only be glad that the Safety Pin Army was a failure. But even as Tony keeps ostensibly doing work for the military, other system members protest the government, seemingly with no concern for the dissonance.

MR. DOWN-LOW: RICK GRIMES

Rick Grimes is the main protagonist of the comic book/TV series *The Walking Dead*. A former sheriff, he wakes up in a hospital bed to the zombie apocalypse in progress, tries to find his wife and son, and ends up running a town of survivors under martial law.

I first see Draven's interest in *the Walking Dead* on January 12, 2017, but the first concrete dates I have of Rick's existence don't appear until summer, when Draven notes that he's using country music to front (2017 June 11a). In that post, Rick is called "Mr. Down-Low," but later the playlist will be renamed "Rick's Ultimate Uber" and the system will grow more open about his existence. ("Uber" is a Draven term for feeling intensely like their fandom self, often while bi-locating.)

Asides from a couple remarks that he exists like the one above, all I have of Rick are a few photos. One from July shows Draven dressed up in Rick's sheriff outfit; "you look totally authentic!" one commenter says, and another says, "I thought this was a screencap/outtake before I noticed" (source available upon request). It's the exact same "eerie resemblance" that Kurt claimed in 1999, recycled yet again.

Another photo shows a holstered gun (June 9), which if it's real, neither Draven nor Trinity would be allowed to own, being convicted felons. Turns out it is used as a prop for bi-location. Draven writes, "Let's say X and Y were survivors of the zombie apocalypse." Clearly they mean Rick and whoever Trinity channels for him. "The people running the bodies go to a remote campsite with no one else around, and then, with a bit of focused

effort, proceed to ‘see’ the area around them as the post-apocalypse landscape they’re familiar with. [...] They wear their weapons even though (they) know that they’re not physically in actual danger from roaming zombies” (2018 May 8).

But they don’t just wear the weapons; they become active props in the psychodrama. “Maybe she pulls out her gun — and although none of the weapons carried around in these circumstances are active, and the body people are obviously aware on some level that they’re not going to be killed on the spot, the reactions are real because it’s understood that pulling the trigger/throwing the weapon/whatever will actively result in someone’s death.” So the weapons aren’t real, but they are, and they carry them, even though they know they don’t need them, and on and on, the usual Draven word pretzel.

Draven describes this whole thing as a healing experience, allowing Trinity to “finally [...] let go of her hate,” “move past their previous dramas and for new things to occur, all a necessary part of existing here” (ibid) but it’s disturbing to read, and clearly untrue. After all, Trinity has been with Draven for fourteen years now, but clearly they reenact these dramas over and over. Draven may have few followers left, but the cult behavior remains.

Rick appears again in photos from a protest, wearing an anti-fascist baseball cap with “Grimes SZA” written on the side (2017 October 28). SZA stands for “Safe Zone Alexandria,” the community Rick rules during the course of *the Walking Dead*. It seems ironic that a system with a history of authoritarian cult groups and that Rick, who leads Safe Zone Alexandria with executions and martial law, would identify as an anti-fascist, especially considering Tony’s military work.

But then again, Draven have always paid great lip service to the ideals of free will, self-determination, and freedom, because it is what they want for themselves, if not for their followers. They are totally fine with using the aesthetics of fascist propaganda (which inspired the outfits of the Star Wars empire, and thus the clothing that Anakin blew the rent money on), the violent rhetoric, the sublimating of dozens of people's wills to their own cause. They just want to be on the top of that power pyramid, not the bottom.

Draven attempts to become a Let's Player, but it never goes anywhere. They aren't willing to put in the effort to make their Let's Plays good or impressive, and give up when they don't get immediate success. Oddly, though, the Let's Plays are both zombie survival games: *Resident Evil 7* (2017 February 17) and *Last Day On Earth* (2017 December 17), the latter of which is most definitely played by Rick.

The Walking Dead is a wretched setting where humans are constantly killing each other, devolving to their most brutal sadism, and many a system member who comes from such miserable places are happy to leave them behind. Rick, however, seems to want nothing more than to return to that world, to be the hero he is in fiction. And perhaps that is why none of Draven succeed in reality: what they want is a fictional plot arc, and those do not exist for real people.

**CRAZILY POWERFUL,
SUPER GOOD LOOKING,
SERIOUSLY CONFLICTED,
BROODING *KILLER*:
KYLO REN**

In *Star Wars*, Kylo Ren is the grandson and adoring fan of Darth Vader. He is a member of the First Order who tries to destroy the heroic Jedi and the Resistance.

Draven's Kylo bursts onto the scene in January 2018. Seeing his relationship to Anakin, it would seem natural for his grandfather to make a reappearance, or Trinity's related headmates, but no. All of that is never brought up, not even as a coy allusion.

Trinity promptly channels Rey, the *Star Wars* protagonist, and a honeymoon period ensues. She describes intense passion and connection to Kylo, being so close they seem to read each other's minds, and a frenzy of sexual activity that apparently might be disturbing to the neighbors. She describes Kylo as a magnetic bad boy, a "crazily powerful, super good looking, seriously conflicted, brooding *killer*" (citation available upon request) and is deeply offended at the idea that anyone could think she has lost agency or has Stockholm Syndrome.

But it isn't all hearts and flowers. Even by Draven standards, Kylo is intense. He "paces like a caged animal," "rants," and he's constantly bi-locating and having intense emotional conversations.

According to Draven, Kylo also “[saves] my life” by bringing Draven’s diabetes under control within the space of a few months. How? By “eating more protein and salads, keeping the water going, making sure my portion sizes are healthy, and paying attention to my blood sugar,” along with actually taking the diuretics Draven has supposedly been given (2018 April 20). Draven also attributes it to the exercise: all that pacing “adds up to miles and MILES of walking. You can actually see the track he left in the carpet” (ibid). Plus all the sex they’re having, which Kylo is certain can’t hurt.

Keep in mind that less than two years prior, Draven claimed to have spent a year in bed (2016 September 3). All throughout their *Pokémon Go* period, they used a motorized scooter and mentioned over and over their poor mobility; even while talking about Kylo’s exercise, they remark that they “can’t walk any distance longer than a block without the cane,” but Kylo just pushes through the pain (2018 April 20). And apparently he suffers no setbacks or health problems from such overexertion.

Contrary to popular narrative, that is not a safe way to exercise. A system who has similar mobility issues says, “IT DOES NOT WORK THAT WAY. [...] we’ve still fatigued ourselves more times than we can count by thinking Once We Got Started We’d Be Fine [...] and not noticing when endorphins were obscuring the cues from our body saying STOP STOP THIS IS ENOUGH FOR NOW” (personal communication, 2018). If someone has been immobile and inactive for a prolonged period, they have to be careful, starting slow and gentle. To overdo it can be extremely dangerous. Pacing for solid miles is not a good idea.

But of course, even in their miraculous recovery from diabetes, Draven can't let go of the narrative that they're dying tragically young either. They note that "my heart and GI stuff have started giving me more severe problems" (2018 April 20) and remark that "hope to god this left-sided pressure and increasing PVCs and fluid retention are NOT my heart finally starting to crap out [...] and [that I] LIVE to make it to PortCon" (2018 April 13). Yes, even as they have so little money that they have to skip meals, even as they might be dying, they've found the funds and wherewithal to travel down to Portland to become volunteer cosplay staff for PortCon (PortConMaine Unknown A). Not only that, they've taken on the work of two panels, one about a Star Wars card game from eleven to midnight on Thursday, and another on prop and weapon handling the following Friday from nine to ten AM (PortConMaine Unknown B, Draven 2018 May 1).

If Draven isn't exaggerating about their health (unlikely), they're being incredibly reckless. Having paneled and tabled at cons for years, I know from experience that they are frenzies of activity, and any staff who become sick at the last minute causes chaos. But Draven isn't even scheduling enough time for a good night's rest in-between their shifts! Their actions are clearly not that of someone who truly thinks they might die at any second.

But why should they? They've been "dying" for thirteen years and are still doing the exact same things they were then.

Their newest blog is a carbon-copy of so many of those before. The coming out posts, the complaints about fandom fictionalizing their pain. They deliver the usual lies, "We have no agenda [...] no cause, no GoFundMe, no affiliation" (2018 April 8a). They insist that they "pay the rent(a week early, every

month, actually; we've never been late even once since we moved here" and "we don't think we have some sort of 'special powers'" (2018 April 8b). They create a secret closed Facebook group devoted to the pairing of Rey and Kylo Ren, not divulging its importance (2018 January). Nothing of substance has changed.

The cycle continues...

20 YEARS, 20 SYSTEM MEMBERS: CONCLUSION

Over the course of roughly twenty years and twenty system members, Draven has bilked followers of thousands of dollars, abused them in every way imaginable, gotten them arrested, and left them homeless. Draven themselves have been arrested and sent to court multiple times over domestic violence charges, non-payment of rent, obtaining prescription drugs through fraud, and threatening with weapons. They are not messiahs, prophets, superheroes, or even decent human beings. They are parasites, predators, and convicted felons that have shown no capacity or desire for change.

In the course of writing this history, I have read countless words by Draven, Trinity, and followers past and present. Draven uses every setback, obstacle, and cruelty of the world as justification for their own violence. In contrast, I have seen ex-followers who despite everything still worry for Draven's health and Trinity's safety. Ex-followers have shared with me their guilt and shame, their feelings that they should've known better, done better, *been* better. It is as though they carry the moral burden and responsibility that Draven refuses to bear for themselves.

When I read Trinity's posts, I see a rapt adoration of Draven, the heroes, narrators, and writers of the Story. She's financially supported them, been arrested and jailed for them, but all the support is one way. When I read Trinity and Smith's LJs, when I see Christine in the Phantom's videos, it is all about Draven's goals, Draven's importance, Draven's message. Meanwhile, all of Draven treat all of Trinity as orbiting objects,

extensions of their own goals and feelings—Trinity as Neo's devoted second-in-command, Sidious as Anakin's dom, Christine as the Phantom's pet star. Angie's miscarriage becomes a mere footnote to Constantine's romantic angst. I have never *once* seen Draven refer to a single goal or hobby of Trinity's that doesn't involve them.

Almost twenty years ago on Usenet, a few intrepid Poppy Z. Brite fans saw through Draven. One commenter wrote, "This ng has seen many trolls, although [...] I've never seen anyone who seems to revel so much in dishing out hatred. You come across as enjoying hurting the people that you have" (Jayne, 1999). That awareness and sense of community saved them, and it is that awareness and sense of community plurals must also build, if they want to avoid predators like Draven and uproot the existing ones from our spaces.

On April 18, 2017, one anonymous commenter returned to that ancient Usenet thread, untouched since 1999. Their response:

"All of you, every last one of you, were absolutely right."

AFTERWORD: FOR PROSPECTIVE, CURRENT, AND EX-FOLLOWERS

This paper is a history, not a self-help manual. However, I would be remiss not to give resources. If you're in a cult, or have been in one, or just want to render some psychological first aid and vaccination, here are some good places to look:

- *Combatting Cult Mind Control*, by Steve Hassan. Ignore the florid title and cover; Hassan is an ex-Moonie and his book is solid and down-to-earth.
- The Tea Blogger's reports on the cult activities of Andy Blake, whose cults are Draven clones. You can read about them here: <http://theteablogger.tumblr.com/>
- Abbey Wilson's blog about her time as the Trinity of Andy Blake's cult, along with her escape and recovery: <https://kumquatwriter.wordpress.com/category/the-crazy-train/>
- *Crash Override Network* by Zoe Quinn covers info security, self-defense, and tactics when under siege by an Internet hate mob, and how *not* to be one.
- *Why Does He Do That?* By Lundy Bancroft is a guide to abusive tactics from the perspective of straight male partner-abusers. Not about cults, but there are still tactics in common.
- Any articles or interviews regarding the late David Sullivan.

I myself have never been part of a cult; all I've experienced are a few near-misses and hurt feelings. However, after two years

of researching Draven, plus my lesser involvement in my zine *Cultiples #1* and a few years in the Andy Blake awareness arena, I do feel I can state with some authority what not to do:

Do not try to infiltrate a cult.

Seriously. Don't do it. Do you think yourself David Sullivan? You are not David Sullivan. *He* knew that even with all his training, research, and knowledge, he had to get in and get out of a cult within a few days, lest he be hallucinating cult leader voices like everyone else. Multiple followers of Draven were recruited because they infiltrated, only to be converted to the cause. It is the height of stupidity and arrogance to presume that your intelligence or resilience will triumph. *Don't do it.*

If you are tempted to do this, you are already playing by a cult leader's rules. Draven's whole gambit is to make real life seem like an exciting adventure, an action movie or a comic book. Whether you join them or try to infiltrate them, you are playing to the narrative, the Story they create. And at the end of the day, people like Draven don't care if they're the hero or the villain, as long as they're the memorable character in the Story.

Especially since you are likely not to accomplish anything. Making this write-up was the most soul-crushing artistic endeavor I have ever undertaken, in part because of its futility. I have no hope of getting Draven's current followers out of their situation. My work will not cause Draven to change. The best I can hope for is that this write-up will serve people who have already escaped, or prevent bystanders from being taken in at all.

The ethics of reporting this kind of abuse, done to so many people, still gives me nightmares. I ask myself whether I am serving anyone, or just digging into other people's wounds. This is not a fun game to take down "a bad guy"; that's the exact same

logic Draven uses to rally hate mobs against critics. Draven's cults might seem cartoonish or laughably absurd on the surface, but they are deadly serious.

If you want to do something useful about the cults in your community, don't go to war with them. Instead, be like the Poppy Z. Brite fans and never let them get a foothold in your space to begin with. Remember what those fans did:

- They did not let Kurt Draven groom teens in privacy. When he exposed himself, they made it public and stated that his behavior was not acceptable from the very beginning.
- They did not back down when he tried to harangue, shame, or guilt-trip them into compliance.
- They rallied to the protection of their younger, more vulnerable members, even when they were like Tiffani, who was brand-new to the newsgroup.

In other words, they were active, not passive. They didn't avert their eyes for the sake of avoiding conflict, or stick their fingers in their ears and wait for Kurt to change of his own volition. They cultivated an atmosphere where conflict was accepted, and therefore dealt with instead of festering into a huge explosion.

You might notice that this is a lot more complicated and less exciting than simply punching out an abuser. Instead of a heroic single strong punch, it's more like boosting the psychological immune system of the community. The Poppy Z. Brite fans likely had no idea what bullets they dodged, because to them, Kurt Draven was not significant. He was annoying, they threw him out, and they got on with their lives. That is exactly

the result you want, where you never even *have* a cult on your hands to begin with. Is it less exciting, less like an action movie? Yes. But life should not be an action movie.

This is not an easy process, I know. Building a community with that strength and social dynamics takes active work, but the important thing is, *it is possible*. The Poppy Z. Brite fans (along with other communities I've been a part of, online and off) prove this. It takes all the members, and most importantly, the people in charge. Members of a community learn what they can get away with from the behavior of the mods, whether there are favorites who can never be criticized or scapegoats who can be harassed with impunity. If someone is harassed and goes to the people in charge, only to be completely ignored, then everyone learns a very bad lesson. The victim learns that there is no point to appealing to other group members, and goes quiet. The harasser learns they can get away with hurting others.

Is that what we want members of our communities to learn?

I believe in plural community. I believe we are better than this. It is my dearest hope that we build communities like the Poppy Z. Brite fans, filled with imperfect, flawed people, who together were able to stave off an abuser without even really recognizing it. It is my hope that victims like Blackbird, Connor, Trinity, Seven, Blaze, and all the rest have a place where they can be safe and happy.

That is what I want to help create, not another miserable write-up like this one.

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LB Lee is a multivarious entity mostly known for their mental health comics, but they also draw pictures and write about reality melting. Their past books include *The Homeless Year*, *Alter Boys In Love*, and *Flights of Reality*, none of which have anything to do with cults. They were interviewed for a mediocre online news article about Andy Blake in 2015, but it's not worth reading.

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