

The Kreme Affair
From the WAPA Files

By Dave Berlin
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A cold rain pounded on the slanted gray roof, making a sharp, metallic sound that always soothed his nerves. Marc Yanz sat with his back to the door of the break room, facing the window and the dark gray world beyond. The refrigerator hummed in the background, barely audible over the rain. He sipped his coffee before continuing.

“He doesn’t listen,” Marc said to Billy Kessinger and Jonathan Sparkman. Even though they were both Andrew’s friends, Marc felt comfortable talking to Billy and Jonathan about him. “Either that or he’s confused. Or maybe he’s lying.”

Billy interrupted him. “I don’t think so, Marc. Andrew has never lied to us. And he doesn’t seem confused either. He explained to us very clearly what happened, and your story doesn’t match up.”

“Yes, it does,” Marc protested. “I said I didn’t necessarily want to go out, not that I wouldn’t. When he saw me at the party he freaked out. I tried to explain to him that I simply changed my mind, but he wouldn’t listen.”

Jonathan waited patiently for his opportunity to speak. He was more reserved than Billy and enjoyed watching people interact. He figured that was why he had such an extensive movie collection.

Finally, Jonathan spoke up: “What about the state test? You told your boss you passed it, but you really didn’t.”

“That’s true, but later I told him the truth. I was just so embarrassed I couldn’t tell him that day.”

“You also told us you hated Andrew,” Jonathan pressed, “and he said you denied it.”

Marc paused for a moment. “I never said that I hated Andrew. I just hate how he has been acting lately. Again, he misconstrued what was said. Andrew and I have been friends for six years, but sometimes he jumps to conclusions when he hears things from people. If he would simply talk to me, we could work these problems out together.”

Billy and Jonathan looked at each other. There was one more incident to clear up.

“Marc, where were you going that night?” Billy asked.

“Oh, that. I was merely blowing off steam. Why was Andrew following me, anyway?”

“He said he was following you to pick something up from your house,” Jonathan said.

“But he never said that,” replied Marc. “I said goodbye to him at the party and left. I never saw him get in his car or start following me. He probably confused that night with one of his dreams again. You know how he can do that sometimes.”

“Yeah, I guess he does,” Billy conceded. “But you’ve never talked to him about that night?”

Marc shook his head. “He won’t even talk to me anymore. He just wanders around muttering to himself. Now I know he hates me, but frankly, I’m a little worried about Andrew. I don’t know if it’s the stress, but he’s definitely cracking.”

Matthew Kingston walked into the break room and stopped. He looked as if he wasn’t sure whether he was coming in to work that day or not. His shorts and T-shirt clashed with his black dress shoes and expensive watch. “Yanz, I’ve been looking for you. Is my dry cleaning done yet?”

Marc stood up quickly and wiped his hands on his shirt, crumbs falling to the floor. Marc’s new clothes were already starting to look tighter, Matthew thought. The kid needs more work and less snack breaks.

“Yes sir,” Marc said. “As soon as I finish my coffee, I’ll go get it.”

“Hurry it up. I have to give that presentation tonight and I need that suit.” Matthew turned and walked out. Billy thought he heard him say something about students on his way.

“I gotta go guys. Did I clear everything up for you?” Marc asked.

“Yeah,” Billy said. “We’ll keep a closer eye on Andrew.”

“You do that. Keep a real good eye on Andrew Calderon.” Marc nearly ran out of the room.

In the executive conference room down the hall, Russell Colin stood at the head of the table. He was the manager of the Power Management division at the Washington Area Power Alliance, or WAPA. Its less than 50 employees were housed in a small, one story building right outside of Seattle. Jonathan Sparkman and Andrew Calderon worked in Colin’s department, but he loathed them as much as the rest of the students.

As far as the students were concerned, Colin was just a fat, blubbering fool. Where most people had pictures of their family, Colin put up framed certificates of his favorite stocks. What irritated him the most was when other people tried to show him pictures of their children. “I don’t even have pictures of my own kids,” he would say before they ran off. “What makes you think I want to see yours?”

To Colin’s left sat Melissa Rosenblatt, the pushy Human Resources manager with a beak for a nose. She prided herself on keeping the employees at WAPA safe at all costs, but really she was more of a necessary annoyance. Melissa’s crowning achievement at WAPA was a program called Safety Points, designed to reward employees for safe behavior.

Across from her was the Dispatch and Scheduling manager, Peter Pendleton. He was an ex-sailor, discharged after being diagnosed with scurvy. He barely paid attention during meetings, instead picking at an orange he always seemed to have in his pocket.

At the far end of the table, the general manager sat staring lazily back at Colin. Even looking half-asleep, Philip Wolcott would catch more than the rest of the managers combined. His beady eyes recorded everything, and his ears picked up conversations down the hall or across a crowded room.

Today Colin was presenting a new cost-savings program. Wolcott was always trying to cut costs to stay competitive in the energy market, and sometimes managers had excellent ideas for saving money. Colin's, however, always seemed to entail cutting student benefits.

“As you can see from this chart, if we take away the students' vacation time, our total expenditures will drop .0001 percent.” The managers around the table squinted to see a difference in the perfectly horizontal line. Even Wolcott's eyes narrowed to see the distinction.

Colin took the opportunity to grab something off the tray on the counter. He accidentally picked up a carrot, dropped it, and then grabbed a buffalo wing.

The general manager was the first to speak up. “I don't see anything, Russell.”

“Oh, Mr. Wolcott, I'm sorry sir,” he mumbled with his fingers still in his mouth. He pulled them out, along with a bone he had just licked clean. “Ten times magnification please.”

Tiffany Schindler, Colin's beautiful administrative assistant, hit a button on the laptop. The image zoomed in to reveal the tiniest dip in the expenditure line.

“Now you can clearly see the savings.”

“Very well, Russell. If that's the best we can do this quarter, so be it.” Wolcott stood up. “Meeting adjourned.” He walked out of the room. A slight grin sneaked onto Colin's face. He couldn't wait to see the students when they heard about this.

Andrew Calderon didn't notice the E-mail from Russell Colin explaining that any remaining vacation time for students would be forfeited in 30 days. He had other things to complain about.

“That liar,” he said. “Marc never said he didn't feel like going out; he said he wasn't going out.”

“That's really a minor point, Andrew,” Billy said. “Maybe he changed his mind.”

“He didn’t change his mind. He lied.”

“Andrew, what does it matter?”

“It matters because everything he says is a lie. He lied about the party, the state test, hating me, and especially that night.”

“Andrew, are you sure you ever talked to Marc about that night? He said you never discussed it,” Jonathan said.

“Yes, I remember being at the restaurant with Marc. I don’t remember exactly how he phrased it, but I certainly remember the point.”

“It’s just so ridiculous. It seems hard to believe Marc would really say something like that.”

Billy looked to see if anyone else was around before speaking. The three students had crammed into Andrew’s cube; Andrew sat in his chair, while Billy and Jonathan sat on the desk on either side of him. All around them was the constant sound of phone conversations and fingers clicking on keyboards. The desk was littered with unfinished documents, pushed into piles by those looking for sitting space. The real estate on top of Andrew’s monitor held the pride of his cubicle: enough Star Wars collectibles to give one to each employee in the office.

“Are you sure you didn’t just dream the whole thing?” Billy asked. “You have been under a lot of stress lately, and sometimes you have strange dreams.”

“No, I didn’t dream it.” Now Andrew was getting angry. “I think I know the difference between reality and a dream. I don’t remember the exact words, but I’m sure it happened. I was there, and he was sitting across from me...our food was cold...and...and the doors flew open.” Andrew smacked his forehead with his palm. “No, that didn’t happen. Quit it!”

Billy and Jonathan each moved a few inches away from Andrew. He looked at them, desperation in his eyes. “Marc always finds a way to explain his lies. I thought at least you two would believe me.”

“Calm down, Andrew. Billy and I are worried about you, that’s all. Maybe you need to take a nice, long vacation.”

“I don’t need a vacation!” Andrew yelled.

Russell Colin stopped in front of Andrew’s cube. The expression on his face was like a child at Disneyland. “Better take it while you still can. Otherwise quit chatting and get back to work.” He waddled off down the hall, chuckling about student vacations.

The three students exchanged confused looks before Andrew spun around in his chair to open his E-mail.

Andrew left work fuming. Maybe the guys were right; maybe he did need a vacation from work, especially Marc Yanz. He jumped in his car and stepped on it.

Marc watched from the window as Andrew's car screeched out of the parking lot. I wish I could help him, Marc thought. He used to be so normal, so calm. He's getting worse every day.

At home, Andrew sat down on his bed and grabbed a book off the shelf. After a few pages, he began to yawn and couldn't concentrate anymore. He put down the book and closed his eyes.

Andrew saw Marc from across the room. He was getting his jacket and umbrella from the closet. Great, Andrew thought; he's leaving without saying goodbye again. Andrew grabbed his best friend, Jim, and ran over to Marc, nearly knocking over the host on the way.

"You going home Marc?" Andrew asked.

"Yeah."

"Hey, can we follow you and get that book I left over there? I need it to study for my midterm on Tuesday."

"Sure, whatever." Marc said. He turned and walked out.

Andrew and Jim made their apologies for leaving early and ran after him. Marc hardly seemed to realize they were following him; he had already pulled out as they reached their car. Instead of heading toward his house, he got on the freeway going the opposite direction and sped past the few cars on the road.

"Where does he think he's going?" Jim asked. He was a big guy who never particularly liked Marc. That sometimes made it difficult for Andrew to throw parties with them both there.

"I don't know," Andrew replied, "but he sure is in a hurry. Let's pull up next to him and see if he slows down."

When Marc saw Andrew and Jim, his head nearly hit the ceiling. He accelerated and cut them off, then swerved over to the slow lane and got off the freeway. Andrew stayed behind him, hoping there weren't any cops around. When they got to the street, Marc pulled over into the first parking lot and hopped out of his car.

"What the hell are you doing?"

Andrew smiled as he said, “We were hoping you could get us a deal on that prostitute you frequent around here.”

Marc did not look amused.

“Actually, we were following you to get that book from your house,” Andrew said. “Remember? We asked you about it a few minutes ago.”

“Oh. Whatever.” Marc climbed back into his car and led them back to his apartment.

When Andrew and Jim got out of the car, Marc held up his hand.

“Wait there. I’ll go get it.”

“Fine. We’ll wait here.” Jim was starting to get annoyed.

Marc reemerged a few minutes later with Andrew’s book. He gave it to them and walked back over to his car.

“Thanks, Marc,” Andrew called after him.

Marc got into his car and sped off.

The rest of the drive home, Andrew and Jim argued over where he might have been going.

“Maybe he was going to a strip club.”

Jim shook his head at Andrew’s guess. “I don’t think so. He was probably going to get a midnight snack, the pudgy bastard.”

“Well, what do you really think? Don’t hold back on me,” Andrew said and laughed at his friend. After a moment the smile faded from his face. “I honestly don’t know,” he said at last.

It wasn’t until months later that Marc was willing to talk about it. “You can never tell a soul what I am about to tell you,” he whispered as he leaned across the table in their favorite restaurant. The light above their small booth was dim, and their server gave them a funny look as she walked by. Andrew realized they looked like they were going to kiss.

They ignored her and Andrew stared at Marc, waiting for his explanation. Marc took his lack of response as acceptance to maintain secrecy.

“Alright, here goes. Sometimes I make deliveries for my uncle.”

“At midnight?”

Marc looked patiently at Andrew, deciding how much to tell him. “They’re for his meetings the next day.”

Andrew continued to stare at him. “I must be missing something.”

“Andrew, my uncle has ties to the Swedish mafia. Now, they’re not really picky, but they prefer Krispy Kremes.”

Andrew nearly lost it. “You mean to tell me you deliver donuts to the Swedish mafia?” He couldn’t keep from laughing any longer. “That’s the funniest joke you’ve told yet.”

“I’m serious, Andrew.”

“Sure Marc. If you don’t want to tell me what you were doing, that’s fine. But you don’t have to lie to me.”

Andrew stood up and began walking to the door. Time seemed to slow as the door flew open. Four men with blond hair and machine guns stepped through, pointing their weapons at Andrew. He spun around, the room swirling. He stopped and Marc slowly materialized through the haze, pointing a surprisingly small gun at him.

“I told you I was serious.” Marc pulled the trigger.

Andrew bolted upright in bed and wiped the sweat from his forehead. Everything except the last part was how he remembered that night. Sometimes he had to remind himself there were no machine guns and that Marc never shot him. Andrew had walked through the door without any trouble, but after that night he never trusted Marc again, and their relationship had gone steadily downhill.

The final straw had come when Andrew caught Marc in his biggest lie yet.

“Three people told me you hated me,” Andrew had said to Marc over the phone.

“I never said that Andrew. Once again, you have come to the wrong conclusion about my feelings toward you.”

“No. Forget you. We’re through.”

“Is there nothing I can do to save our friendship?”

“We’re not friends. Stop saying we’re friends. You hate me!” Andrew yelled and slammed the phone on the receiver.

The next day at work, Marc walked up to Andrew with a piece of paper in his hands.

“Andrew, I want you to sign this. That is, if you were serious about us.”

He handed the paper to Andrew, which he immediately began reading:

Dissolution of Friendship

This dissolution, to be signed on this date by Marc Yanz and Andrew Calderon, hereby nullifies any friendship, brotherhood, or other ties, whether informal or formal, between the parties.

Whereas Mr. Calderon feels that he can no longer trust Mr. Yanz.

Whereas Mr. Yanz can no longer certify the mental stability of Mr. Calderon.

Whereas, on account of disputes between the parties, the two have decided to take different paths through this life.

Witnesseth as follows:

- 1) The parties hereby agree to dissolve the friendship between them.*
- 2) The parties hereby agree to stay a reasonable distance from each other.*
- 3) The parties hereby agree not to speak to one another or try in any way to contact, harm, or distress the other.*

Andrew stopped reading and glared at Marc. “What is this crap?”

“Protection from you,” Marc replied.

“Fine, I won’t talk to you or go near you.”

“I’d rather have a signed contract.”

“Then sign it.” Andrew ripped the contract in half, threw it at Marc, and walked off.

Still alone in his room, Andrew laughed. Whereas, witnesseth, hereunto. “I have to stop thinking about that guy,” he said to himself. Andrew sighed and looked out the window. The sun had just finished its descent over the horizon, leaving a reddish glow on the otherwise darkened sky.

The following morning, Andrew’s boss gave him a new project. Bruce Swanson wasn’t the type of supervisor to keep Andrew busy, so when Andrew got an assignment, he knew it was important. Bruce explained that this project would involve more than usual.

“It should only take a few weeks, and once you’re finished, I want you to present it to our department.”

“Sure thing, boss. I doubt there will be any problems.”

Andrew didn't count on Melissa Rosenblatt, however. The Human Resources manager was always harassing WAPA's employees. If it wasn't Safety Points or employee surveys, it was something else.

Today was no exception. At 2:30 the fire alarm went off. The lemmings in the cubes around Andrew got up and filed toward the nearest exit. Andrew banged his head in frustration on his keyboard and then resumed working. A minute later, Melissa ran by and stopped in front of Andrew's cube.

"What are you doing? The building's on fire! Get out of here now!"

"You know, I think you're right. I was trying to place that unmistakable smell of Smores. The fire must already be to the break room."

"Move it now, Andrew!"

He opened his mouth but quickly thought better of it. He stood up, grabbed a handful of his Star Wars collectibles, and shuffled toward the door. Melissa kept right behind him, hurrying him along with her threats of a fiery demise.

Outside, Andrew waited in the parking lot while Wolcott's executive assistant, April Cushman, took roll. He muttered something about full-timers when she called Russell Colin before him, then laughed as he realized they didn't bother to put students on the fire alarm roll call.

Marc watched as Andrew came out of the building minutes after everyone else, clutching some toys from his cubicle and talking to himself. Marc shook his head at his old friend and turned to talk to his boss.

After a few minutes Melissa addressed the crowd. "Good job, people. We only had one straggler who would have been very sorry in a real emergency."

A few people turned to look at Andrew, who seemed to be acting out a scene from Return of the Jedi. Melissa ignored him.

"Now before you go back in, be sure to grab one of the Emergency Action Plan Summaries. It will reiterate what to do in case there is an actual fire in the building."

Two weeks later, Andrew finished preparing for his presentation. He scheduled a meeting for the following day and arranged for coffee and muffins to be served. In the morning, Andrew came in two hours early to set up and rehearse his speech. He stood at the head of the table, staring into the light of the projector, and went through the entire presentation. He was ready.

While he was waiting for the meeting to start, Andrew had a snack in the break room and checked his E-mail. Five minutes before the start of the meeting, his entire department began wandering into the conference room. Andrew welcomed them and invited them to a muffin and a chair. He waited for everyone to get settled before starting.

“Good morning. Today I am going to present the latest market research on power fluctuations and variances in the Northwest. My presentation is in PowerPoint, so let me open the file here.”

Andrew clicked on the file and an error message popped up:

“An error has occurred. This file appears to be corrupt.”

“What the hell is this?” Andrew clicked the file again as his heart began to beat faster. The same message appeared on the screen and a murmur started around the table. Russell Colin appeared to be chuckling.

“I expected a little more from you, even if you are a student,” Colin said.

Andrew started getting upset. “It was working a little while ago,” he growled.

Bruce Swanson tried to comfort his student. “Andrew, we believe you. It just looks like your file got whacked. We can try again tomorrow, if you’d like.”

Andrew’s eyes widened at Bruce’s suggestion.

Whacked.

Marc.

Andrew was halfway to Marc’s cubicle before the thought finished floating to the top of his brain. It had to be Marc; no one else would sabotage him. No one else hated him so much.

Marc was surprised to see Andrew heading straight for him. Maybe he finally wants to patch things up, he thought.

“What did you do to my presentation?” Andrew asked.

“What are you talking about?”

“You know what I’m talking about. I leave for ten minutes and you go in there and...and destroy my file.”

“Andrew, I’ve been sitting at my desk all morning.”

“Oh, like I’m going to believe that. You lie about everything. Why should I believe you about this?”

“I don’t lie. And you wouldn’t know anyway since you never talk to me yourself. You just go by rumors and believe what other people say.”

“You want to talk about it? Fine. Let’s talk about it.”

Andrew pulled up a chair from another cubicle and sat down next to Marc. For the next 15 minutes, he accused Marc of lying about nearly everything he had ever said. Marc denied all of his accusations, shocked at how confused Andrew was. Some of the things Andrew had heard correctly but misinterpreted; others he simply imagined.

Finally, Andrew dropped the big one: “So, where were you going when Jim and I followed you?”

“That’s none of your business.”

“Then how come you told me that night at the restaurant?”

“What night at the restaurant? I never told you where I was going.”

“Yes, you did. You were dropping off donuts to the Swedish mafia.”

“I never said that, Andrew.”

“Well I clearly remember you saying just that.”

“You must have misunderstood me.”

“Well, I’m not sure how, because you said, ‘Sometimes I deliver donuts to the Swedish mafia.’ At least, I think you used the word mafia. Maybe it was ‘mob’ or ‘organized crime,’ but I definitely got the idea.”

“That’s ridiculous. Listen to yourself. You’re nuts. We’ve never even talked about it until now.”

“We haven’t?” Andrew yelled at him. “I remember the whole thing, even the part where you shot...I mean, I left you there.”

“Andrew, you need professional help. If you are imagining things, maybe you should talk to a doctor.”

“I’m not crazy!” Andrew climbed up on Marc’s desk to yell down at him. “You’re probably going to have me whacked anyway, like my file! I’m gonna be wearing cement shoes by the end of the week! I guess I’ll know for sure if I find a dead fish on my

doorstep!” He jumped off the desk and ran down the hall. Marc leaned back in his chair, eyes wide in amazement and fear.

Bruce Swanson didn't know what to think. Andrew had finished telling him of Marc's alleged involvement in the Swedish mafia. At first he thought Andrew was joking, but as the story went on, he realized Andrew actually believed it. He doesn't seem like the type to make this up, Bruce thought, but the Swedish mafia? There must be some mistake.

Andrew spent a majority of the day informing his coworkers of Marc's mafia ties. Most of them looked at him like he was crazy, but Andrew ignored their response. He knew he had to warn them, whether they believed it or not. It was for their protection.

Marc kept track of who Andrew talked to and paid each one a follow up visit. “You don't really believe I'm in the mafia, do you?” Marc asked Bruce shortly after Andrew had left.

Bruce studied him and shook his head. “No. I'm still not sure why Andrew would say that, but I can't honestly believe you are in the Swedish mafia.” The rest of his coworkers had about the same response, and by the end of the day, Marc had everything straightened out.

Within a few days, the office had mostly forgotten about the incident. A few people were still giving Andrew strange looks, but he didn't seem to notice.

That week, Peter Pendleton called a meeting for the Dispatch and Scheduling department. Marc was eager to take a break from his work and was the first to get to the meeting. When Peter arrived, he saw Marc and called him over.

“Here's twenty bucks kid. Go pick up some Krispy Kremes. You know how we sailors like donuts,” he said in his thick, east coast accent.

Marc thought about refusing, but remembered his primary responsibility was to keep his superiors happy. He swore under his breath and stalked out of the conference room.

Just as Marc was walking back up to WAPA's front door with three boxes of Krispy Kremes, Andrew walked out. Andrew's eyes grew as big as the chocolate glazed donuts in the box Marc was holding.

“It's cool, Andrew. It's not what it looks like,” Marc said.

“Get out of my way, Mafioso!” Andrew yelled and pushed him to the side.

Marc recovered his footing and watched as Andrew ran out to his car and sped away. He considered going after him, but instead took the donuts to the meeting. The dispatchers swarmed over the donuts, cramming them into their mouths. After a few bites, they turned on Marc. “Hey, what's going on here?” his boss asked. “These donuts are stale.” Marc shrugged and walked away. Suddenly he didn't feel like avoiding work anymore.

Strolling up to the 16th precinct of the Seattle Police Department, Andrew smiled. He finally had enough evidence to turn Marc in.

Officers Lasley and Madsen weren't so sure. "You mean to tell me he's making a delivery now?" Lasley asked.

The officers looked at each other in disbelief as Andrew insisted Marc was up to something mob-related. "Maybe some of the others at work are in the mob, like Peter Pendleton and Russell Colin. Yeah, that makes sense. WAPA is only a front for mob activity." Madsen shrugged and said, "We might as well go check it out. Sounds like there are donuts. Come on, kid." Andrew sat at the table, counting off names on his fingers. "Hey kid, let's go."

Andrew looked up at the officers, his face expressionless. "Yes, of course. You'll need backup."

Five minutes later the sound of police sirens filled the air surrounding WAPA. The two officers marched into the building and took a right in the front entryway, searching for Marc Yanz. The drones, bewildered by the scene, stared as they hauled Marc off in handcuffs.

Back at the station, Marc was escorted through the more traditional post-arrest activities, including the heat lamp interrogation.

"Since when is donut trafficking a crime?" he asked the officers seated across from him.

"Well, it's not so much the donuts as your involvement with Swedish organized crime we're concerned about."

"The Swedish mob? Is that what Andrew told you?"

"We have our sources," Madsen said.

"Well, nobody's ever heard of the Swedish mob. It's absurd. And why were you listening to a crazy man? Haven't you seen how he acts? You should be locking him up."

"Hey," Lasley said, "we're not arresting anybody. We just want to ask you a few routine questions and then we'll let you go."

Marc stormed out of the police station a full hour later. On his way back to work, a familiar voice in his head nearly sent him flying off the road. Marc jerked the wheel and stabilized his car. Then it spoke again: "Marc, don't ignore me. Let's talk."

"Who are you?" he asked frantically. Marc turned to look in the back seat. It was empty.

“I am the Controller. You must prepare yourself, Marc. This may be a bit disturbing to you.”

“Prepare myself? For what?”

“To meet the others.”

“Others?” Marc asked.

“Yes, Marc. Your other personalities.”

“No!” He shouted. “It can’t be!”

“Of course it can. Why do you think you have those gaps in your memory? Why do people accuse you of things you haven’t done? Why does Andrew think you are a liar?”

“But, but Andrew’s crazy!”

Marc wasn’t sure what was more disturbing: the sound the laughter made as it echoed through his head, or the fact that this voice, this Controller, was laughing at him. Finally the noise subsided.

“First, I would like you to meet the Troublemaker.”

The voice that spoke next was his own, but somehow different. Its speech patterns and attitude were foreign to Marc. His knuckles gripped on the steering wheel and he looked at himself nervously in the rear view mirror.

“Hey buddy,” it said to him. “Fan of my work, are ya?”

“I don’t know,” Marc said cautiously, “What have you done?”

“Well, among other things, I really trashed Andrew’s presentation last week. Killer, huh?”

“Hey! Andrew was really pissed about that!”

“Yeah, that was great.” The voice seemed to be enjoying this too much.

“That’s enough, Trouble,” the Controller said. “Now let’s meet Mr. Moody.”

“No! Marc shouted. I don’t want to meet any more personalities! Why are you doing this to me?”

“This is our time, Marc. We need to work together, because together we are invincible! We will rule the world, but first we must destroy Andrew Calderon. Now reach under your seat.”

Marc put his hand under his seat and clamped onto something cold. It’s sleek, silver barrel looked strangely familiar to him. Yes, he thought. This is my gun. And I have used it before.

Marc threw open the front door at WAPA and marched straight for Andrew’s cube. On the way he pulled the fire alarm on the nearest wall. Dozens of well-trained employees filed past him toward their designated exits.

He, or rather the Controller, was counting on Andrew lagging behind in a fire drill. It was right. Andrew sat facing his desk, seemingly unaware of the alarm buzzing. It’s so loud, Marc thought. How can he just sit there and work?

Marc raised his arm and pointed the gun at Andrew’s head. He started to pull the trigger, but suddenly the room was spinning.

Feeling a little dazed, Marc shook his head and looked around. Immediately he noticed Andrew Calderon working at his desk. An alarm buzzed loudly, making it hard to think. He was pointing a gun straight at Andrew’s head.

The voice spoke again: “Pull the trigger, Marc. Do it for you. Do it for us.”

“What? No,” he said to the voice. Andrew spun around in his chair and jumped backward, his chair bumping his desk.

He swore at Marc. “You scared the piss out of me. What the hell do you think you are doing with that fake gun?”

As Andrew watched Marc, he began to think it wasn’t a fake. Normally fake guns are plastic, he thought. That looks like metal. Marc’s face began twisting up, as if he were in pain. He blinked several times and then opened his eyes. Now there was no doubt; he could see it in Marc’s eyes. It was a real gun, and Marc was going to kill him.

Andrew leapt to the side as Marc advanced toward him and pulled the trigger. The shot stunned both of them, making the fire alarm sound like soft elevator music. The bullet went through Andrew’s chair and into his desk, leaving a small cloud of chair stuffing floating in the air. As he fell, Andrew remembered where he had seen the gun before. It was the same gun Marc used to kill him in his dream.

Outside, Melissa Rosenblatt looked up from her roll sheet to listen for that popping sound. It was almost like a firecracker, she thought. Probably something exploding from the fire. I will tell the fire department to be careful when they get here.

As if she had willed them, the big red fire truck pulled into the small parking lot, complete with sirens and firemen hanging off the sides.

Melissa nodded as she looked at her watch. Exactly two minutes, 13 seconds. Everything was going according to plan. If only she could figure out why she felt like she was forgetting something. Or someone. But everyone on the roll call was there. She scanned the crowd, looking for something to jog her memory. She stopped on Billy Kessinger and Jonathan Sparkman. Of course. Andrew. Ignoring the shouts from the firemen setting up, she ran toward the building, casting her clipboard to the side.

Andrew hit the ground and rolled up onto his feet. Before Marc could fire again, Andrew was on top of him, trying to wrestle the gun away. They slammed into Andrew's desk, causing his Star Wars toys to fall from their perch and scatter on the floor. Andrew managed to get both of his hands on the small gun and was trying to force it away from his face. Marc was breathing heavily and straining to maintain his advantage.

Suddenly Marc kicked Andrew's legs out and they both fell to the ground. Andrew landed with a thud and groaned as Marc hit him a split-second later. Andrew thought Marc's weight could account for that cracking he heard come from his ribs.

Marc had a better grip on the gun now and was getting the barrel closer to Andrew's body. Andrew grunted and pushed the gun down toward his feet. At that instant, Marc pulled the trigger again.

Andrew howled in pain as the bullet ripped through his flesh. He wondered if he would ever be able to use that leg again. I have to survive to find out, he thought. In desperation he flung himself over, rolling Marc and landing on the other side of him. He screamed again as he landed on his leg.

Down the hall, Melissa heard the yelling and picked up the pace. Two big firefighters followed her in full gear. They rounded a corner and arrived at Andrew's cube. The scene was disturbing.

Andrew and Marc were on the ground, along with Andrew's toys. The floor itself was covered with blood that was squirting from Andrew's leg. Marc didn't appear hurt, although somewhat tired. Andrew was crouching over Marc, forcing a gun toward his face.

Melissa almost lost her footing as the firemen plowed through her on their way to help. They practically dove at Andrew, causing him to scream again, and knocked the gun away. Each firefighter pinned one of the boys to the ground. Melissa exhaled and let go of her dress.

As they took Marc away in the police car, Melissa came up to Andrew, who was being loaded into an ambulance.

“Fortunately for you, enough people saw Marc walk down the hallway with the gun. Otherwise, I doubt anybody would have believed you.” Andrew smiled at her.

“By the way, I told you...” she started to say.

Andrew cut her off. “I know. It just didn’t smell like Smores yet, so I thought I had a couple more minutes.”

Melissa laughed and walked away. She had a lot to explain to the 40 or so people milling around the parking lot.

Billy and Jonathan were standing nearby, piecing together what they knew and waiting to find out the rest. Andrew told them what he could before they closed the ambulance doors and drove away.

“As far as why he did it, I guess he was trying to cover up how much I know. After all, I did tell everyone his secret. I’m still not sure what is going to happen to him, though.”

They found out a few days later. Andrew picked up the phone on the second ring.

“Andrew, this is Officer Lasley of the Seattle Police Department. My partner and I originally took your case about Marc Yanz.”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Son, I would like you to meet me over at this address to speak with Dr. Nathan Morton. He has some information about Marc he would like to share with you.”

Andrew wrote down the address and thanked the officer. On his way out the door he grabbed Billy and Jonathan. Luckily, the bullet didn’t do too much damage to Andrew’s leg, and he would be fine in a few months. In the meantime, he had to manage with a cast and crutches. It was slow going, but finally he climbed into the back seat of Billy’s car and stretched out. He breathed heavily from the walk, every breath a blow to his two cracked ribs.

After an hour of driving in the rain, they pulled up to a gray, three-story building and parked in one of the visitor spots. To Andrew, the building looked like a cross between a castle and an old, abandoned warehouse. The windows on the upper floors had bars on them, and Andrew pictured what it would look like with a moat and arrow slits in the walls. Andrew shivered under his big rain coat as they walked past the sign out front:

“Welcome to the Washington State Government Hospital for the Criminally Insane”

Inside they were escorted to Dr. Morton’s office, where Officer Lasley was already waiting for them.

“Glad you boys could make it. How are you feeling, Andrew?”

“Oh, much better, thank you. I mean, I can’t feel my leg with all these pain killers I’m on. And I’ve never had a friend go criminally insane before, but otherwise I’m good.”

The door to Dr. Morton’s office opened and an old man with patches of white hair on his head stepped out. He looked perfect for a role as a mad scientist, Andrew thought. He fits right in around here.

“Hello boys. I’m Dr. Morton,” the man said in a slow, calculated voice. “About your friend. Let’s walk, shall we?”

Dr. Morton waited until they had passed through several corridors before stopping in front of what looked like a door to a vault.

“Boys, your friend is very ill. After he was taken to the police station, his mental condition became unstable. They brought him here when he began claiming he was the ‘Chosen One’ and had the power to change the color of certain objects.”

“Oh my god,” Andrew said, “I had no idea.”

“I’m sure you had noticed,” Dr. Morton continued, “that your friend seems to lie a lot and that his mood swings are quite abrupt. Well, that is only seemingly the case. When he rapidly changes from lively to lethargic, it is more likely a personality shift than a mere mood swing. Some of his personalities are quite friendly and even tell the truth. Others, however, are angry, depressed, or just make up things to fill in the gaps in their memory. That is how he can lie without even knowing it.”

“So he has Multiple Personality Disorder?” Andrew asked.

“Yes, but that is only the beginning. At least one of his personalities is bipolar, and I believe several others were showing symptoms of various mental deficiencies before he was driven completely insane. One of his personalities, calling itself the ‘Controller,’ introduced the rest of them to each other. It also plotted to kill you and then rule the world. That is how it got the rest of the personalities to try to murder you.”

Andrew took a step back, stunned. Billy and Jonathan grabbed his arms to support him. He looked as if he was going to throw up. “No, I’m fine,” he managed. Dr. Morton studied him for a moment.

“Would you boys like to see your friend one last time?”

Andrew nodded reluctantly and Dr. Morton showed them to a small window in the door behind him. Andrew, Billy, and Jonathan squeezed together to get a look inside.

Five miles from WAPA, Officer Madsen kicked open the door of Marc Yanz's upscale apartment. The sickening stench of decay consumed him and instinctively he lifted a hand to cover his nose and mouth. Flies buzzed around the room like it was a garbage dump. One side of the room was bare and looked as if it was regularly cleaned. The other side, however, held the biggest pile of trash, electronic equipment, pornographic magazines, and various other household items Madsen had ever seen. It was as if a giant bulldozer had pushed everything from the apartment to this particular spot.

Madsen stood in the doorway for a full minute before recovering himself. This kid seemed so normal, he thought. Man, were we wrong about him. He carefully stepped around the pile of trash and slowly pushed open the door to the bedroom. Once again, the officer froze in his tracks.

Krispy Kreme pictures lined the room like cheap wallpaper, and a big neon "Open" sign flashed in the window. In the middle of the room was a table, apparently designed to be a counter in the donut store. Behind that were hundreds of unopened Krispy Kreme boxes, stacked to the ceiling. A cardboard cutout of a man stood behind the table, and a box of Krispy Kremes sat in front of him next to a rolled up newspaper.

Madsen carefully nudged the newspaper. A fish rolled out and stopped at the edge of the counter, eyes staring back at him. The smell of rotting fish and old chocolate mingled in Madsen's nose. He barely made it to the restroom before losing his lunch.

Through the small window in the vault door, Andrew, Billy, and Jonathan could see that the room was covered with mattresses. There was no furniture and the boys were staring through the only window. A single light hung from the ceiling, barely illuminating the room. Marc sat directly underneath the light, his legs balled up to his chest and his arms surrounding them. He was rocking back and forth.

"No uncle, I'm sorry. I don't know what happened to them. No, I didn't eat them. No!" he screamed and fell silent, his head in his knees.

"The controller seems to have lost his hold on Marc's personalities," Dr. Morton said from behind them. "The shiftings are quite frequent now."

When Marc looked back up, he was crying. "I'm sorry Andrew. Please forgive me. I didn't mean to shoot you. Oh, please don't die!"

Andrew turned away from the window as Marc shifted again. The boys could still hear his maniacal laughter as they ran out the front entrance and back to the car.

The cold rain pounding on the roof was the only sound on the long ride home, drowning out the echoes still ringing in their ears.