

# The 2020 Event

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# The 2020 Event

## |The Main Event|

Hunter Owens Wallace

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Any and all resemblance to Reality is purely coincidental.

• • •

In other words, it's just words. It's not real. Get a grip.

**The 2020 Event**  
**|The Main Event|**

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*To The Hillside Commons*

## Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank the strange life I am currently living.  
It has taught me, beyond any reasonable doubt,  
that reality is the greatest fiction ever scribed.

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# Chapter 0

# Prologue

## Ambitious Monkey Lads

First, there was nothing. Then, there was everything. Now, there is anything. We all repeatedly choose between these three on an everlasting basis; the culmination of our choices brings us to what we know as right here and right now, the present moment. Here we are... but where the hell are we?

Earth: a huge, yet relatively small planet compared to what else is out there. It's really nothing special. It has dirt, a large body of water, a greatly unimpressive history, and some more dirt. For the past couple thousand years or so, some *very* ambitious monkey lads who assume they've reached their evolutionary pinnacle have obviously ruled over the planet with a cancerous fist, pulling resources and slinging their waste wherever they go all for the sake of a specific variety of shiny rock the monkey lads at some point decided to label not only as *gold*, but also as *valuable*. And *important*. You see, these monkeys humbly started as a backdrop species of nomadic hunters and gatherers, quietly traveling the plains in tribes as they followed herds of undomesticated livestock wherever they roamed. It was a simple time; one would eat, sleep, shit, fuck, occasionally smoke herbs, and that was life. It was brilliant... until the child of the leader of one of these tribes cried out, "Don't wanna keep moving. We build cave of wood instead."

The child was banished immediately, exiled to wander the wilderness alone for the rest of its days without so much as a spear to gank a deer with. Despite the veritable rag stuffed down the child's throat, its cry was heard; others supported this monkey, the ex-child of the grouchy leader nobody really loved anyway, and eventually these wannabe settlers got kicked out of the tribe too. But, once they found the original rebel child, who had hidden itself down in the one part of the one valley where the sun rarely shines, they joined forces and founded what they believed was the first town ever, which amounted to little more than a collection of wooden huts surrounding a stone well in a clearing in some forest.

How'd they get the well? One of the monkeys saw it in a dream after they ate a weird, almost penis-looking thing that was growing from one of the many pies that fell from the asses of their livestock, and then they got everyone together and built it. *Duh*. Didn't even take too long, and the maintenance was only slightly inconvenient. Everyone shared the burden to make it more bearable.

After some time, the existence of this town would lead to the adoption of an agricultural lifestyle by the entire species, more or less. Some chose not to evolve, but, well, natural selection works in mysterious ways.

With homesteading firmly under their homemade leather belts, these *slightly* less uncivilized bipedal things went through a few rounds of *industrialization*, a process in which work becomes a way of life. Thanks to luck and not much else, two or three of our monkey lads invented tools that did a lot of work in a little bit of time so long as said tools were constantly operated by a human. Then, one of them invented a strategy called *mass production* and the results of that luck were suddenly available to everyone – for a certain arbitrary amount of gold, that is. More concisely, for a *price*.

Here's the thing, though: the industrial tools must be operated, and operating said tools makes one *dirty*. The monkeys who started the whole *gold* thing? They didn't want the poor monkeys to muddle up their precious *prettyprettyshinyshiny*, so they expanded the financial family a little bit by inventing something called a *dollar*. A dollar is a physical metaphor for gold, but instead of being shiny and a rock, it's dull and made of green paper.

So basically, it's a leaf.

As our monkey marauders went about expanding their little town, they took the idea of a dollar and fuckin' ran with it, allowing their minds to become warped around an idea called *Dollarism*. The rules of this *-ism* are simple: broken down to the barest of bones, the goal of your life is to actively transmute your time on Earth into either gold or gold's less shiny, papery cousin; whoever dies with the coolest toys and most metaphorical rocks wins!

What do they win? Death in a big hut, of course, surrounded by the remaining humans who still have something to gain in caring about them and accompanied by the notion that they probably could have done more for others while they were still alive.

Anywho, Dollarism isn't total horseshit! Its influence led to the development of what we know as modern-day Earth: a polluted and wheezing rock that is vastly overpopulated by the technologically overstimulated descendants of the original crazy monkey creatures. They're not even doing that bad for themselves, either – they took the idea of a *town* and evolved it into something called a *country*, which is basically a specific piece of land one might be born on. Those born on certain specific pieces of land are automatically better, faster, stronger, and in possession

of more dollars than those born on other specific pieces of land, but that's okay. On the whole, things could be worse. In fact, the monkeys are currently on their longest streak without holding a catastrophic worldwide deathmatch between the arbitrary countries they use to divide themselves up with in the past... actually, it depends on what will go down in the next few years. The history books they print up for their consumer bases will tell of either World War III or the Colder War, depending on which planet the buyer lives on. If there are planets left to live on, or a buyer to inhabit them, that is.

Regardless of the possibilities, as the human population began to sprout legs and lose its tail, the Dollarism idea chose a specific one of these "countries" to be its embodiment, the one true carrier of its pure and righteous ideals. This country became known as the United States of America, and it was, at one point, the top global superpower of Earth. Yes, the USA: the one country above all that could singlehandedly cause the most irreversible devastation if shit were to hit the fan on a global stage. *How super.*

So, as this modern US of 'Murica came into form, a certain *just unhinged enough* human grew and festered inside it, over time losing all patience towards his government's rules, regulations, and large swinging... *obelisk*. This growth led to the development of New Manhattan, a beaudious chunk of used plastic and space junk that was repurposed into an island cityscape off the coast of northern New Jersey. In this metropolis there are no rules, regulations, moral standards, or ethics – that means there's a whole lot of freedom. It's essentially a life-size open world sandbox video game, except you need billions of real-world dollars to enter – so pretty much it's a pay to win kinda thing. Once you're in, though, you either fly yourself out or you don't come out; this is for the sake of the towering doorless titanium wall surrounding the city. The United States' government wasn't exactly keen on a bunch of its wealthiest subjects doing as they pleased without paying up a share in levies, you see, and it made a single attempt to take a piece of the lawless Dollarific action of New Manhattan before the titanium wall was raised (and a few attempts after, too) but the attacks never amounted to much. Especially because roughly two years after New Manhattan was founded, the United States' government collapsed in on itself and all the arbitrarily defined states went from *united to untied* real quick.

But anyway, as rich and luscious as the history of New Manhattan is, that's not what you want to read. You don't want exposition and data! You want action, you want characters, you want a *story*. So, allow me to take you about one trillion miles in the opposite direction of New Manhattan, into the harsh coldness of deep space where there is a Colorado-size meteor hurling its way towards Earth at this very second.

## Bob The Meteor

So this meteor, let's call it, uh... *Bob*, has been traversing the infinite nothingness for quite some time now. It has been tracked by countless intelligent forms of life over the course of its life—... actually, scratch that. I guess you wouldn't call it a *life*. I certainly wouldn't, anyway. *Bob* is an inanimate object, after all. Okay, let me try again:

It has been tracked by countless intelligent forms of life over the course of its *existence*, all these higher beings worried that the rock would smash into their planets and cause, oh, y'know, one apocalyptic calamity or another. But *Bob* will never hit a planet; *Bob* is a supersmart meteor, it likes to scare the more advanced lifeforms, to get their blood pumping, to remind them that there is and always will be something out there that's bigger than them. Many lifeforms have tried to stop *Bob*, launching everything from rocks, missiles, energy beams, even blocking it with an entire moon once, but *Bob* keeps hurling along, totally undisturbed by all the pebbles tinkering off its surface.

Yes, from the great plainlands of planet Tlactrol to the hive-minded colonies of Marix drifting throughout the cosmos, *Bob* has spread feelings of cataclysmic horror, panic, and dread through the entire Universe ever since the moment of its creation; in fact, *Bob* knocked a Boolevarian weather monitoring satellite off its course just an hour ago! The poor bastards, their supplies of viscous lumpsap will surely freeze now that their televisions can't tell them how cold their troposphere will be tonight. Oh well; there are lifeforms out there with lives that *Bob* needs to jumble, it can't be focusing on the lives it's already touched.

Or anything, really. Because, you know... *inanimate meteor*.

Back to Earth now, there is one human whose life is about to get particularly jumbled. His name is Chuck Leary, and he is the CEO, president, and pretty much everything else of *Cape Enterprises, Unincorporated*, one economic body amongst the trillions operating inside the impenetrable New Manhattan. Today, instead of cruising around the city in a self-driving carpool hopped up on all kinds of Magic Mushrooms, Chuck is flying around the uppermost atmosphere of the planet in a little diddy (read: deathtrap with guns) he likes to call the *Id Mk II*.

The original *Id* (the *Id Mk I*) was a helicopter body equipped with seventeen jet engines instead of a propeller. It died tragically in a house(s) fire on Christmas Eve a few years back, so Chuck had a new one built with his bare leather wallet. The *Id Mk II* has nineteen jet engines, plus a propeller on its tail for the hell of it, yet it's still virtually impossible to fly... through the air. However, where there is no air resistance there is only propulsion, and the *Id Mk II* excels when propulsion is the only factor. But Chuck is not on a jaunt, this cosmic exploration does not have the purpose of gazing upon the trillions of glowing stars which light up that

mysterious infinite purplish-black thing Chuck found himself marinating in one day; our suited man has a mission, one bestowed upon him by a very close friend named Sigmund Durham. You see, there is a little-acknowledged fact about the space around Earth – it’s not just empty space. Much like the gigantic island of plastic junk floating in the Specific Ocean, there is a layer of spacey junk orbiting the Earth – broken satellites, spent fuel pods, functioning technology strategically placed by advanced lifeforms eons ago, rocks, functioning satellites – it’s all there, and it’s all extremely dangerous to any potential space traveler going to or from Earth. And this, to quote rocket scientist Sigmund Durham himself, “...is, like, a really, really big problem,” (Durham, 2019).

The *Id Mk II*, equipped with a cloaking feature to avoid the ensuing gossip from being spotted by the astronauts aboard any of the various intranational space stations, is also equipped with guns, big whomphus *blastabangbang* guns which shoot led, pure plasmic kinetic energy, and/or whatever the pilot can stuff down the barrels. One time in ‘012 before the government collapsed, Chuck filled the *Id Mk I*'s barrels with crumbled Cannabis flower buds wrapped in tobacco leaves, screaming the word *BLUNTDERBUS* at the top of his lungs as he unloaded on a group of protesting US Dollarists and politicians who weren’t being allowed into New Manhattan because they couldn’t afford to buy a way inside by themselves. It helped a lot to make the protest peaceful, if nothing else.

So, Chuck is flying around the last whiff of atmosphere between outer space and Planet Mediocrity, bobbing and weaving through traveling patches of debris as he sets his phasers to *decimate* and makes short labor of the few bits and pieces of cosmic litter devoid enough of motion to be shot. He’s more than merely *aware* that this is the interstellar equivalent of picking plastic bottles out of a landfill and throwing them into an incinerator, but Chuck keeps picking anyway. He needs to do this for Sigmund, literally; dude has as much say in the matter as Swimmy The Fish did regarding living in the vinegar inside the experimental exosuit that Chuck had Sigmund build to test how quickly vinegar could be transmuted into life-sustaining water. Rest in pickles, Swimmy The Fish.

Sigmund is a throat-plugger of the opinion that extraterrestrials (because the word *alien* is offensive) not only exist, but that they run rampant in the little star system we call home. He thinks the aliens never visit Earth because doing so is too dangerous, the risk it would take to break through the junkosphere would be far greater than the reward, whatever that reward may be.

So... yeah, here we are. Chuck is zipping around in shallow space destroying garbage as Sigmund monitors from beneath the earth beneath the plasti’spa’junk beneath the intersection of Rylitath and Golskap, a street corner where a man is about to get mugged by two overcoat-clad teenagers armed with flintlock pistols that shoot chipped microchip fragments and burnt roaches. Now what?

Chuck's comms click on, that's what.

"Hey uhh, hey Chuck."

"Yessir? How can I be of service, oh humble Escortair Of The Aliens?" said as seriously as he can manage.

"Very funny, but it's *extraterrestrials*. Show them some respect, they could be listening to us!"

Chuck's eyes look up at the ceiling of his craft while the rest of his head takes on a somewhat sullen scowl. "Sorry, *extrater-fucking-restrials*. So what's up?"

"I see something on your radar."

Chuck looks into the empty space around him, the emptiness of it all littered with fat chunks of metal, stone, and plastic. In other words, there's a whole lot of somethings out here.

"Do you mean the massive amount of shit you have me cleaning up? Because I don't need no radar to see all that."

"No, you don—"

"It's *allllllllll* right here, buddy," Chuck says into the microphone, speaking with his hands like a deaf Italian.

"...no, you don't even have a radar in there."

"I wha—"

"I see something big. Like really, really big. That's two reallies, Chuck."

"Shit, well why didn't you say so? How far away is it?"

"About... nine hundredish or so thousand miles out, as of right now."

A pause occurs, the static from the communication device filling the void of communicationless silence between the suited man and his happy scientist cohort. "Are... you serious? You interrupted my work to tell me there's some... literally some *thing* nine hundred million miles away from me?"

"Yes, indeed I did, if by *million* you mean *thousand*. It is... eh... about... seven'hunnid'fitty'thousan' out right now," said in a mumble, as Sigmund's brain is too distracted by math to properly enunciate his words. Then, more perked up, "Hey, how much garbage did you destroy so far?"

"I don't know dude, a bunch? A whole lotta? An assload?"

"A metric assload or a normal one?" Sigmund says as a droplet of sweat rides down the mountainous surface of his forehead. "There is a difference, you know."

The *Id Mk II*'s cannons make a loud *PSHEW* noise as a detached solar panel is utterly disintegrated from reality. "How's that for your metric assload? Hah."

Chuck hears a faint scribbling noise coming through the audial snow. Then, "Look, Chuck, I'm trying to keep track here, for the show and all, and I—"

"HEY, uh..." Chuck suddenly cuts in, his voice dropping octaves worse than a pubescent preteen girl who's sprouting her first chin hairs, "how far away is that bogey again?"

“Oh, well I’d saay... about...” Sigmund trails off.

“Um... you’d say about nothing? Like, it passed me?”

Silence creeps its way through the wireless comms line.

“Well?”

“Sorry, I was waiting for an even number. About two hundred miles. Why?”

“Bec—” is all that comes through.

Chuck would have finished his sentence, but as you may have guessed, Bob reared its boulderish self and bodied the *Id Mk II*, taking both it and its pilot for a joyride both through *and* into deep space. The Earth, having zero slingshot effect on Bob’s massive mass of mass, shrinks into a turquoise speck until it disappears from what would be Chuck’s sight were he facing the right direction with his eyes open beneath his sunshades.

Eventually Chuck opens his eyes to find his body – and ship – miraculously still intact. He pinches his arm a few times to make sure what’s happening isn’t a dream, then he gives his face a slap for extra confirmation. The hairs of his goatee do *not* appreciate the rough contact. Chuck inhales a couple lungfuls of artificial Earth air, then exhales; how nice, breathing is still possible. The craft seems to be practically undamaged too, other than the camouflage.

How ‘bout that, the closest thing we have to a main character survives getting struck by a meteor. *In the prolo*

Slight feelings of dread grip the psychedelic astronaut as he tries once, twice, and then a seventh time to activate comms and talk to Sigmund, all to no avail. Stars, asteroids, and dark nothingness pass by the ship as Bob continues beaming along, completely unaware of the passenger it has picked up. This is not because the *Id Mk II* is so insignificant compared to Bob, nor is it because Bob is stupid; Bob is simply a rock and lacks the awareness, just like Chuck lacks the knowledge of how the fuck he’s going to get himself out of this one.

Chuck removes a joint from an inner pocket and sticks it in the left corner of his mouth, not sure how he’s clenching it there but clenching it nonetheless. He begins feeling around for a lighter. There doesn’t seem to be one in either of his inner pockets, or his outer pockets, or his pants pockets... *ruh-roh*. It’s one thing to be hurling through space via gigantic rock, but to be doing so whilst unable to smoke? No. Chuck decided a long time ago that he would be high for his death, and he’s incapable of getting high right now. Therefore, this is not his time to die.

A lightbulb lights up within Chuck’s head similarly to how the tail propeller manual start button lights up on the dashboard of his craft. He checks his mirrors to see that Bob, in its girth, bent the craft’s tail in a way so its propeller is pressed flat against the rock. The joint floats out of Chuck’s mouth as he subconsciously opens it to a gape, awestruck at the sheer perfection of this obvious and blatantly convenient coincidence, this *convenient incident*, one may say.

The *Id Mk II*'s tail prop is no ordinary helicopter propeller, you see. Chuck's other partially helicopteric crafts have blades made of an expansive assortment of materials like steel, aluminum, titanium, and potassium harvested from the tears of those who see Chuck's toys but cannot afford to have their own. The *Id Mk II*, however, is special; its tail propellers, and the craft in general, are made from a previously undiscovered metal that crashed into Earth in the form of a different meteor, this one named... Rob. Yeah, let's go with Rob. The priceless materials offered by Rob, while not as abundant, are significantly more dense, flexible, and useful than the priceless materials offered by Bob. Rob's metal, *robinite* to the humans, can be melded and crafted into whatever a craftsman might imagine, so long as they possess the necessary equipment. It will hold up indefinitely against the forces of time and erosion, and it can be used for damn near anything in damn near any situation... probably.

Sigmund doesn't know about those last couple bits for sure, but when he first looked at the molecular structure of the robinite, he was utterly astounded to find a completely unfamiliar and impossible formation of protons, neutrons, electrons, and a fourth *-on* which he wasn't previously aware of. *Thus*, he figured he would be rather liberal with his descriptions of the material within his own private notes, which is where I'm pilfering this information from. Sue him.

Before implementing the robinite into the tail propeller, Sigmund tested the junk out by building a racecar with an aerodynamic battering ram mounted on the front and sending it full speed into the New Manhattan wall. The car drove away spotless – the wall, on the other hand, was left with a gnarly half-inch-deep square dent the likes of which Sigmund, nor the thousands of innocent bystanders, had ever seen. Today the dent is decorated with a large wreath of flowers and a nice memorial plaque which tells the tale of how the impenetrable wall was damaged – not destroyed or penetrated but *damaged* – not by any of the many forces across the planet who wish to invade the island city but by a single man, a man who lives on the inside. A NewMann, with two *ns* because he's so *nnew*.

The driver of the car, on the *other* hand, literally died to pieces. Upon impact, the limbs and whatnot of the test robot shattered at an atomic level, leaving zero trace of its existence behind. So, one thing led to another and the car was melted back into a raw, more usable form. A small chunk of the robinite was melded into the *Id Mk II*, but the remainder was stored away in one of the many vaults buried deep beneath the plastic bedrock substitute underneath the Cape Enterprises, Unc building, but not as deep as Sigmund currently sits. Speaking of which, Sigmund is actually having a panic attack down in his cave right now because of how long ago Chuck disappeared from both radar and the communication line. There's no helping Sigmund when he's hyperventilating, he just needs to find a brown paper bag. But uh, in the meantime, let's check in with Chuck, shall we?

Ah good, he's about halfway through Bob The Meteor now. Where Rob The Meteor was composed of robinite, Bob The Meteor is made from a material called *bobinite*, which is remarkably different from robinite in composition, application, strength, color, odor; the only similarity the two share is the fact they're both from outer space, robinite being a chunk of an obliterated moon once called Cyklomoor and bobinite being the obliterating factor. Robinite is a very sturdy material, damn near impenetrable by anything other than itself; the metal is a bluish silver in hue with a shiny gloss and, strangely enough, it faintly emanates the scent of Earth's cedar trees. Bobinite is a crumbly brown substance that looks like a Colorado's worth of vermiculite was packed together at high pressures and left to ferment for a few centuries before being set loose into the great wide open. It also regenerates into its original form after enough time passes regardless of how much mass it has lost; no Earth scientist has ever had the opportunity to study Bob The Meteor, nor the bobinite it's composed of, but if one got that opportunity, they would not be able to figure out how the stuff actually works. Not by a long shot.

As for odor, bobinite smells like a combination of good cheese and bad milk, and its scent is stronger on the inside than on the out-. In fact, on the inside, Bob's scent is just odiously potent enough to punch through the hull of the *Id Mk II*; the smell-induced shock nearly causes Chuck to lose the joint from his mouth *again*. *Nearly* is the operative term there – not much in Existence can come between this man and his plant, and a smell sure as hell isn't gonna do it.

All right, at this point I've shot the shit to pieces just long enough for Chuck to bore his ass, and the ship it's sat in, out of Bob. Chuck watches as the gigantic rock flies away from him like the school bus did when he was seven and he got tripped into a puddle by a bigger kid and all his classmates and the seventy-year-old bus driver with two teeth pointed and laughed at him so hard he had to switch schools... I mean... like a... bird... flying away. Yes, into the void it goes, each little fragment of stone left behind from the boring akin to a feather drifting upon the wind, traveling without a destination from no place special to nowhere at all.

After Bob's disappeared from his perception and therefore the rest of reality as he knows it, Chuck does a quick spinny thing in his emancipated yet slightly decimated craft to find that he can see absolutely nothing behind him, aside from the light beaming at him from balls of gigantic exploding element factories quite a distance away.

Starlight. All he can see is starlight.

Chuck refaces Bob, or at least where Bob once was, to see more of the same – a vast, empty nothingness populated by nothing but stars and more stars. Welp. There's only one thing left to do now, as far as Chuck is concerned.

He dons his spacesuit, skintight with a glass dome headpiece and completely impervious to the harshness that is deep space, and goes for a little float, carrying

with him a gadget with a button on it and the joint as he precariously tumbles and spazzes through the empty space around his *Id Mk II*. He takes his sweet time to locate his favorite of the jet engines (the one with a woolly mammoth etched into it) and positions himself before it. A press of a button on his left sleeve generates a plasmic forcefield around Chuck, and the Earth-air generator in his suit works overtime to bloat said forcefield full of breathable air. Chuck removes his dome and watches it float before him, realizing how hard it is to see translucent objects in space. Seriously, there could be some kind of glass spaceship clad in false two-way windows floating alongside him right now and he would be none the wiser. It wouldn't matter, though. Not even the aliens could save Chuck now... not that he'd want them to, anyway.

Chuck distances himself from the jet engine and sticks the joint in his mouth, leaning forward as to poke just the twisted-off tip outside his forcefield. He raises the device up in his other hand and studies it out the corner of his eye as if he's unsure of the potential consequences of his actions. Then he thinks, '*Fuck it,*' and presses the button, igniting the engine and lighting the tip of his joint in one swift motion. As Chuck leans back and takes the happystick, he watches his spacecraft tumble off into space guided by the woolly mammoth engine and literally nothing else. That's the *swift* part, the *Id Mk II* disappears from dude's sight before he can even think about taking a third hit.

Floating alone in deep space inside a bubble of thick fog and thin air, Chuck takes a moment to reflect on his life. He thinks back to his childhood, motherless with a father who actively cared less after every interaction; to his outcasted days in the many schools he attended because he was never in one place long enough to make friends; to his college experience during which, after meeting Sigmund, he spent no more than a couple weeks experimenting with all the drugs he could possibly get inside his system before dropping out like a proper main character; to the decade he spent scheming and adventuring all over the globe in the name of Cape Enterprises, Uncorporated, a supercompany that operates by eating small companies; to the vast acres of Cannabis plants and Magic Mushrooms that were brought into this world just to be smoked, eaten, or made into tea by him and him alone. All Chuck can muster is a slick chuckle as his oxygen supply is traded for an increasingly dense miasma of delicious pot smoke.

Well, the warmth is leaving the bubble now and Chuck's spacesuit is nearing the limits of its power. There is so much smoke in Chuck's forcefield that he isn't even breathing air anymore; he gets higher and higher with each breath, so high that the pure energy that is his consciousness is the only thing keeping him alive on this plane. Eyes redder than a tomato and body trembling from the cold and the ridiculous amounts of Tetrahydrocannabinol (among the other cannabinoids) coursing through his bloodstream, Chuck Leary decides it's about time to let go,

to relinquish his past and his potential futures and wade into that great transition. He takes one last breath, drawing all the smoke he can into his lungs, then...

## The Hole In The Wall

*Ding.*

Two gilded silver doors slide open to reveal an empty elevator, the red velvet carpet matching all too perfectly with the jazzy yet mellow music wafting gently out of the speakers. On the back wall, something of a portal suddenly opens up, a swirling cauldron's broth of all the colors of the rainbow and then some spinning in a perfect six-and-a-half-foot-tall oval. A plume of smoke escapes the portal and is immediately followed by a mid-inhale Chuck who walks with a slight limp and sports a version of his suit that is positively riddled with tears and what appear to be bite holes. He stumbles into the Cape office, pushing the glass doors in so hard they almost fly off their hinges and shatter into dust, to see none other than Karen The Secretary sat at her guard post at the front of the office, scribbling on a piece of paper as always.

When Karen notices her boss is in, she hurriedly hides her scribbles and sits up straight with her hands folded on her desk as if Chuck gives even the slightest little dust fragment off a thirty-year-old pellet of an attic rat's shit about what she does at work. She could get high and relax all day e'er' day and he wouldn't have a problem with it whatsoever. Hell, he'd buy her the Cannabis! But she doesn't – the girl just sits there working hard whenever he's looking and doing some other nonsense whenever he's not, and this cannot be left to fly.

Chuck calls Karen a *weeaboo* – Karen's eyes grow wide, as if triggered by a bad memory – and then hears his own voice laughing in his head before he forgets about his limp and dances over to his wheely chair at his desk around the corner. As he plops down, the back of the massive chair crunches into the sheetrock wall behind him, adding bits of debris and a sprinkling of dust to the pile of rubble that has long since formed on the floor.

With the hole in the wall made just a tiny bit bigger, Chuck is ready to watch Sigmund announce the last-minute contest – which was totally Chuck's idea, by the way – to his myriad myriads of viewers on VidTube, but alas! Chuck's phone goes *ringy-ding 'a ding-ding* just as Terry's glistening head fills the screen. Who could possibly be... oh! Well what a surprise, it's Alvey Fratto! Chuck hasn't heard from him in... anyway, he must be calling to catch up. Let's give these two some privacy, they're really close with one another.

## Universe W-2020

Confused? Imagine how I feel, I *delivered* that shit. I'll explain it to you this time, since I'm here, but otherwise you'll be on your own – all that stuff about Bob The Meteor? Yeah, that was all bullshit, it didn't really happen... kind of. Black holes are weird like that. Anyway, let's just say that Chuck was actually up there, see, but he simply got bored of clearing space junk, so he shut off his comms in order to make a stealthy return to Earth and light up a happystick in peace. That doesn't really fit with what I told you earlier but it's fine, this prologue doesn't have much to do with the story anyway.

Unless it does, in which case fuck what I said, it makes *perfect* sense.

This prologue is more of a little sampler, a window for you to peek through before you open the door and walk into the lunacy of what's to come. I certainly won't be there with you; I'm only adding in this extra explanation bit here because I know they won't look the draft over before they send it wherever they send it.

Also, you probably need the warning.

The other guy they got to write and narrate, well... he doesn't do a bad job, I suppose, but he's kind of weird. Like, the *when you talk to him he repeats your words under his breath* kind of weird. But don't let that put you off, they might get someone to refinish it all by the time this sees the light of day. Or they might not. Then again, they could have already gotten somebody new for all I know, I don't really keep up with the gossip around here. I don't even know if there is a *they*, to be honest; I could be somewhere burning a fat one right now but no, I'm here. If I want to vent or speculate or outright bullshit a little, I'm going to.

You see, this... *book*, I suppose one could call it, is the telling of entirely true events that took, take, and are currently taking place in an alternate Universe right now. Be aware: the Universe in this book might be similar to your own. In fact, it may be completely identical, save for the specific hue of the shit that one seagull bombed all over your brother's hat during that one family vacation y'all took to the Jersey shore. Or, it may be very different, bearing literally no resemblance to your universe at all other than the fact that it, too, exists. Regardless, here's what I'm trying to say: if you are not on board with all this, if you cannot grapple with the idea of alternate universes which appear similar to but truthfully have nothing to do with your own universe, you don't have to read this book. Chuck might talk some shit about you, but other than that there won't be any real consequences. The creatures this story is about won't jump through a portal and tickle your feet at night – trust me, they have better shit to do – nor will you be struck by a meteor or singled out by the universe in any way. Your life will go on as it has been.

**BUT!** If you want to read this book, well, pretty much all of what I just said still holds true. You will finish the book, maybe, and your life will go on. Maybe

you'll be inspired by it, maybe you won't. Maybe the characters will visit you in your dreams, but I doubt it. They're busy humans too, for the most part, and the al-... *extraterrestrials* usually find a way to keep themselves otherwise occupied. Anyway, if you're not vibing at this point then you've probably stopped reading, so we may as well dive in.

The day is Monday, the twentieth of the April of the twentieth year after the year 2000, and certain events are about to unfold in Shui Dong, China that might drastically, and catastrophically, alter the humopolitical landscape of planet Earth for years to come. A butterfly is going to flap its wings in Africa until it lands on a flower to drink some nectar, and then it'll die moments later because the lifespan of a butterfly is laughable at best. A cluster of adult humans are going to attempt to deliver an anti-drug assembly to a body of uninterested and jaded students in a North American high school. In the dusty Australian outback, a kangaroo is about to give birth to a joey which, strangely enough, resembles a thylacine cub. A cult of human-size rodent creatures is about to agitate the fault line between California and the remainder of America in order to secure a fat patch of Outer Earth all for themselves. A single hornet is about to massacre a colony of honeybees because it has nothing better to do with its time. Two rabbits are making dozens of babies in a burrow mere inches from your great-grandmother's rotting head, and there is nothing you can do about it.

An innumerable number of events and situations like the ones listed above – and not unlike the ones not listed above – are about to occur not only across the surface of planet Earth, but across all the various surfaces floating in this specific infinite Universe, and all of it is as meaningful as the struggle that a lightly abused suburban dog goes through every time it tries to poop out a solid log and ends up leaking instead.

Do you feel it? Do you toke what I'm blowing on here? Is it seeping through the page yet?

Welcome to Universe W-2020. Peace out, motherfucker.