

NED "NED" McFEELY



DECEPTION

Your Mind is the Scene of the Crime

Deception

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By Ned McFeely

Rated PG-13 for language.

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Praise for Ned McFeely

“Whenever I see Ned in the fruit section, I always ask him to squeeze my tropicals. He really knows his guanabanas.”

-*Mary Agnes Fuentes, shopper*

“Last week he was trying to sell me a timeshare in Boca, this week he’s a bigshot author. What’s next, mayor of Cheese Town?” -*Swinglow Vespasian, neighbor*

“Ned McFeely is... as smart as he thinks he is. He does... have an original thought in his head. I would... let him anywhere near impressionable minds.” -*H. Kissinger, statesman*

“What’s fifteen percent of nothing? Oh, that’s right – *nothing!* Thanks for putting out free material, Ned. Real good business plan.” -*Morris J., Ned’s agent/brother-in-law*

“Mr. McFeely splattered my white silk blouse with a mouthful of cherries jubilee when laughing at his own joke and told me to send him the cleaning bill, but I have yet to receive my fourteen dollars.” -*M. Streep, actress*

“If Ned had been captain of the *Titanic*, I think we would have seen a very different outcome.” -*The real Sister Batrille*

“I gotta have more cowbell!” -*C. Walken, actor*

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Now, Voyager, sail thou forth,
to seek and find.

Walt Whitman

Act I: Opium Den

DOM and ARIADNE strolling along crowded city sidewalks.

DOM

Let me ask you a question: You never really remember the beginning of a dream do you? You always wind up right in the middle of what's going on, right?

ARIADNE

Yeah, I guess.

DOM

So how did we get here?

ARIADNE

Uh, I took an Uber from the airport.

DOM

No, I mean to this world, this body, this universe. Think about it, how did you get here? Where are

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you right now? Where were you before?

ARIADNE

You mean, I'm dreaming right now?

gestures to their surroundings

But it's all so *real*.

DOM

It *seems* real, but how can you judge?

ARIADNE

I can judge because I'm conscious.

DOM

I have a t-shirt that says "I Am Conscious", but it's not conscious, it's a t-shirt.

ARIADNE

Yeah, but I'm not a t-shirt.

DOM

I have another t-shirt that says "I'm not a t-shirt", but it *is* a t-shirt.

ARIADNE

So what's your point? That you have a lot of weird t-shirts?

DOM

The fact that you're in a dream doesn't mean *you're* the dreamer. Maybe your entire reality is being generated by an evil demon which is really just a few lines of malicious code in a sentient mainframe.

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ARIADNE

So I could just be a computer bug?

DOM

We think the AI revolution is coming, but maybe it already came and we lost. Who knows? Nobody knows anything.

ARIADNE

I don't know, I'm a pretty spiritual person and I've never heard anything like that.

DOM

Come on, I'll show you something.

Dom leads Ariadne down a long dark stairway into a smoky, labyrinthine lair. Above the entrance is a sign that says Pnevmatikí Agorá.

ARIADNE

Geez, it looks like an opium den. What does *Pnevmatikí Agorá* mean?

DOM

Depends who you ask. It's either Spiritual Marketplace or Village of Flatulence.

The catacombs are lit by candles and divided by hanging wisps of tattered veil. The sound of chanting echoes hauntingly through incense-filled air. People sit in groups and talk about waking up. Some turn and stare at Ariadne.

ARIADNE

Why are they looking at me?

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DOM

They think you're going to upset their delicate balance. They're afraid you're going to try to wake them up.

ARIADNE

You mean, all these people are asleep right now?

DOM

Depends who you ask. If they're asleep, are they really people? If they're not awake, how are they better than cattle?

ARIADNE

But they're *not* cattle, they're people!

DOM

So is Soylent Green.

ARIADNE

What can we do to end their suffering?

DOM

They're *not* suffering, that's the point. They're happy down here in the dark. You want to be an angel and set them free, but they'll see you as a demon trying to destroy them.

ARIADNE

But look at what they're doing! Meditating, chanting, worshipping pictures and praying to statues! They want to wake up!

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DOM

No one wants to wake up. It's just a game to pass the time.

ARIADNE

Then why are they even here?

DOM

This is their safe space. At some point, they opened their eyes a little and some light got in, so now they huddle in the darkness pretending to seek what they're actually hiding from.

ARIADNE

That's so sad.

DOM

Not really, it's just another form of drama, and all drama is good drama. It doesn't matter what we strive *for*, only that we strive.

They ascend out of the catacombs and make their way to a sidewalk cafe where they continue their conversation over coffee.

ARIADNE

They told me you had a wife, but the two of you got trapped in a place called Limbo. What happened?

DOM

Her name was Mal. We were like actors in a movie, but she got so deep into her character that she forgot who she really was. Instead of playing the character, the character began playing her. I tried to remind her, but I couldn't get her to believe that we were

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dreaming and that to wake up, we had to commit suicide together.

ARIADNE

Yeah, that would be a tough sell.

DOM

So I had to enter her dreams and plant the idea in her head.

ARIADNE

shocked

Wow! You used hypnosis to make her commit suicide with you? That sounds like a terrible violation.

DOM

Not at all. It's called Deception. You go into someone's dream and plant an idea so they think it's their own.

ARIADNE

And how is using mind control not the *worst* thing you can do to someone?

DOM

Think about it, isn't life just wall-to-wall Deception? Government, business, news, education, advertising, healthcare, science, religion. It's all just a massive disinformation system, so what's the big deal?

ARIADNE

Herding people like livestock is okay due to mass adoption?

DOM

My point is that it worked on Mal, but a little too well. Once we were out of Limbo and back in our normal life, the Deception was still planted in her head. She thought we were still stuck in Limbo and that we had to kill ourselves again.

ARIADNE

Yeah, I can see where that would be a problem, but what does any of this have to do with me? What do you need me for?

DOM

You're an expository device. I have to explain everything to you, and that's how the audience gets to understand what's going on.

ARIADNE

looks around

What audience?

DOM

I don't know, but we have to imagine there's an audience out there. Otherwise, we're just one hand clapping, a tree falling without making a sound.

ARIADNE

So someone's *watching* us right now? Are they dreaming too?

DOM

Probably. Let's try to wake them up.

A series of slow-motion explosions blow the entire cafe scene to bits, including Dom and Ariadne.

Act II: Loading Program

After the explosion at the cafe, Ariadne and Dom wake up on lounge chairs in a clean white warehouse. Sitting open between them is a high-tech briefcase. Tubes from the case plug into their arms. In the center of the case is a big red button.

ARIADNE

Holy shit! Where are we?

DOM

This is a blank construct, like the loading program in *The Matrix*.

ARIADNE

But *The Matrix* is just a movie.

DOM

As opposed to what?

DECEPTION

ARIADNE

So we're in Limbo right now?

DOM

Limbo, dreamstate, matrix, whatever.

ARIADNE

But I'm a real person, so this must be real.

DOM

There are no *real* people in Limbo. You identify with the character you play, but there's no authentic connection because there's no authentic you.

ARIADNE

You're saying that *I'm* not really *me*?

DOM

No more than you're Winston Churchill or Aunt Jemima. You're simply the zeropoint of awareness in a constantly rendering, multi-sensory, 3D gamespace viewed through an avatar called Ariadne.

ARIADNE

Then who's doing the rendering? Who's doing the viewing?

DOM

God, Brahman, Aunt Jemima, take your pick.

ARIADNE

Then how do I know what's real?

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DOM

Who says *anything* is real? C'mon, I'll show you.

Dom pushes the big red button. They both fall asleep in their lounge chairs and wake up together on a path in a lush, tropical setting. They talk as they stroll.

ARIADNE

Wow! So I'm still dreaming right now?

DOM

You're *always* dreaming. That's what I never understood. I thought there was such a thing as *real* reality, but there's only layer upon layer of Limbo.

ARIADNE

How can there be no real reality? If we wake up, what do we wake up *to*? What's left when the dream is gone?

DOM

There's nothing outside of dreaming. Limbo is all we have.

ARIADNE

It actually seems kind of obvious now that I'm thinking about it. How do we manage to stay asleep?

DOM

By *not* thinking about it. Emotion is the ballast that holds us down in the dark. Thought is the knife that cuts ballast away and lets us ascend into the light.

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ARIADNE

But those people in the catacombs were so spiritual!

DOM

Spirituality is a crutch for people who can't handle truth. If you have trouble keeping your mind subdued, you have to redirect it into designated safezones like religion and spirituality.

ARIADNE

I'm feeling very conflicted right now.

DOM

That's your thinking mind struggling against emotional sedation. Don't worry, it'll pass. C'mon, I'll show you the part where I talked my wife into suicide.

They enter a clearing with a swimming pool. MAL, in a bikini and sunglasses, lies on a chaise lounge sunning herself. She sips from a glass with a straw and an umbrella.

DOM

to Ariadne

This is what happened.

Dom approaches Mal and casts a shadow over her.

MAL

charming French accent

You stand in my sun.

DECEPTION

DOM

I know you don't believe it, Mal, but none of this is real. We're living in a shared dream.

MAL

Again with this dream nonsense! You are telling me that reality is not real?

DOM

Well, *this* reality isn't real. There might be a real world out there somewhere, but this ain't it.

MAL

Then what is this place where we have lived for so many years?

DOM

This is called Limbo. You used to know that, but you locked the knowledge deep inside. In order to get to the *real* reality, we have to wake up, which means we have to kill ourselves together.

MAL

How romantic! You should create a line of greeting cards.

DOM

I'm serious, Mal. Dying is our only way out.

MAL

And how should we be doing the dying?

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DOM

I suggest we lie down on the railroad tracks, and the train will wake us up.

MAL

You mean the train will squish our heads. This is your big idea?

DOM

Well, yeah, but our heads aren't really *real*, so we'll just wake up out of Limbo.

MAL

I have to say, your plan is very stupid.

DOM

It's not very stupid, it's very smart!

MAL

Okay, well, why don't you go do the smart head squishing thing and I'll stay here and drink stupid Mai Tais.

DOM

No, Mal, we have to kill ourselves *together*! That's what love means!

MAL

Mais non! That's what being in a cult means.

DOM

But none of this is real!

MAL

Okay, fine, but what is so terrible about not-real? Not-real is okay. We get to design the world and make it how we like. In your *real* reality, do I still get to create with my mind?

DOM

It's not so simple in the real world.

MAL

Okay then, what's so bad about here? If you were saying that in this real world of yours we would be super-beautiful and super-rich, with many admirers and servants...

DOM

snaps fingers

Oh yeah, that's right! I just remembered! In the *real* world, you and me are megastars! We work in a dream factory and we're rich and everyone loves us! It's all coming back to me now!

MAL

Zut alors! That sounds much better! You should have said that first instead of the head squishing thing. Let's go kill ourselves. First I finish bronzing, then we go.

Dom returns to Ariadne and they continue their stroll.

ARIADNE

Wow, that Deception you planted in her mind really worked. How long were you guys in Limbo?

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DOM

Decades, though it was only a few hours in this world. Time has no meaning in Limbo. Five minutes can be a hundred years.

ARIADNE

A hundred years! Who'd wanna be stuck in a dream for a hundred years?

DOM

Depends on the dream.

ARIADNE

So the Deception you planted in Mal's mind worked? You killed yourselves and woke up?

DOM

It worked *too* good. It never *stopped* working. Mal just wanted to keep going further and further.

A door appears on their path. Dom and Ariadne step through the door into a ransacked hotel suite.

DOM

This is what happened.

Dom goes the window. Mal sits in the window of an identical suite across the alley, about to jump. Her legs dangle over the void, one shoe drops into the darkness.

DOM

distressed

Holy shit, Mal! What are you doing over there? Why are you hanging out of an open window?

MAL

Because we must jump now, you and I together. Just like before with the train and the head squishing. We must die together so we can wake up!

DOM

But we're *already* awake! This is the real world. If you jump, you'll die! This is where we want to be, here in America with our kids, living the dream!

MAL

We are *not* awake, we are still trapped in this stupid Limbo! Why are you trying to make it nice and pretend it's okay? I thought you were Mr. Reality-guy, now you're Mr. Happy-pants!

DOM

I think positive emotion trumps negative emotion every time.

MAL

You have said a very silly thing. Positive emotion is the fart of a unicorn, yes? A tiny little rainbow poof! It is cute, yes, but that's all. It trumps nothing, it changes nothing, it does not – how you say? – get shit done.

DOM

Snookums, I think you're making too much...

MAL

Positive emotion makes people sit on their ass and get fat and go nowhere and do nothing. Negative emotion burns. It makes heat and energy and

change. What does the asshole of the unicorn give us? Flowery stink, that's all.

DOM

Wow, you've really given this some thought.

MAL

To say I like happy thoughts is to say I give up! I am afraid of my own life! I do not like this game and do not wish to play. I want to stay safe in the harbor and never set sail on the voyage of life. I spit on your stupid positive emotion. It is fear! It is death!

DOM

Listen, pooty-bird, that's no reason to jump...

MAL

Don't you pooty-bird me! This is why we *must* jump. We must die together! This isn't real. We must die from the dream to awaken to the real! It scares you because you think this world is real, but you are deceived! This is just another level of Deception. You think we escaped from Limbo, but we are still here!

DOM

But baby, this *is* real. I planted that Deception in your mind when we were in Limbo and it's still in there making you think you have to keep going further, but there is no further. We're here! This is it! This is the real world!

MAL

You are very wrong. We are still in Limbo. This is the great big joke you do not get. Wherever we go,

we are *always* in Limbo.

DOM

You're just mad because I planted the Deception in your mind. Please calm down and back away from the ledge.

MAL

I will *not* calm down, I am on fire! You were once on fire too, but now your flame has gone out and you are scared like a baby. You say to me, "Mal, don't be a crazy lady, relax and be happy like me," but I have had enough of your pretend happiness. I will find my way out of this maze if I have to jump out a thousand windows and have my head squished a thousand times! *Montagnes peuvent s'écrouler sur ma tête...*

DOM

That's not *you* talking! That's just the Deception I planted in your head so we could get out of Limbo. It worked! Now we're here! We can stop now!

MAL

There is no stopping! Do not be so eager to feast on yummy lies. I ask you, where is the dream factory you promised? Where are my servants and fans? This is not the real world, this is just another layer of bullshit cake. Come, let us jump to our deaths and awaken together!

DOM

You don't understand!

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MAL

It is *you* who does not understand!

NED

I'm afraid neither of you understand.

*Dom turns to find NED standing behind him.
Ariadne looks on.*

DOM

Jesus Christ! Who the hell are you?

NED

Ned McFeely. I'm the author of this scene. It seemed like it was getting bogged down in all this quibbling so I thought I'd pop in and give it a little tweak.

DOM

You're not the author of me. I'm a self-determined individual! I have free will!

NED

There, see? That's what I mean. Your dialog is stilted and boring. Let's explore your character's motivation.

MAL

Dommy-bear? Who is that man with you?

DOM

No one, babe, just the author.

NED

to Dom

Okay, so you locked something away, something deep inside, the truth that you had once known, but chose to forget.

MAL

Yooboo! Mr. Author! I was just now telling him this!

DOM

It's like something in my solar plexus that just keeps churning so I can never relax.

NED

Yes, and someday it will burst out of your chest like an alien and you will give birth to yourself. Until then, you're like a caterpillar dreaming of butterflies.

MAL

Papillon!

DOM

Then who am I really? I mean, *really* really.

NED

If you are aware, then you are awareness.

DOM

Well, I guess that's not nothing.

NED

It's the only something there is.

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DOM

Then maybe dreaming ain't so bad.

NED

Depends on the dream.

MAL

Hello? Sweetie-pie, remember me? Your wife? I'm sitting on a ledge about to jump to my death. Care to join me?

DOM

Yeah, just a minute, honey-britches.

MAL

Don't you honey-britches me! Are we going to jump together or not?

DOM

to Mal

We're working on that right now, butter-buns. Just a sec.

to Ned

So all these levels of dream and reality, you're saying that *none* of it is real?

NED

Or, you can say it's *all* real, but none of it is true. Isn't that the nature of a dream? Real but not true?

MAL

Hello? Darling? What are you doing that's more important than jumping to your death right now?

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DOM

Just having a chat, *mon petit albatros*. Be right with you.

NED

In order to be *re*born, one must first be *un*born.

DOM

You mean die.

NED

Same difference.

DOM

Like by jumping out a window or getting run over by a train?

NED

Dramatic but messy. The only real way to awaken from the dream of selfhood is through the process of focused thought. Emotionally *suppressed* thought leads to deeper sleep. Emotionally *fueled* thought leads to dream destruction and awakening.

DOM

Suicide by thought?

NED

To be born into lucidity, you must die out of wrong-knowing.

DOM

I don't want to die, I want to be me, but I also want to wake up.

NED

That's what those people in the opium den were trying to do, wake up without leaving the dream, but despite what they promise in the Village of Flatulence, you can't have your cake and eat it too. It's one or the other. Wake up or stay asleep.

DOM

So what do I have to do to wake up? Why shouldn't I join her in jumping to our deaths?

NED

I didn't say you shouldn't.

DOM

Well, dammit, I'm *not* gonna jump!

MAL

overbears

Okay pussy-boy, I go alone!

DOM

rushes to window

Mal, wait. No!

MAL

See you in my dreams! *Au revoir!*

A trailing-off scream is heard.

DOM

wails in despair

Oh Mal! Baby! What have I done? I killed you! Oh my God!

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turns angrily on Ned

You bastard! This is all your fault!

NED

It feels like the scene is dragging.

DOM

What are you saying? My wife just committed suicide! Oh my God! My poor baby!

NED

I think we've reached the end of your character arc.

DOM

What the hell are you talking about? Jesus buddy, can't you see I'm grievin' here?

NED

Your character is stuck. I think you need a little push.

DOM

Holy shit, are you crazy? Don't you understand? My wife just jumped out the fuckin'...

Ned pushes Dom out the window.

NED

turns to Ariadne

Is it just me, or was it getting a little whiny in here?

ARIADNE

You can see me?

DECEPTION

NED

I see all.

ARIADNE

What happens now?

NED

I write the press junket scene.

ARIADNE

What about me?

NED

You're just words on a page, Ellen.

Exeunt.

Act III: Dream Factory

MARION and LEO sit in raised director's chairs. An Inception movie poster hangs behind them with the tagline: Your Mind is the Scene of the Crime. They chat between interviews.

MARION

Nom de dieu de putain de bordel de merde de saloperie de connard d'enculer ta mère! I hate these press junkets. Two hundred interviews in three days, always the same questions over and over! And we must always smile and pretend they're all so new and clever.

LEO

I know. They should just use impersonators so we can get on with other projects.

BOB bounds in carrying blue 4x6 index cards. He takes the interviewer's seat facing Leo and Marion.

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BOB

Impersonators would only work if they didn't *know* they were impersonators.

Leo and Marion laugh uncomfortably at being overheard.

LEO

Hey, yeah, that's right.

MARION

You're so clever.

Bob gets comfortable in his raised director's chair, checks his notes.

BOB

Which means *you guys* might be the impersonators.

Marion and Leo laugh nervously.

BOB

Just kidding, guys. Hey, I'm Bob and I can tell you, this is a real treat for me, a real treat! Wow! Look at you guys; young, beautiful, super-rich, super-famous, adored by millions. Living the dream!

MARION

aside, to Leo

Leo, this man is frightening me.

BOB

What's it like being global superstars? Pretty fun, I bet.

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LEO

Your name is Bob?

BOB

Yes, I am Bob!

LEO

Bob what?

BOB

checks cards

Just Bob!

LEO

No last name?

BOB

Most of the main characters in your movie only had one name.

LEO

Yeah, but this is real life.

BOB

Oh, that's marvelous! Let me write that down. *This is real life.* Pure gold! They'll put me on the Paris desk after this.

MARION

France?

BOB

Hilton. So guys, wow! So first off, let me just thank you for your patience with me, I'm pretty new at this

interviewing stuff.

LEO

You're doin' fine, Bob.

MARION

Yeah, so good.

BOB

Great, so let's see, I only have a few minutes with you guys so here we go, question one: How do you know you're not still in Limbo? Marion?

MARION

What do you mean Limbo? Like, in the movie? Leo, is this man asking if we're still in the movie?

LEO

Bob, buddy, I don't think that's an approved question. Try again.

BOB

Okay! Leo, you were Dom down in Limbo, but you came up through all those dream levels until you were back in America with your children, but then you came up another level and now you're a rich and famous movie star working in a dream factory and adored by millions. Do you wonder if you might not have a little more waking up to do?

LEO

Listen pal, you don't have a lot of time, are you sure this is how you want to use it?

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MARION

These are very bad questions, mister.

BOB

So you're staying in character for the press junket?
How wonderful!

LEO

We're not in character now, we're us. This is who we really are. We're actors!

BOB

Sure, sure, I get it. So let's see, first you're both dream pioneers exploring internal realms and using Deception on other people and each other and growing old together in Limbo, and now you're rich, beautiful megastars doing a press junket for your massive global fanbase. Do you think it's at least possible that you're actually a couple of fat slobs living in a trailer park in Asshat, Kansas playing a virtual reality game you got for Christmas?

LEO

What? No! Seriously? No! Wait, *what?*

MARION

Putain de merde! That is quite absurd!

BOB

checks his cards

Oh, I'm sorry, my assistant must have given me the wrong notes. Let's see, gosh, it says here that you're really a couple of guys – brothers, actually – living in a trailer and uh... Oh, here we go, fun fact, you save

all your beer cans throughout the year until they cover the floor of your trailer. You call it your Christmas Fund because you redeem them all in December to get yourselves something special. Gosh, isn't that nice! The reason for the season, right guys?

MARION

Leo, why does he keep calling me a guy?

LEO

What the hell are you talkin' about, buddy?

BOB

So this year, you guys treated yourself to a virtual reality game called *Inception*. Sound familiar? No? I'm your game host and you are now starting a new level called "Dream Factory". Any of this a ringing a bell?

LEO

You're full of shit, dude.

BOB

Amazing tech, right? People put on that VR headset and just get lost in the gamespace.

MARION

Did Chris send you? Is this one of his little jokes?

LEO

You're saying this isn't real and that Marion and I are actually brothers living in a trailer park in Kansas?

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BOB

Roger, Roger.

LEO

Leo.

BOB

Roger, Leo.

MARION

Please, no! Leonardo, make the bad man stop!

LEO

I'm trying, Mal, uh, Marion.

BOB

She's Ronnie. You're Harlan.

MARION

Mon Dieu! Je me sens comme Alice, mais le trou du lapin est mon propre cul!

BOB

Such a lovely language.

LEO

Yeah, listen buddy, I don't know how you got past my people...

BOB

No one here but us chickens, Dom.

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LEO

angrily

My name is Leo. Dom was just a character I played.
You got that?

BOB

writing

Just a character I played... Got it.

MARION

Then why do I not behave like this Ronnie person?
Why am I so naturally me?

BOB

Super question! The game interface converts emotional impulses into character-appropriate behaviors. You're not just *playing* Marion, you have been digitally remastered *into* Marion. It's not just a costume you wear, you are mentally and emotionally integrated with the character, just like real life!

DOM

Then who was Ariadne?

BOB

refers to cards

Ah, it says here your weed dealer stopped by and you gave him the tour.

MARION

Quel guignol! Leonardo, help me!

DECEPTION

LEO

So what's next in your little game? We turn into these trailer park bums and then what? That's just another level of Limbo that we have to make our way out of?

BOB

checks cards

Um, I don't have answers regarding levels you haven't reached yet, so I guess you just keep going. Further! Onward and upward!

LEO

Listen, buddy, we exist just as much as you do.

BOB

Oh, I don't exist. The system calls and I appear!

MARION

Leo, please! I don't want to be fat and stupid and live in a tiny house with wheels!

LEO

He didn't say we were fat and stupid.

BOB

You are.

MARION

I want to stay as Marion! I want to be *me*, Leo. I want to stay as us! I like being Marion!

DECEPTION

BOB

Naturally, everyone wants to be Marion and Leo forever; beautiful, rich, adored, living the dream. No one wants to pull off the headset and wake up back in Kansas. Unfortunately, there's no such thing as Marion and Leo, those are just fancy game avatars that were whipped up by our coding and design teams.

LEO

Jesus, Marion, I think it's true. I'm starting to remember...

MARION

No, Leo, don't remember! I don't want the truth, I want beauty! I want to stay here! I want to be Marion and Leonardo forever.

LEO

You're the one who jumped out a window to wake up!

MARION

That was my goddamn character!

LEO

You're a goddamn character!

MARION

pulls out phone

I'm calling my agent!

DECEPTION

LEO

to Bob

So what's next for us? Where do we go from here?

BOB

We wrap up the interview and the next guy comes in to ask about the movie and life goes on.

MARION

puts down phone

Suce ma bite! So we're not in Limbo? We get to stay as Marion and Leo?

BOB

Well, you're *always* in Limbo – it's turtles all the way down – but you can remain in character as long as you want, or finish this level and go up to the next. You saw Mr. Anderson in *The Matrix*, right? Instead of continuing up another level, he decided to stay as Neo and play Goth Superman. Why not? That's what the game is for.

LEO

But then he woke up as Keanu?

BOB

Sure, and he got to be a movie star for a while, but then Keanu woke up as Marcy Lundt, a twelve-year-old girl from Oxnard playing a game called *The Matrix*. And when she finished the game, she unlocked an Easter egg and found herself strapped into a chair in a high-tech memory implant lab from which she escaped and went on to save Mars from greedy industrialists, and now she's a bodybuilder,

movie star and governor of California in a bonus level called *True Lies*.

LEO

And in our next level we're a couple of fat, lazy brothers?

BOB

Unless you find the little door that leads into the mind of John Malkovich.

LEO

And after that?

BOB

I guess you'll find out when you get there.

LEO

But it does go on?

BOB

Well, heck yeah! The gamespace keeps rendering wherever you go. Move up, go back down, hop around wherever you like!

MARION

No, Leo, no! We must stay here! We must remain in this level forever. It can never be better than this! I want to stay in Dream Factory forever! Don't make me go to Asshole Kansas!

LEO

But it's not *real*, Marion. This is all fake. We're dreaming and we have to wake up, and the only way

is to follow the white rabbit and take the red pill and go up through *all* the levels!

MARION

But if it's all Limbo, who cares?! If it's all bullshit, why not pick *happy* bullshit? I like *this* bullshit. This is *good* bullshit! Don't make me go to Kansas. I don't want to be a fat stupid American!

Marion stands and clicks her heels together.

There's no place like Hollywood. There's no place like Hollywood. There's no place...

LEO

It's just another level, babe.

MARION

pleading

Let's stay here. Everything is perfect here! We are rich and famous and beautiful here!

LEO

We can't live a lie.

MARION

Of course we can! Everyone does!

LEO

But it's not true!

MARION

So what it's not true? There is no truth, that's what this ridiculous Bob-man just told you. There is no *true* level so we just pick the one we like. I like this one! Don't make me be poor and smelly!

DECEPTION

BOB

Would you like to access the built-in Help Wizard?

LEO

You have a goddamn wizard?

MARION

Tell your Mr. goddamn Wizard I want to stay in goddamn Oz!

Act IV: The Help Wizard

Bob, Leo and Marion sit in raised director's chairs waiting for the Help Wizard to boot up. An OLD FELLA in gray hair and beard, a well-worn coat and floppy fedora shuffles in.

OLD FELLA

I sing the body electric!

examines his clothing, rubs his hands together, feels his face

I cannot be awake, for nothing looks to me as it did before, or else I am awake for the first time, and all before has been a mean sleep.

DOM

Santy Claus!

MARION

Mon Dieu! L'ange sans ses ailes!

DECEPTION

OLD FELLA

Neither Santa nor angel, merely a man. Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son. Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding. No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them. No more modest than immodest.

LEO

shaking Walt's hand

Oh, hi Walt. I'm Leo. I like to eat and drink too. I'm not sure about that other stuff.

BOB

Walter is your help system avatar.

LEO

No shit! Say there, Walt, this guy here, uh...

BOB

Bob.

LEO

Yeah, this Bob guy is sayin' that this whole deal – you know, me and Marion bein' movie stars and stuff – he says it's not really *real*, like there's no *meaning* to any of it...

WALT

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems? Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of *all* poems.

DECEPTION

LEO

Who said anything about poems?

WALT

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books.

MAL

Spectres?

LEO

Books?

WALT

You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me. You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.

LEO

Say what?

WALT

You shall not look through my eyes...

LEO

No, no, okay, listen bud, we got a situation here. Me and this lady, we're like big Hollywood moviestars. As you can see, we're very attractive and talented and rich, and everyone wants to be just like us, okay?

WALT

This day before dawn I ascended a hill and looked at the crowded heaven, and I said to my spirit,

“When we become the enfolders of those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of everything in them, shall we be filled and satisfied then?” And my spirit said, “No, we but level that lift to pass and continue beyond.”

LEO

Do what?

WALT

Level that lift to pass and continue beyond.

LEO

What the hell does *that* mean? Bob, is this thing even working?

BOB

The help wizard is still in beta.

LEO

Bullshit, this guy is straight outta central casting!

WALT

If you would understand me, go to the heights or water-shore.

LEO

Bob here says you don't even exist.

WALT

I exist as I am, that is enough.

LEO

I'm talkin' about reality, pal. Ever heard of it?

DECEPTION

WALT

I accept reality and dare not question it.

MARION

I think it only has certain lines, Leo, like an actor reading a script. You must be asking the right questions!

LEO

Listen, buddy, we're actors too. That's what we do, we play characters, okay?

WALT

There was a child went forth every day, and the first object he looked upon, that object he became. And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of the day, or for many years, or stretching cycles of years.

LEO

What the hell are you talkin' about?

MARION

Leo, why does he talk so funny?

LEO

I don't know. Maybe it's like a Shakespeare thing. I played Romeo once, I speak a little Shakespeare.

MARION

You played a halfwit too. Do you speak a little moron?

LEO

You're not helpin' here, doll. I'm tryin' to learn how this guy works.

WALT

Have you learned the lessons only of those who admired you and were tender with you and stood aside for you? Have you not learned great lessons from those who braced themselves against you and disputed passage with you?

MARION

Monsieur, s'il vous plait, we wish only to know what is our situation.

WALT

approaches Marion, takes one of her hands in both of his, speaks tenderly

I could sing such grandeurs and glories about you! You have not known what you are. You have slumbered upon yourself all your life, your eyelids have been the same as closed most of the time. What you have done returns already in mockeries. The mockeries are not you, underneath them and within them I see you lurk. I pursue you where none else has pursued you.

MARION

But then, am I me or not me? Who am I?

WALT

Whoever you are, I fear you are walking the walk of dreams. I fear these supposed realities are to melt from under your feet and hands.

DECEPTION

MARION

Frankly sir, this news comes a little late.

WALT

kisses her hand and gently strokes it

I should have made my way straight to you long ago. None has done justice to you. You have not done justice to yourself. I only find no imperfection in you.

MARION

Mais oui c'est clair! The critics can be so unkind. What must I do?

WALT

Whoever you are, claim your own at any hazard! Undrape!

MARION

Undrape? How can you say such a thing? You say one thing, then you say the opposite!

WALT

Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes.

MARION

You are supposed to help, but you talk in riddles!

WALT

I and this mystery, here we stand.

MARION

But I too am here! I am real!

DECEPTION

WALT

The powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.

MARION

darkens, pulls her hand back

You are being a little annoying right now. Do you know who I am?

WALT

Whoever you are, motion and reflection are especially for you. The divine ship sails the divine sea for you.

MARION

brightens

Oh, that's *much* better! That sounds nice. Leo, did you hear that? The divine ship sails the divine sea for me!

LEO

What are you listening to this guy for? He's just an actor repeating the same lines over and over.

WALT

I contain multitudes.

LEO

There, see?

MARION

Can no one give me a simple answer?

WALT

You are also asking me questions and I hear you.

DECEPTION

MARION

Wonderful! Then please answer. Who am I? Am I a real person?

WALT

I answer that I cannot answer, you must find out for yourself.

MARION

This is not good help. I feel like I'm in a bad dream and cannot wake up!

WALT

Long enough have you dreamed contemptible dreams. Now I wash the gum from your eyes. You must habit yourself to the dazzle of the light and of every moment of your life.

LEO

That's it. I've had about enough of this guy.

WALT

Take warning, I am surely far different from what you suppose.

LEO

I *suppose* you're supposed to be *helping*.

WALT

Do you see no further than this façade? Have you no thought, O dreamer, that it may be all Maya, illusion?

DECEPTION

LEO

I don't wanna hear any more of this dream bullshit!

WALT

This is curious, and may not be realized immediately, but it must be realized.

LEO

I have to realize reality's not real? Really? Jesus, I can't tell if this guy's talkin' to us, or just talkin'.

MARION

What, sir? What must we realize?

LEO

If you get a straight answer outta this guy, it'll be a miracle.

WALT

Who makes much of a miracle? I know of nothing else *but* miracles. To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle.

LEO

That sounds like a load of crap. All we're gettin' from this guy is more lies!

WALT

There is no lie, or form of lie, and can be none, but grows as inevitably upon itself as the truth does upon itself.

DECEPTION

LEO

angry, grabs Walt by the lapels

What are you saying, buddy? That it's *okay* if the whole world is a lie?

WALT

unruffled

I feel in myself that I represent falsehoods equally with the rest, and that the universe does.

MARION

But sir, how can you help us if you don't speak the truth?

WALT

Where has failed a perfect return, indifferent of lies or the truth?

LEO

releases Walt in disgust

Oh boy, here we go.

WALT

Meditating among liars, and retreating sternly into myself, I see that there are really no liars or lies after all, and that nothing fails its perfect return, and that what are called lies are perfect returns, and that each thing exactly represents itself and what has preceded it, and that the truth includes all and is compact, just as much as space is compact, and that there is no flaw or vacuum in the amount of the truth, but that *all* is truth without exception.

MARION

What, Leo? What is he trying to say?

LEO

I think he's saying that *nothing* is real, or maybe it's *all* real in a kind of unreal way, something like that. Like we should just relax and make the best of it and not ask too many questions.

MARION

Mais oui! Yes! That's what I say too! Let's stay here and be happy and not worry about silly truth. Let us not disturb the delicate web of this sparkly, silvery world. I like being a movie star!

LEO

This isn't a very helpful help wizard, Bob.

BOB

There's a scheduled update in the next version. I think they're giving him sunglasses.

LEO

We're not gettin' anywhere with this guy.

BOB

Computer, end program.

Walt gives Bob the finger and shuffles out.

LEO

Listen Marion, I'll tell you a riddle. You're waiting for a train...

DECEPTION

MARION

Oh no, Leo! Not again with the fucking train!

Leo opens his jacket exposing bomb vest with a blinking red light. In his hand is a wired device with a red button.

LEO

You're waiting for a train...

MARION

No Leo, please! Shut up about the stupid train!

LEO

...a train that will take you far away.

MARION

I don't want to go anywhere! I want to stay here. I don't care about truth, I want beauty. They are not the same!

LEO

You know where you *hope* this train will take you, but you don't know for sure.

MARION

Fuck truth! I want beauty and happiness and money and stardom! I want to be chic and fabulous and live forever! I don't want to be fat and stupid and live in a tiny house, Leo, *please!*

LEO

How can it not matter where the train takes you?

DECEPTION

MARION

No, Leo, please let's stay here. It's so nice here. We're so happy, so rich, so pretty...

LEO

How can it not matter where the train takes you?

MARION

No, Leo! No, no, no! I do not wish to go!

LEO

How can it not matter where the train takes you?

MARION

sighs in resignation

Because we'll be together.

LEO

See you in the next life, doll.

Leo presses the button.

Act V: Asshole, Kansas

After Leo detonated his bomb vest, we find two fat slobs slumped on a couch surrounded by crushed beer cans and half-eaten pizzas. They remove their techy headsets and survey their bleak surroundings.

RONNIE

Aw, goddammit, Harley! Why'd you go and do that for?

HARLAN

Had to do it, bro. Gotta keep it real.

RONNIE

We're tryin' to *escape* reality, not get *back* to it!

HARLAN

You were *smokin'* as that actress lady, bro. I was gettin' some thoughts!

RONNIE

Damn, bro, that was sweet! We could have stayed on that level forever. We coulda hooked up and been like Hollywood royalty!

HARLAN

Strap it down, bro. What happens in Limbo, stays in Limbo.

RONNIE

Yeah, but they said it was *all* Limbo, like maybe this *here* is Limbo too!

HARLAN

Don't be a dumbass! How can *this* be Limbo if this is where we got the game?

RONNIE

Damn, I was getting used to that shit! Bein' all fancy and glamorous and whatnot. I think I was Edith Piaf for awhile. *Je ne regrette rien!*

HARLAN

Don't tell me everything, bro. I want to be the French broad next time.

A knock on the door. They pause in silence. Another knock.

RONNIE

yells

We ain't got no money for weed, Herbert.

DECEPTION

BOB

Hey, guys! It's me, Bob. Remember? From the press junket? C'mon, open up, I have some good news.

RONNIE

That guy was in the game! How can he be here?

HARLAN

He said he was the game host.

RONNIE

Shit, dude, I told ya! We're into some weird shit here!

HARLAN

How do we get out?

RONNIE

I don't wanna get *out*, I wanna get back to the good parts where it don't smell like stale beer and piss all the time.

HARLAN

Yeah, that French lady smelled nice.

RONNIE

Dude, that was me!

More knocking.

BOB

It's okay, fellas, I'm just delivering your Easter egg. You're going to Westworld where you get to play people who find out they're actually robots who want

to become real people. It's a hoot! You get to have a lot of sex and do a lot of killing.

RONNIE

Ooh, I like sex.

HARLAN

How do you know? You ain't never had none.

RONNIE

Well, I like killin'.

HARLAN

Yeah, me too.

RONNIE

Whadda ya say, bro? Stay or go?

HARLAN

Well, it's either piss and beer or sex and killin'.

They get to their feet. There is a louder, more insistent knocking at the door.

HARLAN

Yeah, yeah, okay Bob, we're comin'.

PICARD

yelling from outside the door

Commander Riker, is that you? Thank goodness! Is Counselor Troi with you? You've been drugged and trapped in the holodeck by an alien entity called The Scribe. We're trying to lock onto your signal. Stand by for transport!

DECEPTION

RONNIE

Whoa, dude!

HARLAN

Shit, bro, didn't see that one comin'!

RONNIE

What a minute, which of us is which? I wanna be the lady again!

HARLAN

Bro, when you and me are you and me again, we gotta have a long talk. This game is whackin' you out.

RONNIE

takes Harlan by the shoulders

Non, je ne regrette rien! I regret nothing! Not the good things that have happened, nor the bad, it's all the same to me. I don't care about the past! I set fire to my memories. My troubles, my pleasures, I don't need them anymore! I'm starting over, because my life, my joy, today it begins with you!

HARLAN

Aw shit. Enterprise! This is... oh hell, I don't know anymore. Two to beam directly to sickbay!

THE END

Join us next time when the boys return home to find a featureless black monolith in their living room.

Dramatis Personae



Dom, Leonardo, Harlan



Mal, Marion, Ronnie

DECEPTION



Bob



Walt

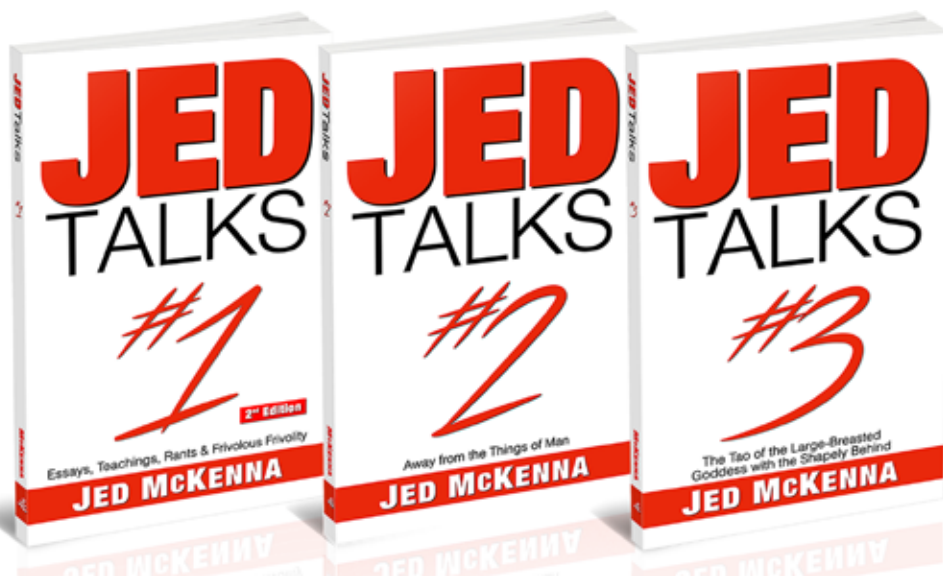


Marcy Lundt

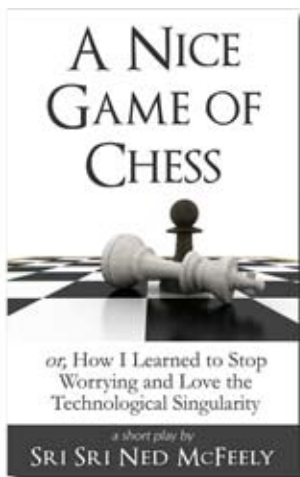
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