

Darla Pitt

By Sheila Gold

Chapter 4: Meet-Up

The first Marin hiking meet-up was scheduled for Blithedale Ridge a few days after the encounter with Sarge 1.0. The meet-up would be a bust in terms of meeting in person, but a boon to meeting in Cyberspace. It would also be a huge loss for the Misfits. For Brad, it was like a science fiction story with a glowingly happy ending.

As with the fake hike, the meet-up hike started at the Tiburon-Wye bus pad. At first, Brad hoped to find a café close to the bus pad, but that would not come to pass. The closest open café was in Downtown Mill Valley. Brad settled down there to eat breakfast and have a drink. The food and beverage were selected by the lady doing the marionetting. He encountered Sarge 2.0 on the way and quickly befriended him by deboning him. Sarge had sported the typical Mooderola sensory and memory cruft masks Brad had encountered in Sarge 1.0. The deboning operation cleared up the cruft with a set of simple exercises. Brad liberated Sarge from his boneheaded brain-control prison.

The cruft clearing operation known as “deboning” was a simple process of exercising physical systems until the neural masks were cleared. It did not take much for this to work because the masks were fragile. Any active person would automatically debone, so the Misfits depended on relatively sedentary people as victims of their brain-control manipulations. Like Sarge 1.0, Sarge 2.0 was also a Marine Sergeant Veteran of the Vietnam War. He was not as passive as the prior Sarge. He had served as a drill sergeant stateside, so he remained physically unscathed by the war (but not by the Misfits).

As a new friend of Brad’s and the Cyberjunkies crew, Sarge pointed out W.P. automobiles and cell members. He hung with Brad and the meet-up ladies in Cyberspace as Brad sat at the café. For Sarge, it was as though he was being Brad Yayger, likewise for the meet-up ladies.

Four guys sat inside the café as Brad sat outside eyeing the one Sarge pointed out as a W.P. cell leader. Brad got up and walked around outside the café windows glaring in at the guy as he was seated with his clutch of pals. This was a clear intimidation tactic, which proved to be quite successful. Some of the meet-up ladies promised to join Brad on the Blithedale Ridge, so he headed up there after breakfast.

Brad took the path he had feigned during his operation supporting the lady-in-distress. It took him up the side of the ridge to the Corte Madera Fire Road. Sarge enjoyed the Cybertour of the wilderness above his own abode and lamented that he never got to see it before then. He committed himself to spending time there in the future.

This experience brought Brad back to his hike on Mt. Diablo with Sarah Angstrom cybered in. That was Brad’s introduction to certain features of marionetting that he would use to great advantage in the months to come. Sarah pointed here and there to objects in the distance. Brad pointed out that he was not the one doing the pointing. Both she and Brad were learning about the marionetting aspect of their brain-computer connectivity. Brad had yet to realize that he could also marionette Sarah.

When Brad and Sarge reached the ridge, some of the ladies in the meet-up group claimed that they were close. Brad gave them a full half-hour to catch up, but they seemed to be snowing him. As he waited for them on the ridge, he observed the other people who passed by. There were some prissy misses

without water carrying something like a Walkman (an old-school portable cassette player). He took the time to make a podcast with an interview of Sarge.

When he timed out and proceeded toward Mt. Tamalpais, he realized he was not on the right trail. Since the meet-up group balked, he headed south on Blithedale Ridge Fire Road to its termination at a private road. The proximity of an affluent neighborhood so close to his waiting spot explained the lack of water, but not the Walkman-like devices. Why weren't they listening to smartphones like most other young folks?

The meet-up lady most active in the cyber group was the Corte Madera Lady. Brad figured she was a W.P. interloper attempting to sabotage the meet-up. When he had her empty her Air Bonehead carrier, he expected her to be zapped by the pain-inducing area denial weapon. Instead, her husband got the zap. This was an informative event for Brad. It introduced him to a whole new profile of W.P. bitches who were collaborating with W.P. players against their will. The event shook up the W.P. cell so much that members dropped a dime to the Feds.

Thinking back on the Diablo hike with Sarah, Brad recalled how he looked for live oaks without success. All of the oaks they encountered were of an unfamiliar variety. It just happened that they encountered a plaque explaining the three varieties of oak on the mountain: coastal live oaks, blue oaks, and valley oaks. It showed the leaves, acorns, and profile of each for distinction. Brad knew the live oak leaves, but learned about the blue and valley oak leaves from the plaque. The image of a valley oak profile revealed a distinctively broad trunk.

Later in the hike, as they approached a broad-trunk tree, Sarah speculated that it was a valley oak based on the trunk. As they neared the tree, the deep lobes of a valley oak became visible. Bingo! Sarah had nailed it. The next tree up the trail was also a valley oak. Next to the tree was a young man with a guitar. Brad took the time to chat him up about the differences between the valley oak above him and the more populous blue oak. The guy asked Brad if he was into nature. "No, I'm just into trivia." False words were never spoken.

The experience was so profound that it led to an entire genre of Cyberjunkies lore regarding triviality, nature observations, and valley oak sightings. Other experiences that day rocked Sarah to her core, and set the stage for her romantic interest in Brad.