



In the dead of the night Vencin Marcusi ran for his life down a desolate freeway overpass. A hexagonal UFO hunted patiently overhead, as if waiting for him to collapse from exhaustion. The merciless Arizona summer acted as a furnace, even in the dark of the night, provoking rivulets of sweat to slither down his face and neck. The smell of city pollution and the road's hot tar choked his lungs. High frequency sound waves pierced through his eardrums, muting all external sounds—the ringing in his head only accompanied by his pounding heart.

“YOU CANNOT ESCAPE YOUR FATE, VENCIN!” an inhuman—almost electronic—voice rumbled through the sky.

The fear Vencin experienced was unmatched. His anxiety rash burned and stung across his back, chest, and face—the sensation almost bringing tears to his eyes. The concoction of agony intensified as his muscles began to cramp, struggling for oxygen like a fish out of water. Vencin's chest tightened in exhaustion. As his energy drained, his pace decreased, like a car running on empty. Tunnel vision dominated his clear sight—limiting his peripherals.

*I won't give up. I can't let them get me!*

Vencin's vision focused on a tunnel of light ahead. A surge of adrenaline ignited, granting him immense strength. His aching skin and muscles renewed, his vision purified, and his head

cleared of the tormenting buzzing. With Vencin's physical limits no longer holding him back, his wobbling hurtles transformed into a steady sprint. The road blurred below as he dashed forward, the thumps of his footsteps echoing in his ears.

“NOOOO! GET HIM!” the synthetic voice boomed from above.

The pavement lit up as the UFO descended. Vencin was almost at the tunnel and focused all his energy away from the approaching force. Just before entering the light, a magnetic vibration ripped him away. His stomach dropped as his body went numb and tingled. His blood rushed to his head when a windblast sucked him up towards the UFO, like being ripped out of an airborne airplane door.

Vencin fell to the cold wooden floor, wide-eyed, and gasping for air. He'd awoken from his nightmare. He felt the numbness and tingling slowly dissipate while he caught his breath—his chest rapidly expanding. Yet again, another torturous slumber had occurred—just as they regularly did ever since he could remember. There was something so real and haunting about them that a weight of angst seemed to linger even after he awoke.

*Why do I keep having these dreams of people trying to kill or capture me?*

His shaky hands lifted himself up. He sat on his bed and reached for his phone, checking his emails and social media—his usual routine before he got out of bed. An hour passed within no time before he put his phone down. Wanting to start the day, he maneuvered towards his bathroom.

Two sliding closets acted as a connecting hallway to his bathroom—the mirrored doors reflected his passing naked, muscular physique. Vencin always slept in the nude. Peeling off his clothes at the end of the day was like releasing the control, stress, and anxiety in his life. Unfortunately, those misery-filled emotions seemed to return each day, oftentimes even in the peace of his sleep.

He glanced at his chiseled chest and abs in the mirror while he brushed his teeth with his electric toothbrush—the vibrations invigorating his mouth with minty freshness. Even though he had finally achieved his desired look, he all too often saw the formerly scrawny man staring back at him. Based on his good looks and charm, no one would ever guess Vencin suffered from body dysmorphic disorder most of his life. Growing up, he was always in shape, but underweight. No one, including previous girlfriends, ever commented about it except his drill Sargent of a father, who loved to address every flaw he saw in others—especially Vencin.

After smoothly shaving along his jawline and chin, Vencin splashed his face with warm water—it never got cold in the summer. It left him somewhat refreshed, minus the foul scent of the city water, which he learned to deal with over the years. He found it ludicrous that he grew up in the acclaimed “most livable city” of Scottsdale, Arizona; yet it was one of the hottest in the country, had horrible pollution, and housed not the most pleasant of people.

His current apartment resided in Tempe, about six miles outside of Scottsdale, and provided the same features, only it was usually a couple degrees warmer. Living in Tempe had its perks, for it was close to his school—Arizona State University. He’d been attending ASU for the past four years and was just one week away from achieving his Bachelors in Business Entrepreneurship Degree. It seemed great, yet he still struggled to figure out his desired career path—his true calling in life.

Vencin slid his closet door open and dressed himself in a sky-blue oxford shirt—sleeves rolled up—tailored white shorts, and a nice pair of brown brogue shoes with a matching Hermès belt. He put on a fancy watch to complete his preppy look. He went back into his bathroom to style his thick, dark-brown hair into a well-coiffed side part. The shorter sides made his medium-length hair up top look clean-cut, while his pomade added a desired sleekness and shine. As he finished, he analyzed his reflection; his blue shirt really made his light-gray eyes stand out underneath his naturally arched eyebrows.

Internal anxiety rushed through him when he realized today was the day he had been dreading all semester—the day of his oral presentation for psychology. The stinging-zapping feeling of his rash irritated the skin on his back and began prickling up his neck. He could see the red patches starting to form.

*Stop, you can control this.* He breathed in deeply, his closed fists resting on his bathroom’s granite counter as he relaxed. He’d won the battle with his rash this time and hoped he wouldn’t get it during his speech—it was almost impossible to talk down in public.

Vencin grabbed his leather backpack and made his way out his single-bedroom, luxury apartment. He jogged down the stairs. Even in the morning the heat blazed right through him, already making him break a sweat. He unlocked his mountain bike from its shaded rack and rode to his favorite breakfast-lunch restaurant, Harlow’s Café, conveniently located just West of ASU on Hardy and University Dr.