

of the complete series of levels detailed above. As described in Bara's Chronicle, this process was developed in the 1960s in order to generate a more robust community within P.S. After completing the process, most members come to recognize that the language of "Initiates" and "Initiation" is deceptive. The process might more accurately be described as a bizarre seminar or a kind of training program. As one Initiate interviewee explains:

I was one of the first Initiates to be brought in with the modern eleven-level process. It was jarring. I was commuting from home an hour away, sharing a room with my brother Diego. It was already intense. Then I noticed them. Back then, I didn't know what P.S. was. It was just "them." For the first few weeks, I seriously thought Diego was playing a prank on me. I mean, you know. A lot of the first levels are so subtle. You'd hardly notice. A poster for a movie screening that looks normal, but then all kinds of small things would be off if you read closely. Every few steps, someone would contact me. Once it was an anonymous phone call. Another time, my friend Sofia, you know Sofia. She pulls me aside and just says, "I can tell you're freaked

out, but do you want to keep going?" No context. Nothing about the parasite. No real pressure. Just that deep look she does. You know, I told her, "I'm on scholarship. I need to keep my head down and get through school, not get into some club that tests me by making me stand in the snow to prove myself, so you just count me out!" And then Sofia just says, "It's nothing like hazing. No humiliation. It's training. A way to help you get ready. But no one can make you. This is only if you want."

Several Initiates use the language of "training." Then again, even this language suggests an older pedagogical idiom that involves the repetitive behaviors or rote memorization that characterize nineteenth-century education. This process arguably bears closer similarities to a sport. Regardless of the inaccuracy of "Initiation," as soon as language enters into common usage, it is difficult to alter it (I think, for instance, of the myriad texts that fall under the rubric of "science fiction" when "speculative literature" might be far more accurate a term).

All of the levels map onto abilities and forms of knowledge that enable one to approach the unthinkable power of the parasite. In the early days, some members of P.S.

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experienced something akin to culture shock when first confronting the parasite. Since that time, the Reticulites have regularly created and implemented their levels. In the 1960s, they would recraft each level for every new Initiate in order to guarantee the ongoing uniqueness of the process. There are few accounts of the types of levels from that period. Even so, there are some descriptions of the process. As one Initiate noted:

Oh, God. I don't know. Back then, we had challenges, puzzles, ambiences, just different ways of being in the world. The one that I really remember was when they challenged me to make my guitar sound like a horn. At first I thought it was crazy, but once I figured out how to do it I felt so good! I didn't understand why they were asking me to do it until I saw the parasite. They were preparing me for a completely different way of seeing the world. Another time, they asked for my help on a problem that no one else had been able to solve. To make a moving sand painting. They said that they needed some fresh eyes. It actually felt really good to be around all of these more experienced people who respected me. They

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needed my help! Remember: this was, what, 1962. They didn't care that my parents worked

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at a factory and weren't anyone special. Or that I preferred women. This wasn't like any other club or organization or whatever. World. I guess, that's the word for all of this. Anyway, age didn't matter to them either, even when I first joined. I was so young. But we do everything together. The work. Whether you're seventeen or forty-seven. Doesn't matter. The best idea moves forward. I mean, how do you turn back from that?

By the 1990s, P.S. shifted the process from individual to collaborative trials. Occasionally, Initiates at different stages of the process would be invited to interact with one another or to influence each other's levels. Overall, recruitment practices have become more complex over the decades, and have increasingly incorporated multiple media.

Even today, not all Seekers traverse all of the levels to become Initiates. In order for an Initiate to traverse all 11 levels requires nontrivial dedication, creativity, a playful spirit, detail orientation, and increasingly distributed intelligence and affect. Indeed, these qualities are not so different from some

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of the capacities that some people develop during the type of initiation that is built into a four-year university experience. Given P.S.'s commitment to a kind of self-obsolence and perpetual change, however, these criteria have not remained constant through history. Interviews with P.S. members have suggested that Initiates demonstrate a strong sense of commitment to the community and capacity to transform the group even before exposure to the change capacity of the parasite itself:

I joined up in like 1998. It was a weird time to come into P.S. Everyone was still working through all the residuals from 1995. But they were already planning for 2006. Sometimes you can barely remember what it felt like, after nine or ten years away. It's hard to hold onto that feeling. I was a completely different person! I was 19 in 1998. By 2006, when it finally happened, I was almost thirty. I'd been a Squirrel for probably eight years. The Sects were new back then. At least the official split. Anyway, I thought I was ready. I was *so sure* I was ready. But you know! You know this. *No one* could be ready.