

## One

If someone is reading this, maybe they finally caught us. It was to be expected. I was always the world's worst liar. I tell people their birthday gifts before they even express intrigue. Covert operations, well, it goes without saying. Pun intended.

Regardless, I somehow became a devout follower of UPS anyway. I think it was the summer of 2109, though it's hard to tell now.

Time in general makes much less sense since I joined. It takes me awhile to do the conversions since, I mean, the first thing you become privy to in UPS Assembly 1, is that there used to be seven days in a week.

According to most UPS Factsars, it was called Sunday, although there is some argument over the name depending on if you learn from new school Factsars or old school Factsars. I've also seen it spelled with an "o" instead of a "u".

Supposedly, Sunday (Sonday) was meant for relaxation, which is the reason no one believes it ever existed. Years then, would have been 364 or so days long, and not 312.

That's where it starts to get almost impossible to calculate. I admit it makes sense of the seasons' tendencies to invert every six years or so, because according to the old calendar, seasons were *exactly* the same time every year.

I was impatiently waiting for the train on 50<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. It was just starting to get warm, the time of year when birds appear directionally incompetent and the sun reacquaints with your shoulders.

I ducked downstairs. Usual runtime on the local train is about 43 seconds. I had already been waiting about two minutes. I tapped my foot to the beat of nothing, pulled the gum in my mouth into rubbery strands, anything to pass the time.

A man sat on the bench and stared at me. His promiscuously naked head shined. Around his neck hung a rusty antique key on a ball chain. His Textbox wires wrapped his forearm twice in a renegade kind of way that I could never pull off. I'd come to find out his name was Totum Mac.

He is a conspiracy theorist and extreme preacher of UPS. One of the die-hard types. Cynical, worn and looks 15 years older than he really is, not that he'd ever tell you his age. He has now spent years of his only life illustrating a message that no one can hear. The meaninglessness of his plight is indented all over his face in pockets and wrinkles and I'm instantly convinced he hates the world. People like this compel me to needle them.

I stared back. The next thing I knew, Totum sprung from the wood and made his way to street level having wasted his subway fare. I thought that was the most frivolous thing someone could do. For all of these reasons I decided to follow him through the gripping claw-like metal bars, having now wasted the fare myself.

I spotted him immediately but remained about 20 feet behind him for a block or so. As the orange hand halted us both, Totum finally realized I was following him. Paranoia filled his face.

He shot me a look that said, "You're obviously one of them" that was filled with such conviction I almost said yes. A nod that nearly made me agree to anything.

Of course, at the time I didn't even know what "one of them" meant. UPS Assemblies don't tell you who you are hiding from or why for quite some time either, so it wasn't until almost a year later that I even knew what Totum may have been eluding to that day. All I knew was that I wasn't one of anyone.

Somehow I passed his test, unspoken. Knowing what I know now, about Totum and the coded creed he surreptitiously stands for, I can't believe I earned his trust. But I did. We walked.

We walked for 39 blocks in one direction. Along the way, we passed some things I will never look at in the same way again. Like the blue boxes on the sidewalk with the rounded tops and the drawers that pull out at an angle. I almost *always* manage to bump into them. According to Totum, they were once called "mailboxes."

Beyond that, they were supposedly once functional. They were a way to communicate. It was at this point in the tour of the world through Totum's eyes, I almost exited.

Next, were those metal squares on a stand with the numbers and wired black banana. As fixed art pieces, I always thought they dotted the streets quite well, especially in our tapestry. Totum had a theory even more asinine than the last.

Once upon a time, phones were not mobile. They were attached in booths *and* to walls in your own home. These metal number squares housed them. Then it got better. There was a time when they weren't used for text or *even* old email. With that sort of inane logic, there very well could have been seven days in a week.

Sometimes Totum would be on a rant, typing quicker than his brain could feasibly generate. I hung on every thought. I'm no conspiracy theorist but what did any of us *really* know about the past? There's no one account of it anywhere.

After my 39 block walk with Totum, I knew attending a UPS Assembly aroused my curiosity enough. Especially after the most far-fetched part yet.

There were once records of *everything*. Kept in books you could apparently hold. Like a digital book, but in kind of a tangible form. I swear I thought of inventing that once. These books you can hold, smell (supposedly that was the best part), fold, store, mark, collect, rip. There were millions. There were more than millions. There were places devoted to selling them. There were places they were even free!

They were made of something called paper (pronounced pay-per). It was sold in sheets, varying shapes and sizes and impossibly thin. Using utensils that

disappeared a century ago, you could transcribe permanent things. Books were made of them, the news was on it. It was like a chisel on stone. Only not on a stone.

My head was spinning. Could this be true? Why did the free paper houses vanish? What else didn't we know and why did it all get covered up? As the questions fired off in my brain like a fully loaded shotgun, Totum wrote, "Every Tuesday night, the UPS meets in the subway and heads to Assembly. You'll understand everything soon." He cornered off at the intersection.