

The Cycle

by Zachary Jaquith

2,898 words

Cycle 1

Day 1

LEARNING COMMONS.

Andrew read these words as he stepped up to a wide door set at the end of a majestic marble staircase. When he heard his name called, Andrew walked through the now open doors and into an enormous room, empty except for a woman in a red dress with a matching checkered scarf. Lining the walls, hundreds of metallic cylindrical pods shined in the low light of the dank room. Andrew approached the woman warily, "Hello," he said, "I'm here to learn."

His voice echoed through the room a lot louder than he had intended. The woman, clearly experienced at her job, pulled out her tablet. "What is your name and Tentative Learning Methods?"

"Andrew Philip Fuller. Spatial and Linguistic."

The woman typed the data in, took a step back, and led Andrew to pod #452. Their steps seemed to thunder throughout the Learning Commons. The woman stopped, turned, and tilted her head slightly to the left, indicating this was his stop. He looked up at the massiveness of the pod and imagined being rocketed off into space, or being plunged into the depths of the underground. The door slid open, and with only a moment's hesitation, Andrew entered. Taking in his new surroundings, he noticed the bluish glow coming from the inner walls seemed to have no source, leading to a disorientating lack of shadows. The interior was not quite wide enough to sit down on the floor, but not too narrow as to be

uncomfortable. Feeling uneasy, Andrew leaned against the back wall as the door slid shut, sealing him in.

“Name and Methods,” spouted a computer generated voice coming from the ceiling.

“Andrew Philip Fuller. Spatial and Linguistic,” Andrew responded.

“Today, August 9, 2049, is the beginning of your First Cycle. During this period of time, you will spend two hours a day here in this pod with me, your personal learning assistant. We will be discovering more about the inner workings of your mind. You will go through tests and procedures that will help us determine how you learn, and we will develop these methods to perfection. We will start with your *Tentative Methods*. Based on your years of primary, secondary, and tertiary schooling, you believe these Methods define how you learn. According to the data retained from your teachers, projects, and interests, the Spatial and Linguistic methods have been correctly identified. Today you will begin to *learn how to learn*. This is essential to your future as a student and as a professional. Turning young adults into lifelong learners is the goal of public education. *Learn to Learn* has been the motto of public education since the late 2030s. So, Andrew, today you start a journey of self-revelation and knowledge attainment.”

Andrew listened intently with a mix of excitement and anxiety. Thoughts began to circle his mind. *Learn to learn? What does that even mean? How can this computer know how I work or how—*

As if reading his mind, the computer voice continued, “In order to help you learn, you must be completely transparent with the system and be in constant communication both with me and yourself. Now, stand still. The MRI and Brain Mapping is about to start. We must learn exactly how your brain works and how you learn.”

“Ok,” muttered Andrew as the pod started to beep and squeal. Andrew stood there against the wall uncomfortably for half an hour as the computer pulled the data necessary to determine which Learning Method was best for him: Spatial, Aural, Linguistic, or Physical.

These four words had been drilled into his head since he was a child, and here, eighteen years later, two of those words would define him. Define the way he worked and ultimately the way he learned. With a definitive *beep, beep, beep*, the computer halted.

“Andrew, I am pleased to inform you that your learning potential is 38% Spatial, 12% Aural, 34% Linguistic, and 16% Physical. Therefore, the standardized tests applied to you in the last few years of your education have been correct. Your *Tentative Methods* are now your *Defining Methods*. You have two styles of learning: Spatial and Linguistic. Spatial Learning Style means you learn through photos, videos, and visualizations. You solve problems and remember data through picturing things in your mind. Linguistic Learning Style means you learn through thinking aloud and on paper. If you say something, memorize it, and write it, it is branded into your mind. Congratulations, you will now spend one year developing these skills in order to optimize your learning abilities. You must LEARN TO LEARN.”

Cycle 2

Day 1

Jessie walked past the giant marble staircase she had climbed every day for the last year and toward another towering building. A sign reading “LEARNING SPECIALIZATION” was situated above the sliding glass doors. Jessie smiled shyly as she stepped up to the next stage in her education. She felt no fear, in stark contrast to last year’s approach to the Learning Commons. Instead, she felt a warm excitement for the possibilities and future course through her. She now knew exactly how she learned and knew that this next year of finding herself would be exhausting but refreshing.

She sauntered toward the front desk which was located right inside the entrance and smiled at the attendant sitting behind it, "Hello! I'm here to learn a trade."

The man looked up at Jessie's face and spoke in a charming and gentle tone, "What is your name? How do you learn?"

"Jessie Austin Johnson. Spatial and Physical Learning Methods."

"Perfect!" replied the man, as he found her name on the list, "Starting today, August 9th 2049, you will be put through various courses of almost every trade you can imagine. By measuring your brain and how fast you learn certain skills, the computer will generate several optimal choices for specialization. The choice is up to you, but the computer is here to guide you and give you suggestions. Now, time to begin! Come right this way, please."

The man stepped out from behind his desk and walked toward a small door set in the stone at the back of the large room. Jessie followed. She was now starting to feel some nerves creeping into her as she thought about how essential these next few months were. Any choice or decision would ultimately lead to tremendous changes to her future, changes she would be unaware of.

The pair walked down a long, curvy hallway that must lead into the center of the building, she thought. After a few more minutes of walking and thinking, Jessie noticed a slight downward incline of the hallway. Her heart started to speed up as she realized she was going underground.

Finally, they rounded a corner and walked into a bright white room. The panels that made up the walls and ceiling glowed white, casting awkward shadows on the floor. Inside the room was a single desk with a huge map etched into its wood surface. The man gestured for Jessie to walk up to it, and she did. As she got closer, she noticed a white rectangle at the center of the map. YOU ARE HERE. Branching out from the top and sides of the white rectangle were three passageways. Each passageway ended up in a different

room, from which three more passageways branched out. This pattern was repeated many times over, resulting in hundreds of small circular rooms around the edge of the map.

The man looked up at Jessie's face. "This is The Decision Maker. It is the beginning of your future. Look at the three different hallways coming out of this room. See?" He gestured to the passageways. "This is the first decision you must make. Creator, Leader, or Healer."

Then he handed her an earbud. "This is a portable version of your learning assistant from last year. She has been programmed into this earbud, so she already knows you and everything about how you learn. She will be guiding you on your decision making. Good luck!" With that, the man walked out the way he came.

Jessie placed the earbud in her ear, and her faithful electronic assistant came to life. "Hello, Jessie! How was your summer? Do lots of learning? Well, welcome back. This next stage of your training as a student is one of the most exciting. Time to make a decision! Which of these three generalized themes would you like to explore today?"

Jessie thought for a moment, "I'm thinking Creator."

"Excellent choice. That's what I had in mind too."

Jessie walked toward the left wall of the room and stepped into the hallway with CREATOR etched above the door frame. She walked a couple hundred feet until she came to a new room, identical to the last. The only difference is that the YOU ARE HERE rectangle etched into the map in the center of the room had moved to her new location.

"Next decision," said the computer, "Artist, Engineer, Architect." Jessie walked through the ENGINEER hallway.

Then, "Mechanical, Electronic, Innovation."

"Mechanical." She walked down that hallway.

Decision after decision, Jessie ended up deep in the Engineering practices and finalized on Automotive Mechatronics. She stepped into the pod at the end of the final

hallway, a pod identical to the one where she had spent her last school year. As she stepped in, the walls shifted around her, and she found herself in a mechanic's shop. She had gotten used to Virtual Reality as she was learning to learn last year, but it was still a bit disorientating.

A man stepped into view. "Hello! And welcome to Automotive Mechatronics..." The man spoke for a while and showed her around the shop. At the end of his tour he said, "I hope to see you next year!" The world disintegrated, and Jessie was back in her pod again.

The computer in her ear spoke. "That's all for today. What did you think?"

"I liked it! But definitely don't love that specialization."

"That's ok!! Tomorrow we will start over from zero, back at Decision 1. You will be taking this journey of realization every day for the next year until you find the career you REALLY love. No matter how long it takes you to find it, once you are sure, we will move you to the next Cycle."

Cycle 3

Day 1

Bo had settled on Cinematography. After months of making decisions and checking out more careers than he could remember, he had finally found his passion. Bo checked his smartwatch, following the small map that appeared toward his next step as a student. He walked past building after building, each marked with a different specialization. Some he recognized from his Second Cycle, but there were others that he didn't even know existed.

Finally, he spotted the Cinematography building. His heart started to race, because he knew that he was about to learn an incredible amount of knowledge. A counselor had told Bo the classes he would go through were personalized and crafted to meet his Learning

Methods. That meant he would be able to learn everything necessary much faster than if he were to be stuck in a classroom listening to lectures. This excited him. He walked up to the door, and as it slid open, he could hear various songs and noises coming from what seemed like everywhere. Bo knew that films were being created at that very moment all around him. The room was long and skinny with six doors lining the walls. Above each door was a pair of Learning Methods.

“You made it, Bo!” said the voice in his ear, “You decided to study Cinematography, and here you are. Your first class starts in two minutes, and it is through those doors to your right.”

Bo walked up to the door and stood outside for a moment. He was feeling a little bit anxious. A sign above the door read, AURAL & SPATIAL. After a few moments' hesitation, Bo pushed open the door. Inside, a group of approximately 500 students was seated around an auditorium in small groups, talking quietly. Bo looked around to see if he could find a familiar face. He didn't. He went and sat near the back of the auditorium.

Within a few moments, a voice came over the speaker, “Please take your seats. We will begin momentarily.” The crowd quieted, and one by one the students sat down. When the last person was seated, the voice started again. “This is the beginning of your professional career. All of you learn through both Aural and Spatial styles and will be taught in a customized way in order to ensure that every piece of material is learned and memorized. This year will be full of fun, hard work, and pieces of art that will most likely outlive all of you. Welcome to forever.”

The crowd broke out in applause, and Bo clapped with them. He was so excited. This is what he was built to do. The people in this room would become lifelong friends and coworkers. The voice materialized into a man who stepped out from behind the stage and started walking towards the students, “I am professor Jean Marc Anthony, and I will be accompanying you throughout this year of intense specialization. I am a friend, a guide, a

leader, and a mentor, but ultimately I am a professor. When I went through the education program, I also learned in both Aural & Spatial styles, which prepared me for this job. Film has changed my life, and I know it will change yours. Your future starts today, August 9th 2049. For the first three months, we will cover basic training. The following three months will be intensive training courses. What a student used to learn in three years, you must learn in three months. It will be taught to you in the exact way that you learn, so it will be effective and efficient. Then, in your final months of the year, you will be put into groups to create three final projects. You will learn quickly. You will learn to be creative. You will learn to work with a team. You will graduate with a degree in film, and enough experience to jump into your Fourth Cycle.”

Cycle 4

Day 1

Sarai speed-walked as fast as she could toward the hospital. She had woken up late and was already stressed out trying to get to her first day on time. She put her earbuds in and pressed play on her smart watch as she checked the date: August 9th 2049. Intense yet cheerful classical music filled her ears as she kept up her brisk pace toward the hospital. After three years of preparation, she felt she was ready. The first year she learned how to learn; the second year she learned who she was; and the third year she learned how to be a doctor. A *doctor*. A pediatrician, to be exact. It was hard for Sarai to even think that about herself. The last year had been an intense year of learning everything human civilization knew about the human body. There had been late night cramming, fun projects, and a little bit of experience in the field, but this year would be the real test. This year separated those who would graduate from those who wouldn't.

Every specialty required a year of field work. All Fourth Cycle students were placed in a business or company related to their specialties where they would immediately begin real life work. At various intervals, their bosses and professors evaluated each student on how well they had adapted to their surroundings. Sarai knew all of this from the beginning, but she had not expected to be this nervous on this first day.

She sped up the steps to the hospital two at a time and burst through the front doors. Behind a desk, an older woman was startled by the sudden noise. “My goodness, why are you in *such* a hurry!?”

“Sorry!” spit out Sarai between breaths. “I’m just really late.”

“Are you here to start your Fourth Cycle, dear?” The old lady seemed sweeter as she calmed herself.

“Yes! My name is Sarai Baumer, and I’ve been assigned to this hospital.”

“Right this way, love. You are just on time! Your guidance doctor just arrived.” She led Sarai to the dressing room, where Sarai changed into her lab coat and white pants. As soon as she was dressed, she went back out into the hallway where she met her guidance doctor, a lovely redhead.

“Hello! My name is Rachelle. I graduated a year ago with the same degree you’re pursuing! My job as a guidance doctor is to be here for you when your experience fails you. At this point you should have retained all of the knowledge that you will need. All that you have left to learn can only be learned in practice. That is what this whole Fourth Cycle is about: immersing yourself in the professional world in order to obtain the experience and tools necessary to succeed. Welcome to your final Cycle.”

CLASS OF 2050

Dr. Sarai Baumer. Pediatrician.

CLASS OF 2051

Bo Klamath. Cinematic Artist.

CLASS OF 2052

Jessie Johnson. Architect.

CLASS OF 2053

Andrew Fuller. Elementary School Teacher.

