

REAL ARTISTS

Written by

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PALLADON (CONT'D)

Anne Palladon. Pleasure to meet you.

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INT. PALLADON'S OFFICE - DAY

2

Sophia touches the base of a large bronze statue on a nearby table. PALLADON is reviewing her portfolio on a tablet. A poster of "Mythos" is behind her.

PALLADON

This is really impressive, Sophia. An internship at a studio throughout college, in addition to a full time job; excellent grades, BFA when you were 20 from NYU? Great recommendations from your film studies professors- We're all impressed by your fortitude and focus. It couldn't have been easy.

SOPHIA

A real artist will do whatever it takes to realize a great vision.

PALLADON

So, why do you want to make movies?

SOPHIA

(she's excited now)

I never felt like I had a choice. It's always been my dream to see my imagination on the big screen. ...Actually, It was when I first saw Mythos that I knew I wanted to make movies. I was maybe 13 years old, and that movie meant something - the ability to tell a story that everyone finds some beauty and value in. That's the mark of a Semaphore movie to me-- It's not just the amazing technology, but a kind of heart. That's what makes Semaphore an icon-- It's why people love it so much. It's why I love it. A Professor of mine once said 'taste is the most valuable tool of a great artist.' I hope one day to make something truly epic and inspiring.

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2A

Palladon smiles at Sophia, touches the tablet screen, then slides it over to Sophia. A video is playing on it. "Mythos Fem-mixed!" DJ scratching is heard.

PALLADON

There was also this fan film, which you didn't include in your portfolio. We weren't really expecting some re-edit of Mythos to go viral -- five million views in a week, picked up by all the big sites. Gave our lawyers quite a headache.

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Sophia's face crumbles and she looks devastated. This is her worst fear --

PALLADON (CONT'D)

Relax. This was actually the reason I asked recruiting to fly you out here. I thought it was absolutely brilliant -- I might even say it's an improvement on the original.

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(beat)

Tell me; what do you think was your best change?

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SOPHIA

Well, I just thought I could do more to make Mythos -- which is a fantastic film, of course, but but I thought... That it could be a little more fantastic for girls. As fantastic for girls as it is for boys. So my edit... Brought the female sidekick more to the forefront. There was no reason in the story for her to be in the background.

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Palladon stares at Sophia, deep in thought. Sophia holds her breath.

PALLADON

Excellent ideas; It is a real challenge to find talented women that want to work in this industry. Honestly, our last few interviews haven't gone well. But I've felt for years that we need more women in our creative process, and frankly I'm hoping today one will be the start of something different.

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SOPHIA

I can't imagine wanting to work
anywhere else.

Palladon smiles and gets up to walk over to a door.

PALLADON

Let's take a peek behind the curtain.

3 INT. HALLWAY - SEMAPHORE STUDIOS - DUSK 3

Palladon crosses the hall to a door which reads 'Restricted Access - Artist Response Laboratory - RTM:v31r337'. Palladon puts her finger on a small screen and leads Sophia inside.

4 INT. ARTIST RESPONSE LAB - SEMAPHORE STUDIOS - DUSK 4

Sophia approaches a window carefully, looks down at an audience in a theatre below, and then at the screen on the huge screen in front of her.

SOPHIA

Is that...?

Sophia rapturously looks up at the film playing on the screen.

PALLADON

An early version of our next film: Return to Mythos. Our hero searches for the baby dragon he rescued, reconnects with the girl that saved his life, and learns the importance of courage and teamwork.

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SOPHIA

Is this a test screening?

PALLADON

(A sideways look at Sophia
- she imparts importance)
This is how we make our films.

SOPHIA

What do you mean?

Palladon touches a display in the booth bringing up a screen filled with biological readings.

PALLADON

In film school you probably learned that a movie is an intricate emotion-generation machine.

SOPHIA nods. PALLADON touches points on the screen, showing faces & graphs as she talks.

PALLADON (CONT'D)

We offer our audiences a perfectly
crafted experience. We give them
moments of laughter, perfectly
oriented against occasions for
pity. There must be exhilarating
highs followed by terrifying,
precipitous drops. We call the
response the "Emotional Chord". So,
Sophia-- how do you think we make
sure our movies get the desired
response?

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Sophia looks thoughtful, and carefully asks-

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SOPHIA

You try and empathize with the
audience...

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Palladon waits, her expression unchanged.

SOPHIA (CONT'D CONFUSED) (CONT'D)

And wouldn't you try to do test
screenings, and use the results
to... see what needs tweaking?

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PALLADON claps her hands together--

PALLADON

Aha! But how do you know if your
test audiences are giving you
useful feedback? Too often, they
tell you what they think you want
to hear.

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Palladon touches her tablet, and a series of screens light up
behind them, filled with the faces of each of the current
audience members, and a stream of biodata underneath. At the
bottom of all these measurements, is a highlighted one, the
"Emotional Chord" - the EC.

SOPHIA

You collect biological feedback
from the test screenings?

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PALLADON

Oh, we do more than that. Our
secret is Big Semi; the greatest
auteur in the history of
filmmaking.

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SOPHIA

Big Semi?

5A

As Palladon speaks, we see concepts in rough animation -

Ghost octopuses in space, a submarine film transposed onto Mars, a romcom starring a mongoose and a cobra.

PALLADON

It's short for Big Semiotics - and
this is why you had to sign an NDA.
When we start to make a movie, Big
Semi generates a thousand concepts
by randomly picking out ideas out
of a database.

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Sophie looks at Palladon thoughtfully. The video screen has graphic diagrams to illustrate Palladon's dialogue.

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PALLADON (CONT'D)

Big Semi then generates a basic
plot for each concept, by
randomizing existing storylines --
anything from classic films like
Jane Eyre to current memes. It then
renders a rough film based on that
plot, using stock characters and
dialogue, and we screen the
thousand resulting films, and
measure the audience response. Then
Big Semi iterates on it, and we
screen it again. On 1000 screens,
for 200 people, 12 times a day, 365
days a year. Until it is perfect.
as ckise as we can get - your edit
of 'Mythos' showed we still have
room to improve.

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Sophia is careful about revealing her skepticism.

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SOPHIA

A thousand random ideas? But then
of course you would have some
concepts developed by real
Semaphore artists in there, right?

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PALLADON

Theoretically, anyone can come up
with a concept. Many of those ideas
never go anywhere, no matter how
many 'real' artists you throw at
them. But with Big Semi, we have
access to the Emotional Chords of
every movie ever made and we can
use these as templates.

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(MORE)

PALLADON (CONT'D)

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SOPHIA

I'm sorry but... all of Semaphore's
films are essentially made by an
AI? That's how you make them?

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PALLADON touches her tablet, showing the live EC for the
theatre-it is flat-lined. Faces are bored, non-responsive.

PALLADON

Its a process that works. The first
audience response Chords are always
erratic and nowhere near the
target. Nudging responses to fit a
known Chord is nothing more than an
optimization problem, and Big Semi
is very good at solving those.

PALLADON taps her tablet, and sets a new target for 'comedy'
on the EC - Big Semi accepts her input, modifies the film,
and we can hear the audience road with laughter as the plot
changes on the movie the audience is watching. Palladon
smiles slyly at Sophia, and walks out.

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INT. SEMAPHORE STUDIOS HALLWAYS - DAY

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They walk through the hallways of the theaters. A few films
have let out, and employees are walking the halls, showing
extreme deference to Palladon, occasionally looking at
Sophia, but mostly preoccupied. SOPHIA's face is flushed and
her heart is beating out of her chest with these revelations.

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SOPHIA

So, if Big Semi is the filmmaker,
then what do artists -- what would
I actually do here?

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PALLADON

Be a member of the test audience,
of course. Without audiences, Big
Semi can't do its work.

SOPHIA

I'd...sit all day in a dark room
and watch movies? I thought you
were looking for artists?

PALLADON

Big Semi needs excellent audiences
to make the best films the world
has ever seen. As you said; "

(MORE)

PALLADON (CONT'D)
great taste is the most valuable
tool of a great artist".

SOPHIA

How can you just keep filling
thousands of theaters with fresh
audiences to watch all these films?
How have you kept Big Semi a
secret?

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Palladon looks at her, and opens a door to a terrace outside -
they walk to a jutting balcony.

6 EXT. TERRACE - DAY

6

PALLADON

Part of what makes our relationship
to Big Semi work is an innovation
we call Tabulae Rasae; it induces
short term memory loss- you forget
the movie you've just seen and you
can sit through a whole new
iteration with a fresh perspective.

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Palladon begins to walk away and opens a door - A drone zooms
into Sophia's view and seems to monitor her - watching with
an inhuman eye. Sophia stares through it, looking stricken
with grief, and grips the handrail for strength.

7 INT. PALLADON'S OFFICE - DUSK

7

Sophia and Palladon are seated at the table. LAWYER enters
room, places a small remote control and Sophia's NDA near
Palladon on the table, then exits.

PALLADON

As you know from reading the NDA,
we use Tabulae Rasae to ensure that
the artists who choose not to join
us don't become tempted to discuss
our work outside of Semaphore.

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PALLADON hands Sophia the mind refresher; the Tabula Rasa.

PALLADON (CONT'D)

I want you to join our team. You
can join today, and start working
directly with Big Semi on the
'epic' films you've always aspired
to create.

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(MORE)

PALLADON (CONT'D)

If, however, you choose not to become part of the Semaphore family, press this button, signal you're terminating the interview. Your wristband will administer Tabulae Rasae to you, and you will forget everything you saw this afternoon.

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Palladon continues to talk but Sophia's ears are filled with the sound of rushing blood, she doesn't hear what Palladon says. She focuses on the bronze statue nearby.

SOPHIA

Who is that?

PALLADON leans back in her chair, looking between Sophia and the statue, and smiles briefly up at a security camera in the corner.

PALLADON

John Henry. He was a railroad man in the nineteenth century. When steam-powered hammers were introduced to replace the driving crews, John challenged a steam hammer to a race to see who could work faster.

SOPHIA

Did he win?

PALLADON

He won, but as soon as the race ended he died of exhaustion. The steam hammers got faster every year, and no one ever challenged them again.

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Sophia stares at the statue, then she looks away and shivers. PALLADON'S tablet chimes, and she slides the mind refresher over.

PALLADON (CONT'D)

You told me that a real artist will do whatever it takes to realize a great vision; Even if it's just watching movies in a dark room.

SOPHIA locks eyes with PALLADON, and without looking away, reaches for the Mind Refresher. Palladon's tablet flashes zero.