

THE CATHARSIS

By Cody Knox

Useless Disclaimer That Nobody Will Read

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The Catharsis: **Book One of Nine.**

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Prologue: The White Rose

Wellington, New Zealand (2019)

A torrent of rain rocked the side-walk like fire crackers, while the two chefs made their way up the hill. These chefs called themselves Zak and Meek. They were heading for The White Rose, a homeless shelter.

Meek's teeth chattered out Morse code under five layers of coats. Zak peered through the fog, stroking his wet beard. He could see a sign, reading "***THE WHITE ROSE***".

Zak pointed to the sign and said, "Well, they'll be looking forward to getting some tucker in them, won't they?"

Meek chuckled to himself and replied, "You're not wrong there, mate, you're not wrong,"

All of a sudden, lightning flickered above the city and there was a monstrous roar of thunder. Meek turned even paler than normal.

"What the bloody hell was that?" Meek asked, "It sounded like a bomb went off!"

"Relax, Meek. It was only lightning," Zak said.

"Oh, well, that's OK then! It's not like a stray bolt could start a fire that could burn us all to death!" Meek said.

"Don't worry. If anything happens, we can handle it," Zak said.

Zak and Meek rushed into the homeless shelter and to the changing rooms.

Meek slipped on his chef outfit and hat, and Zak slipped into his. Meek's name-tag read **APOLLO MEEK**. Zak's read **ABDUL ZAKI**.

The two chefs went into the galley and got straight to work. Before long there was the sound of pots and pans banging and sizzling oil. The scent of many herbs and spices. They went out the galley doors and served their meals to all the homeless patrons.

This night, there were five homeless people staying at The White Rose. A young couple. An old lady. A mother and her son.

Some time later, Zak and Meek sat down to enjoy their own dinners. For Zak, a plate of fattoush (*A middle-eastern dish*). For Meek, a bowl of chicken soup.

Zak noticed a leaflet on the table. The front read, in big bold letters: 'Remedios Varo. Rare Art Show This Saturday \$40'

"Meek, look at this leaflet," Zak said, handing the leaflet to Meek.

"Rare artworks by Remedios Varo? She's my favourite Spanish-Mexican surrealist, you know," Meek said.

"But look at the price. \$40. The White Rose is a homeless shelter. Why would a homeless person waste \$40 on an art show?" Zak asked.

"Zak, are you thinking that somebody is taking advantage of our kindness?" Meek asked.

"Well, I'm thinking it could be time we had another inspection," Zak said.

"Zak, come on. Those are too stressful," Meek said.

Zak pulled out a 20-cent coin and said, "I'll tell you what, we'll flip a coin on it. Heads or tails?"

"Heads," Meek said.

Zak flipped the coin and it spun through the air like a little trapeze artist. It then landed on its side, neither heads nor tails. The two stared at it in awe for a few moments, then the whole building began to shake. Zak and Meek went flying from their chairs.

Looking out the window, the two chefs could see the building was starting to slide down the cliff. Within minutes it was sure to fall into the ocean below.

Meek picked himself up off the ground, then helped Zak up. Zak and Meek ran into the hallway, where the young couple were helping the old lady outside. They ran up the staircase, and came across a woman with a bleeding leg.

"This building is collapsing. We have to move her. We'll need to make a leg splint, in case the bone is fractured," Zak said.

"I'm on it," Meek said, running off to a nearby first aid box.

"It's going to be OK, ma'am," Zak said to the woman.

Meek returned with first aid supplies, and the two fashioned up a leg splint. They then proceeded to carry her out of the building. The others stood there in the rain. They lowered the woman into a wheelchair.

"Is this everyone?" Zak asked.

"My son! Where's my son?!?" the woman cried.

Zak and Meek looked at each other.

"Zak, we have to go back in," Meek said.

"Meek, wait!" Zak said, but Meek had already run back in. Zak followed after him. The building crumbled piece by piece as the two ran up the stairs.

Behind them, a wall collapsed, and fell into the ocean.

They then heard the voice of a little boy yelling "Help!! Help me!!" They ran to the source of the noise; it was coming from behind one of the bedroom doors. Zak kicked the door open and the two saw the little boy in the corner. Blood seeped down the boy's forehead as he sobbed.

Zak began to approach the boy. The boy panicked and hid under the bed. The building shook again. Zak held himself in the doorway while Meek bent down.

"Come on, kid. It's going to be OK," Meek said.

"Meek, just grab him and run!" Zak said.

Meek continued to hold his hand out for the boy.

"Listen, kid. I know you're scared. It's OK to be scared. But no matter how scary life becomes, we have to keep going," Meek said, "Alright?"

The boy grabbed Meek's hand, and Meek picked him up.

The three of them all ran out of the building which was collapsing all around them. They rushed out the front doors and returned the boy to his mother. Just behind them, the last parts of the shelter fell apart and into the ocean below.

Zak and Meek turned around, looking at the cliff where The White Rose had once been.

"Well, bugger," Zak said.

Chapter One: One Small Step

The rain had stopped. The clouds had parted. The full moon shone down on the wet, windy Wellington streets.

In one certain house, a girl was looking out the window, waiting for her father to return. This girl's name was Aida.

It had been twenty minutes since The White Rose had plunged into the ocean. She had not seen hide nor hair of Zak or Meek.

There was a sleeping girl next to her. Her name was Vera. She was wearing a necklace, with a cross.

Aida looked down the street and saw two men walk past the kowhai tree on the street corner. Even from a distance there was no mistaking them; it was Zak and Meek. Zak's face looked like he'd aged 20 years. Meek's blonde hair looked like it had survived a hurricane. They walked up the steps to the front door.

"Dad!" Aida shouted, awakening Vera. The family resemblance between Zak and Aida was quite uncanny. The two looked rather alike, though there were clear differences. For example, Aida did not have a beard.

Aida shot off like a bullet to the front door the moment Zak turned the key. The next moment, the two embraced. A loving moment between father and daughter.

Meek squeezed in through the door frame, seeing a tired Vera squinting in the hallway.

"I'm so glad you're both OK! I was so worried!" Aida said.

"Yeah, we're fine," Meek said.

"Vera? You're still here?" Zak asked.

Vera shrugged, then pushed aside her messy dark brown hair so she could see easier.

"Nowhere else to go," Vera said. She had a noticeable thick Eastern-European accent.

"What, no family back in Romania?" Meek asked.

"None at all," Vera said, "so what do we do now shelter is gone?"

"Well, it wasn't insured, so there's no point in rebuilding it. We weren't making enough money from donations anyway. Aida and I are going to have to sell the house and move to a smaller place," Zak said. His face was solemn and stoic, but everyone could tell he was on the verge of tears.

"But what about Meek and I?" Vera asked. Zak gave a deep sigh.

"I'm not sure, but you won't be able to stay here," Zak said, "this is all my fault. I've been too generous these past months,"

"Aw, come on, Zak. Let's not jump to conclusions about what's gonna happen," Meek said, "we should at least get some rest first, right?"

"Right," Zak said, resigned. Zak and Aida headed to their respective rooms.

Meek lied down on the couch opposite Vera, taking special care not to knock over his wooden guitar.

Zak stared at the ceiling in his room, unable to sleep. His room was full of various rugby stuff. There was:

- A Hurricanes t-shirt signed by Jonah Lomu.
- A photo of Tana Umaga and himself.
- A rugby trophy he'd won when he was playing at High School.

The others did not share Zak's passion for rugby, though Meek once told him that his parents had named him after the rugby player Apollo Perelini.

Zak wondered if any of this would be happening if he'd tried to be a rugby player instead of a chef. Everything had been getting so crazy as of late, and Zak wanted a break from it all.

Zak stared at the ceiling for a long time. But then, a most curious thing happened. A bright light lit up the room and there was an odd humming noise coming from outside.

Zak arose and looked out the window. To his surprise, it was a limousine. It was running with the headlights on.

Without offering any explanation, the engine stopped and the lights went out. He sweated. His breathing was heavy. There was a knock at the door. Zak gritted his teeth.

He walked down the hallway and saw that Meek, Aida, and Vera were awake too. Meek was brandishing his guitar as if it were a weapon. He looked terrified.

Zak took a deep breath and turned the door knob. Behind the door they all beheld a man who looked older than Methuselah. He wore a suit that looked to be worth more than Zak's house. The man cleared his throat then began to speak.

"Bonjour! Nǐ hǎo! ¡Hola! Namaste! Marhaban! Kon'nichiwa! Talofa lava! Bula vinaka! Kia ora koutou katoa! And, of course, greetings to the two of you. Am I correct in assuming that this is 65 Hotere Street?" The man asked. He had a calm and proper way about him.

"It is," Zak said.

"Ah, in that case, you must be Abdul, and the younger man must be Apollo," the man said.

"We like to be referred to as 'Zak' and 'Meek'" Zak said.

"Ah, but of course. Let us get down to business. My name is Mr Chesley Conrad. Here is my card," Mr Conrad said, and pulled a card out of his waistcoat pocket.

The card read:

Mr Chesley Conrad
CEO
Arcturus Space Technologies

"Arcturus? You're the boss of Arcturus?" Meek asked.

"Hey, I know about you guys!" Aida piped up, "I watched a documentary on your space programme once!"

"A space programme?" Zak asked.

"Yeah! These guys are building their own spaceship!" Aida said.

"Alright, fair enough. So what do you want with us?" Zak asked.

"I have come to thank you for saving the lives of my daughter and grandson. Their names were Sophie and Philip. They were staying at The White Rose. They were going to go to an art show tomorrow. Anyway, they told me they had been rescued by two chefs," Mr Conrad said.

"But you look like you're blimmin' loaded. Why would your family be staying at a homeless shelter?" Meek asked.

"We have gone across the ends of the Earth looking for people who can operate as the hosts and chefs of my spaceship.

This evening, Sophie and Philip just so happened to stay at The White Rose.

And I do believe I have found the ideal hosts of my spaceship. That is, the two of you. I want you both to come work for me," Mr Conrad said.

"Aw, you're pulling our leg, mate. There are loads of chefs that are better than us. I mean, Meek here doesn't even have a degree!" Zak said.

"You will both go through rigorous training. Trust me, I am making no mistake in choosing you," Mr Conrad said.

"What about Vera and I? Do we get to work on your spaceship too?" Aida asked.

"No," Mr Conrad said.

Aida looked as though Mr Conrad had torn her heart out and shattered it on the floor. She would have loved to work on a spaceship. Mr Conrad cleared his throat and began to speak again.

"You will not work on my spaceship, but, when the two of you come of age, you may like to try your luck at entering the space lottery," Mr Conrad said.

"And what is this space lottery?" Vera asked. Mr Conrad pulled a DVD out of his waistcoat.

"I am glad you asked that question. This DVD ought to explain everything," Mr Conrad said. He set everything up, then turned the TV on. The commercial started straight away.

Aerospace. Robotics. Chemistry. Cooking equipment.
Military Aircraft. Media broadcasts.



Wherever you look, you can see the influence of Arcturus Space Technologies. We have always been there for you. We have brought together millions.

We have always been at the cusp of cutting-edge technology, and our latest creation is no exception.

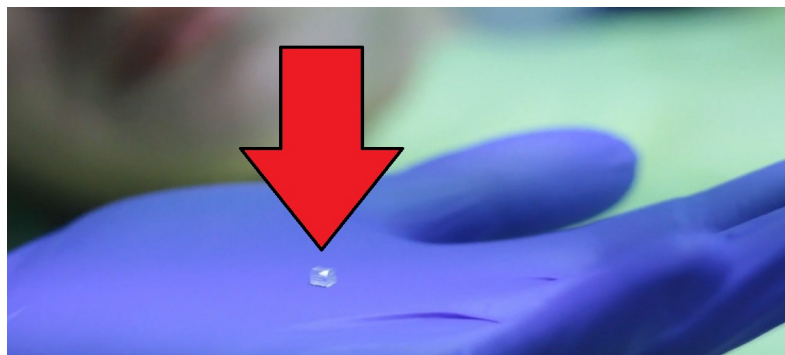


This is The Catharsis! It is a luxury spaceship with no equal.

You could find yourself taking a once-in-a-lifetime trip to the moon upon this spaceship!

Don't miss out on this chance! The results will amaze you! What part will you play? The second space race begins with you!

We are holding a Space Lottery, and everyone in the world has a chance to win!



All you have to do is buy one of these tickets.

There are over two billion tickets in stores now, but only 30 have a chance to win! What will you do when you win?

After buying your ticket, you will need to register your details on our official website.



If your ticket glows gold, then congratulations!

You are going to become an astronaut!

In 2021, on the 30th of January, you will take an all-expenses-paid trip to Houston, Texas, where our spaceship is waiting for you.

There will be two weeks of space camp, then on February the 14th, we shall say farewell to the Earth and begin our voyage.

On February the 17th, we will land on the moon, and we will stay there until we leave on the 25th.

And then we will finally return to Earth on the 28th of February, hopefully all as better people.

But wait! I hear you cry.

Will I have to get used to floating about in zero gravity and eating everything out of a tube?

To which I say do not fear! We at Arcturus Technologies have perfected the science of artificial gravity.

That's right! You'll be able to feel right at home and enjoy everything the spaceship has to offer you.



Take a refreshing dip in our swimming pool, or play with your friends in our games room.

You might learn new skills. Find true love. Discover inner peace. And so much more. I look forward to seeing all of you.

The commercial ended here.

"Blimey," Meek said, as he could not think of anything else to say.

"Well, I'm game. What say you, Meek?" Zak asked.

"Alright, I'm game too. After all, two years is a long time. Who knows what might happen by the end?" Meek asked.

"We will begin training tomorrow. I am pleased with this deal," Mr Conrad said.

The two years that followed passed rather fast for Zak and Meek, as they were taught all they needed to know by Mr Conrad. And outside, Space Lottery mania gripped the world.

Wellington, New Zealand 2020

Vera fought her way past the walloping winds as she made her way up to 65 Hotere Street. Her dark-purple handbag flapped about in the breeze. Aida answered the door before Vera even knocked.

"Oh, I'm so glad you could make it!" Aida said. Vera ventured a look inside. There was not another soul there. It wasn't as if Vera was early; in fact, she was rather late.

"Happy 18th birthday, Aida. I was expecting a few more people," Vera said, making herself comfortable on the nearest armchair.

"Yeah well, you know I can be pretty introverted," Aida said.

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