

The Enhancers

Anne K. Yoder

meekling press 2022

Meekling Press
Chicago, IL
meeklingpress.com

Copyright © 2022 by Anne Yoder.
All rights reserved.

Printed in the USA.

Cover art by Suzanne Gold

ISBN 978-1-950987-25-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022939009

For C.B., E.S., and my many other
abettors in escape.

O science! Everything's been taken care of. For the body and soul—the last rites—there's medicine and there's philosophy—old wives' remedies and new arrangements of popular songs. And the pastimes of princes and the games they've outlawed! Geography, cosmography, mechanics, chemistry... !

Science, the new nobility! Progress. The world moves ahead! Why shouldn't it turn?

Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*

VALEDICTORIAN is available in 2.5mg tablets, 5mg capsules (pink /white), 10mg capsules (daisy/tangerine), 18mg XR capsules (gold/navy), and 28mg XR capsules (magenta/black).

I. INDICATIONS and USAGE

Some years flow smoothly. Others come crashing down. The year I started VALEDICTORIAN was the latter for me and my friends in Lumena Hills. V. was the latest supplement, the fifth-generation refinement of the “most advanced” chemical used to enhance and augment our memories. I’ll admit I felt a small thrill knowing my brain would expand and that soon I’d be so smart, like a genius, even, but beyond that. VALEDICTORIAN boosted minds during our sharpest years. Carried forward, V. would make my generation so much smarter than any humans before. Or that’s what we were told.

V. was a game changer. There had been “casualties” with earlier iterations, minds that couldn’t handle the weight of information, minds that had caved in on themselves. That’s why there were strict guidelines for administration and multiple antidotes. That’s why we were told not to deviate from our regimens. That’s why we spent so much time performing mental exercises, like memorizing Pi to its 100th decimal place, then its 1000th, then reciting. Not unlike playing scales on a piano. More advanced students then used Pi to compare and describe other circular items, like the shape of a pie, or the roundness of a

face. This became a language unto itself.

We also had a language for the shape of a mind. We were told to envision that our minds on V. resembled one of a variety of fruit shapes. These shapes formed the foundations for storing information. Pineapple minds were the strongest and most articulated. We were encouraged to envision their neurons inter-linked like solid diamonds and that these diamonds supported the aggregation of facts. Minds were also shaped like pomegranates. Pomegranate minds were more common, with ideas packed together side by side then sealed off, like apartment tenants, like networked computers. The shapes of lesser minds were less distinct. Think apples. Think avocados. Think minds without V. Problems arose when these minds encountered too much stress. Sometimes they were hollow. Sometimes the wrong regimen would rot their core.

And yet. We were often reminded how lucky we were to have this new tool. My parents Judy and Harold told me to imagine their lives before supplements. As if this were tragic. As if I could imagine anything but using chemical enhancements to think and feel and grow.

By the time I started taking VALEDICTORIAN I'd had plenty of practice. I'd taken test doses. I'd had multiple mind maps made and electronic monitoring of my brain waves. I knew that V. was about building

a better future. That brain fall was a thing that had happened long ago. Its history, a whisper that I saw hints of in the blank faces of people who wandered Lumena's outskirts. Or maybe I imagined this. If I adhered to directions, took the terms of use seriously, I would not have problems.

I started taking V. in late summer along with the rest of my classmates entering third year. This gave us time to acclimate before classes started. I had known that starting V. would happen in this way seemingly forever. But no one had hinted that taking a full regimen would feel quite so grim.

In the last weeks of summer, smoke from the factory's stacks fell low in the morning like a fog. The smoke swept between our houses and through the streets in the valley below. We were told to stay inside but I didn't need instructions to do this. I always spent mornings in the basement. I heard the hum of the air filter running on high as I toggled between screens and moved animals between lists—from endangered to extinct. I'd made a habit of tracking endangered species and their dwindling numbers. My friends Azzie and Celia assisted me with this. When numbers continued downward, I took note. This is what happened most of the time. Today it was announced that the last tufted puffin had died, mateless and in captivity. I felt a new sadness as I streamed

video clips of the birds rubbing beaks. This puffin had great sideburns like mutton chops, that puffed out and made it look wise and wild like a cross between a professor and an old rocker. It was so hard for me to fathom how this bird roamed the earth for centuries and disappeared just like that.

“Species monitoring and maintenance” was how I listed this activity in my habit log for the morning, a log that I was required to keep as part of my own monitoring. This is what I was doing when Judy entered the room holding a hot-pink-and-white box. I looked up and then back to my spreadsheet.

“Hannah!”

“Umhhhmm...”

“Didn’t you hear the door?”

I looked over again. Judy was all sharpness, angled chin and knees poking out from her skirt. She dangled a box with the words StarterPAC in bold in front of me. She set the box down, pulled its contents out, then spread them on the table before us: four foil packs holding rows of electric-pink-&-white caps and promotional pins (as if I’d be caught dead wearing any of them).

Judy wanted me to start *now*. She told me to scan the code. Beside it in bold it said, READ BEFORE USE. And in smaller type: All users must be preapproved. *How obvi*, I thought but did not say. I knew the drill. All my friends had started or were about to, and we

all talked and shared tips. But Judy wanted to do it by the book. Liability, blah blah blah, she said. The link took me to a video detailing the “full V. experience” which was narrated by Lumena’s own Dr. Billy, bunco in charge of dosing and augmentation at school. Billy was known for his long, boring and all too frequent talks and his general enthusiasm for supplements. He had a pill, or many, for every condition. The video ended with testimony from alumni who’d gone on to achieve success, as the factory defined it—high-level positions with room for advancement.

I downloaded an app that featured a journal where I was supposed to track doses and record my experiences, both emotional and physical (together they were called “foundational”). I was required to do this for the next three weeks.

The first page asked me to begin with an audio clip, to articulate what I wanted to do with the BrainBoost™ that VALEDICTORIAN was about to introduce. As if it were my choice. I was asked to list three things I wanted to master and to imagine who I would become in a year, in five years, and over a lifetime. *Basic as fuck*, is what I thought. It’s also what I said. Judy said to watch my mouth, and that the accuracy of my prediction wasn’t the point, at least not right now.

I responded again. This time I said I wanted to become aware of the dying animals and rehabilitate

their habitats. I said I wanted to save them. That one day I'd even go out to the savanna to live with them. This wasn't untrue though I knew it wasn't likely. I could tell Judy was frowning even though she was standing behind me. She didn't like death as a subject, or rewilding as a proposition, or my talking about either. She especially didn't like what she called my "preoccupation" with extinction. She said "just keep living" was the plan. That we should agree on that. I did. But that was also the reason I couldn't focus on anything but the ways this was not happening—with so many lifeforms endangered and dying it seemed like hubris to think that sooner or later this wouldn't also implicate us.

Some people said that V.'s first doses felt like a small jolt; others said they had electricity running through their bodies; some experienced pain and a paralysis of sorts. I wasn't scared despite knowing this. I just wondered what it would feel like to ingest, to experience. Mostly I wondered who I was about to become.

I laid the capsule on my tongue and swallowed. Then we sat. I felt nothing at first but then I felt everything at once. A rush overcame my body and I couldn't move. Judy started saying things and whatever she said, however her mouth moved, it sounded like squawk. She got up and ran to the next room and came back with an oversized purse. She placed

her arms around me then pulled a thin syringe from the purse and placed its needle in my arm. A few moments later I began to feel loose. Judy helped me up the stairs and to bed. She lay beside me for a while, maybe the entire night. She was there the next morning when I came to. And then we started the same routine again.

During those first weeks of ACCLIMATION, I felt dizzy-headed most of the time. I couldn't think what to do in the morning, how to dress, or how to get out of bed. Judy and Harold intervened every so often with their assessments and uploads, monitoring my activities—could I walk? without pause?—and testing my memory: capacity, alacrity, uptake. I performed miserably. They set plates of food on trays in front of me but I was never hungry. I spent days in bed and if I made it out, then it was just hours on the couch.

It felt like I lived with something membranous between me and the rest of the world—the screen was the only thing. It was a portal to the animals, their video feeds, to film clips, to the whole fucking archive of utterances and ideas in the massive repository of the internet. I just sat and took it all in 24/7 as our cats Ismelda and Esmerelda stretched upon me and nuzzled my legs.

The first effects were the loudest. I remember that. The barrage of facts. A newfound awareness of our