

THE IDENTITY PROJECT

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CHARACTERS

ONE—Aggressive, a decision maker.

TWO—Quick to despair. A bit of a pessimist.

THREE—Inquisitive, thoughtful.

FOUR—Impulsive. Quick to act.

FIVE—Intelligent and logical.

SIX—A survivor. Will do what it takes to survive.

SEVEN—A bit of a weakfish, but kind.

DR. EGAN—A dispassionate scientist who lacks empathy.

All roles may be played by people of any gender.

THE IDENTITY PROJECT

When the lights come up, we see seven people in high school-type desks, each slumped over and unconscious. Dr. Egan is making final preparations to awaken them. Each of the seven are dressed alike, with only a number on their shirt signifying any difference.

DR. EGAN. Dr. Van Slyke...prepare the wake-up frequency. (*Listens to his ear piece.*) Calm down. I am absolutely sure they won't remember a thing. (*Listens.*) None of them will remember anything. (*Listens.*) Well, if the impossible happens and one of them does, then I guess I will have to be grateful that you will be there to handle it for me, right? (*Listens.*) Understood. In that case, I am ready to innervate the test subjects. If there is a problem, be ready to handle it on your end please.

He pulls out a small device and presses a button. All seven test subjects are shocked through collars they wear on their necks. They all cry out and stand.

ONE. Why did you do that?

DR. EGAN. I'm sorry. I realize that was rude, but it's the only guaranteed way to rid your bodies of the sedative we administered to each of you.

ONE. A sedative? Why? (*Looking around.*) Where are we?

FOUR. I can't remember how we got here...or anything *before* we got here.

SIX. What's going on? I can't even remember my name.

DR. EGAN. If you will allow me to explain.

SIX. But I don't know who I am!

DR. EGAN. Your memory will return, in time.

He looks at them.

Are you going to allow me to explain?

They indicate that they are.

Excellent. I am Dr. Egan and I will be your test administrator today. The seven of you volunteered to take part in our project with the understanding that you would be given an experimental drug which suppresses your memory. That is why none of you can remember who you are. With that being said, do any of you have any memory of your life before this room?

They all think, then affirm that they do not remember anything.

THREE. I can't remember anything at all.

DR. EGAN. But yet you remember essential functions.

THREE. Do I?

DR. EGAN. The drug administered targets only the parts of your brain dealing with identity. While you cannot remember your name, where you live, or what your parents look like, each of you should be able to remember other things like...how to tie your shoes, or how to use a hammer.

FIVE. Why did we volunteer for this?

DR. EGAN. Money. You were all willing to take this risk for financial compensation.

TWO. How much?

DR. EGAN. I am not privy to the contracts that each of you signed.

TWO. But it must have been a lot, right?

DR. EGAN. What constitutes a lot differs from person to person. I know that each of your contracts are different and that some of you are being paid more than others.

ONE. That doesn't sound fair.

DR. EGAN. If you signed the contract, you must have thought it was fair at the time.

ONE. You know what I mean.

THREE. So why are we here?

DR. EGAN. You are here to help us, help society. The program you

are going to take part in today will have repercussions that should benefit medical and psychological science for generations to come. So for this, we at the agency, thank you.

SEVEN. So, what do you want us to do?

DR. EGAN. If each of you are ready, I will now explain your first task and the parameters of the project.

TWO. I'm ready.

SEVEN. Me too. Let's go.

DR. EGAN. In each round you will be given an accurate biography of one of the remaining participants. I will read to you the specifics of one of your lives, and then you, as a group will participate in an activity.

THREE. Are you going to tell us whose biography you are reading?

DR. EGAN. No. That is for you to figure out.

FIVE. How are we supposed to figure it out?

DR. EGAN. That's part of the project.

SEVEN. But that doesn't make any sense!

DR. EGAN. It will make much more sense once the program begins. So, if there are no objections, let's begin the first task. First, I will read a biography that is one hundred percent factually true about one of the seven of you. Please listen carefully...the biography begins now. "My name is Jordan Erickson and I recently graduated with honors from the top collegiate mathematical program in the world. I earned a double degree in mathematics and statistics and have been accepted into the top doctoral program in the world. I live in a world dominated by numbers and statistics and few I have ever met can decipher that information as quickly as I can."

SIX. Jordan sounds like a pretty humble guy.

DR. EGAN. You could be Jordan Erickson.

SIX. Am I?

DR. EGAN. There's a one in seven chance.

TWO. A fourteen percent possibility.

DR. EGAN. Indeed.

THREE. So, now what?

DR. EGAN. Now I need you to each return to your desks. In your desk, you will find a tablet. It is already powered on and the program you will need is preloaded.

They all return to their desks and retrieve the tablets.

The seven of you will be competing to see who can complete mathematical computations the fastest.

TWO. I guess Jordan Erickson will have an advantage here, right?

DR. EGAN. Perhaps. You will have ten seconds to complete the first problem. Are each of you ready?

FOUR. As ready as ever, I guess.

FIVE. Let's do this.

DR. EGAN. When I give the command your first problem will appear. You may start, now.

They start to work. When a participant gets the problem correct, they hear a pleasant "ding" and this happens quickly for Two and Four. Then there is an unpleasant buzzing sound and Three cries out. Seven and Five receive their correct sounds as time runs out.

Time's up!

A loud buzzer sounds and both One and Six cry out.

THREE. What did you just do to us?!

DR. EGAN. There is a penalty for both giving an incorrect answer as well as for running out of time.

THREE. You didn't tell us that!

DR. EGAN. And you didn't ask.

ONE. What's to stop me from jumping up and knocking your head off for that stunt?

DR. EGAN. *(Looking into a hidden camera.)* Dr. Van Slyke? Would you like to show them what happens if they attempt violence on me?

A loud buzz as all seven are shocked via the collars they wear. They all cry out.

So, that is what will keep you from jumping up and knocking my

head off. Also, if you attempt to remove the collar that is administering the electricity, it will result in enough current to stop your heart. Understood?

SIX. You would kill us?

DR. EGAN. Not if you follow the rules.

There is a beat.

Test subjects number One, Three, and Six each answered incorrectly. Be warned that each incorrect answer will increase the penalty you receive.

FOUR. What does that mean?

ONE. It means it will hurt more!

DR. EGAN. Precisely.

THREE. How do we win?

DR. EGAN. The goal is not to win, but rather not to lose. Each problem will get harder than the last and the first of you that gets three wrong will be eliminated.

FIVE. What happens when we're eliminated?

DR. EGAN. You die.

A beat.

Are you ready for the next problem?

ONE. You're going to kill us?

DR. EGAN. I am going to end the life of the one of you who loses. Don't lose and you will be fine. Are you ready for the next problem?

SIX. I wouldn't have signed up for this!

DR. EGAN. You would have and you did. You are here and if I were you, I would be concentrating on the problem at hand. Your next problem is now on your screen. You have ten seconds to complete it.

Two is first to get it right, then One, Four, and Seven.

Time's up.

A loud buzzer and while Five is shocked and cries out, the voltage given to Three and Six is bad enough to knock them out of their desks.

TWO. Why are you doing this to us?!

DR. EGAN. It is for the greater good. Subjects Three, Five, and Six all answered incorrectly. Are you ready for the next problem?

FIVE. No! I'm not ready!

DR. EGAN. Your next problem is on your screen now. You have ten seconds.

They all work and Six, Four, One, Three all get the problem right, while Five, Seven, and Two get it wrong. They cry out as they are shocked, with Five being knocked out of his chair.

FIVE. I don't want to do this anymore. I quit!

DR. EGAN. The contract each of you signed prohibits you from quitting.

FIVE. I couldn't have known what you were going to do to us!

DR. EGAN. That's irrelevant.

FIVE. It's not irrelevant to me!

DR. EGAN. (*Menacing.*) Would you like me to end the program for you now? I can have Dr. Van Slyke do that right now, if you'd prefer. Is that what you want?

TWO. No. I don't want to die.

DR. EGAN. Then close your mouth and pick up your tablet. Test subjects Three, Five, and Six are all one problem away from elimination. Your next problem is on-screen now. You have ten seconds to answer.

Immediately Seven gets a buzz and is shocked. One, Two, Three, and Four all get the problem right and the corresponding "dings" sound.

Time's up! (*To Van Slyke.*) We have a problem. (*Listens.*) Test Subjects Five and Six have both answered incorrectly.

FIVE. No!

DR. EGAN. Do you think I should eliminate both?

FIVE. You can't just kill us like this!

SIX. I don't want to die.

DR. EGAN. One second please.

Dr. Egan is distracted by this problem and doesn't notice Five jump out of his chair and go for him. But as he does, the buzz sounds and Five is shocked long enough for him to stop moving entirely.

(*Seeing Five on the floor.*) Well, I guess that answers that.

SIX. What?

DR. EGAN. I mean, I guess that answers which one of you will be eliminated.

Two official-looking people enter and drag Five out of the room.

SIX. (*Tentatively.*) So, I'm not eliminated?

DR. EGAN. Thanks to the foolishness of subject number Five, you get to move on to the next round. Congratulations to each of you. I will now prepare to read the next biography.

THREE. Can you give us a moment to breathe?

DR. EGAN. The memory suppressant we gave you has a short life span. Due to this, we have to be quick. I'm sure you understand.

ONE. How can you be so cold about this?

DR. EGAN. I beg your pardon?

ONE. You're just standing there deciding if we live or die. How can you just be so unfeeling about it.

DR. EGAN. Sacrifices have to be made in the name of progress.

ONE. That's easy to say, when you aren't the one being sacrificed.

DR. EGAN. Prepare for the next biography.

THREE. What do these have to do with anything?

FOUR. Which one of us is Jordan Erickson?

DR. EGAN. I can't give you that information.

TWO. (*To Four.*) You didn't get any wrong in the last round did you?

FOUR. No, I didn't.

TWO. Then maybe you're Jordan. The rest of us got at least one wrong.

FOUR. Maybe. I could be.

SEVEN. Not knowing who I am is driving me crazy.

SIX. I almost died last round... I don't care who I am. I just want to stay alive.

SEVEN. (*To Six.*) I wonder if he could put us all down if we jumped him at once.

DR. EGAN. Do we really need another demonstration of that?

He waits for a response.

No? Fine. Then how about that next biography. There are six of you remaining and the following biography was written in advance by one of you. It reads: "My name is Parker Adams and I am a professional concert pianist born with perfect pitch and the ability to play almost any instrument given to me. I have thrived as a performer."

FOUR. That's all?

DR. EGAN. That is all I can reveal at this time.

FOUR. Well, this is going to suck.

ONE. What do you mean?

FOUR. I'm a math brain, not a musician?

TWO. How do you know that?

FOUR. The last round... I'm the only one who got them all right... I have to be Jordan Erickson, right?

DR. EGAN. That has not been established.

FOUR. But it makes sense!

THREE. But you don't know for sure.

DR. EGAN. Please pick up your tablet. Dr. Van Slyke is going to play three separate tones and you will need to identify each, in turn, on your tablet.

They all pick up their tablets.

Play tone number one, now.

A tone plays.

From the choices on your tablet, please select the correct tone.

TWO. This is going to be a total guess.

FOUR. I have no clue what that was!

DR. EGAN. Do your best.

FOUR. This isn't fair!

SIX. You weren't saying that when you were answering all of the math questions correctly, Jordan.

DR. EGAN. All answers have been recorded. Please play tone number two.

THREE. Who got the first one right?

DR. EGAN. I will answer that when all three tones have played.

THREE. But...

DR. EGAN. Play the second tone.

The second tone plays.

FOUR. This is stupid!

SIX. I'm not sure if I'm right...

DR. EGAN. And all answers have been recorded. Play the third tone.

The third tone plays.

SIX. That sounds like the first tone.

FOUR. You think?

SIX. Maybe.

DR. EGAN. All answers have been recorded. (*Listening to his ear-piece.*) Test subjects One and Seven got all three tones right and will not be involved in the next part of the program.

SEVEN. What does that mean?

DR. EGAN. It means that you are no longer up for elimination.

SEVEN. And that's good, right?

DR. EGAN. Of course it is.

THREE. So, what about us, are we eliminated?

DR. EGAN. Not yet.

FOUR. What does that mean?

DR. EGAN. There is a second part of this test. I have a bit of news for you though. One of the four of you remaining is, in fact, Parker Adams.

THREE. But we all got one wrong. How can that be?

DR. EGAN. While two of you got all three notes wrong, one subject got two correct but missed one note entirely, and the other only missed one but it was by less than half of a step.

FOUR. And that one was Parker.

DR. EGAN. Perhaps.

FOUR. Which means I'm screwed.

DR. EGAN. If you believe yourself to be, then it will probably be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

FOUR. This isn't fair.

SIX. Would you just shut up long enough to listen to what he has to say?

DR. EGAN. Thank you. At my command I need each of you to use your voice to produce the note B-flat.

TWO. We have to sing a B-flat?

FOUR. What if we don't know what a B-flat is?

DR. EGAN. Then I reckon you will have to guess. The subject farthest from the tone, as measured by our sound software will be eliminated. Do I have a volunteer to go first?

SIX. If we refuse to go, you'll just kill us, right?

DR. EGAN. In that case you would be eliminated.

SIX. Then I'll go.

He sings a note.

DR. EGAN. Your tone has been recorded.

THREE. I'll go next.

He sings a note.

DR. EGAN. Thank you, your tone has been recorded.

TWO. Okay, my turn.

He sings a note.

DR. EGAN. Your tone has been recorded.

FOUR. I don't want to do this.

DR. EGAN. Would you prefer to forfeit?

FOUR. No. But I'm doing this under objection.

DR. EGAN. (*Laughing.*) Noted.

Four sings out a note.

Your tone has been recorded.

FOUR. (*To One, quietly.*) If he announces I'm the loser I'm going down fighting.

ONE. I don't blame you.

Dr. Egan has been listening to Van Slyke.

DR. EGAN. There is no need for that. You were the second farthest from the correct tone. Now, in order to quash the potential of "going down fighting" I will go ahead and announce the subject who was the farthest from the actual tone.

Six grabs his neck, cries out, and dies. The same two as before enter to remove the body.

TWO. It wasn't me?

DR. EGAN. No, you were second closest. Only one contestant hit the note correctly.

THREE. Then I'm Parker?

DR. EGAN. Either you, number Two, or number Four.

FOUR. But I'm Jordan.

DR. EGAN. Are you?

THREE. And I must be Parker.

TWO. I guess you're right. Then who am I?

DR. EGAN. Please listen to the biography of one of you who remain. "My name is Riley Benson and I signed up for this because I have advanced terminal bone cancer. While it has been explained to me that the project I am volunteering for is very dangerous, I fully accept knowing that the money I receive from participating will take care of my family and provide for my two-year-old son."

SEVEN. That's all?

DR. EGAN. That's all.

SEVEN. Wow.

ONE. I take it the rest of you are analyzing how you're feeling right now?

TWO. Yeah. That's scary.

FOUR. It would really suck to be the last one standing only to find out you're not going to make it.

ONE. Do we know that there will only be one winner?

DR. EGAN. At the end of the project, only one candidate will remain.

SEVEN. And one of us has a two-year-old son waiting for them to come home.

DR. EGAN. For what it is worth, the money that is guaranteed to Riley Benson will be enough to provide well for their child.

SEVEN. That doesn't justify this at all.

DR. EGAN. I'm not trying to justify what we are doing here.

TWO. Just tell us what you want us to do this time!

DR. EGAN. Are each of you familiar with the concept of arm wrestling?

ONE. Yes...

SEVEN. Of course.

DR. EGAN. Well, that is what you are going to do.

SEVEN. Why?

DR. EGAN. It's a part of the project.

FOUR. But wouldn't the person who has bone cancer be at a serious disadvantage?

DR. EGAN. That's what we are about to find out.

TWO. That's sadistic.

DR. EGAN. Does a person who does not know they are suffering with cancer still have the same weaknesses as one who does?

SEVEN. But Jordan and Parker *know* they don't have cancer!

DR. EGAN. And exactly when have I acknowledged that number Three and Four are who you all claim them to be?

FOUR. At this point I am one hundred percent positive I'm Jordan Erickson. The math, the way my mind works. Plus, I can't even imagine having a son.

THREE. Me either. I'm pretty sure I know who I am.

TWO. Great, I guess that means I have a one-in-three chance of dying from cancer. That is, if you don't stop my heart before I can get to that point.

DR. EGAN. In order to avoid elimination, you simply have to beat one single person in an arm wrestling competition. But since five of you remain, one of you will not have to participate. That person is not Riley Benson.

THREE. And who's that?

DR. EGAN. (*To Three.*) It's you. You are not Riley Benson and you do not have to participate in this activity.

FOUR. We all know he's Parker.

ONE. Well, congratulations on not having cancer.

THREE. Thanks...

DR. EGAN. (*Pushing two desks together.*) I now need numbers One and Two to join me here.

ONE. And if we win, we're safe...right?

DR. EGAN. That is correct. Now I need you to clasp hands here in the center.

They do so.

When I tell you to begin, I need you to push hard and press your opponent's hand to the table. Understood?

ONE. I know what arm wrestling is!

TWO. Yes. I understand.

DR. EGAN. On three. Three...two...one...go!

They both start to struggle, but fairly quickly One gets the upper hand and wins.

ONE. Yes!

TWO. What does that mean for me, am I eliminated? I don't feel like I have bone cancer...

DR. EGAN. You are not eliminated yet. You will face-off against the loser of subjects number Four and Seven.

TWO. (*To One.*) You're really strong... I mean... I gave you a pretty good fight, right?

ONE. Not really.

TWO. This sucks.

ONE. But if it makes you feel better, you seem pretty solid to me.

TWO. Thanks, I guess.

DR. EGAN. Number Four and Seven, it's your turn now. Please clasp hands.

SEVEN. Time to step up.

FOUR. You're going down, Seven.

SEVEN. Whatever. Let's just get this over with.

Four and Seven take the same places previously occupied by One and Two.

DR. EGAN. Begin on my command. Three, two, one...go!

The match is very quick as Four quickly pins Seven's hand to the table.

FOUR. Not too shabby for a math nerd.

SEVEN. That hurt.

FOUR. Sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. Just trying to win.

SEVEN. I think that did something to my elbow. My wrist hurts too.

They all look at him.

It's me, isn't it?

DR. EGAN. I now need subjects Two and Seven to clasp hands.

SEVEN. Is it me?

DR. EGAN. I cannot confirm that.

SEVEN. It has to be. That's why my arm hurts. It's the bone cancer.

DR. EGAN. Please clasp hands.

SEVEN. I have a son...

DR. EGAN. Begin on my command...

They do so.

TWO. (To Seven.) I'm sorry.

SEVEN. It's fine. I was going to die anyways I guess.

DR. EGAN. Three, two, one...go!

Two quickly slams Seven's hand to the table as Seven cries out in pain. A beat passes and the buzz of electrocution kills Seven. The same two as before enter and take his body away.

TWO. I know I just survived and all, but I don't feel good about that.

THREE. No kidding. He had a son.

DR. EGAN. You don't know that for sure.

THREE. I don't know why you are pretending we haven't figured it out.

DR. EGAN. Maybe you have, maybe you haven't. It's all a part of the project.

FOUR. This doesn't affect you?

DR. EGAN. Should it?

After a beat.

I will now read the next biography.

ONE. Fine. Let's keep going.

DR. EGAN. It reads: "My name is Dylan Pearson and I am a third-degree black belt in jiu-jitsu with a professional mixed martial arts record of fourteen to one. My father and older brother have fought professionally and I spend my days participating in strength conditioning and working survival skills. I signed up for this project because fighting professionally can't last forever and I believe my skills as a fighter are enough to win any competition."

FOUR. Great. One of you is an MMA fighter.

DR. EGAN. *(Listening.)* What was that? *(Listens.)* In the lab? Okay. I am on my way. *(To the remaining four.)* We have a bit of an emergency in the lab. I'll be right back.

TWO. You're leaving us?

DR. EGAN. That's what I just said isn't it?

FOUR. But you said the memory suppressant...

DR. EGAN. It will last long enough for me to get back. Just try to relax.

Dr. Egan exits.

THREE. *(Mocking him.)* "Just try to relax." Yeah. You guys all relax knowing that you're probably going to be electrocuted soon.

FOUR. Speaking of which, with that guy gone, I wonder if anyone is still watching us? We could get rid of these...

At that, a buzz sounds, all four cry out in pain.

ONE. I guess that answers that.

TWO. I guess so.

FOUR. So I guess we'll just cool our jets and wait.

THREE. Good call, Jordan.

FOUR. So which of you is the MMA fighter?

TWO. It has to be him. (*Indicating One.*)

ONE. Why do you say that?

TWO. Because you literally beat me in like two seconds at arm wrestling. You beat me faster than I beat the bone cancer guy.

THREE. That's a good point.

ONE. True. I didn't think about that. Hard to believe they have a way to make you forget something you have done your whole life.

FOUR. And your name, family...it's pretty crazy.

TWO. I wonder what all of the tests have meant though. I mean, shouldn't they know a math genius wouldn't lose a math contest?

THREE. And that a musician wouldn't lose at note identification.

ONE. I wonder what we're going to be doing with martial arts?

TWO. I bet we have to fight each other. That's going to suck.

FOUR. No kidding.

THREE. (*To One.*) It looks like you'll be moving on to the next round.

ONE. I guess so.

FOUR. This whole thing isn't fair though. I mean, as a math grad school student I'm not geared to fight an MMA fighter. This whole experiment is stupid.

ONE. I'm sure they've got to have some reason for it.

TWO. I'm wondering how they managed to convince me to sign up for something I had a one-in-seven chance of surviving.

FOUR. They must have lied to us. There's no way I would have gone for that. The odds are horrible.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!



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