

Leave Em is Me Erael Backwards

By : Steve Balsky

This is a dark satire that asks the question if our children are learning too much too soon?



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Ms. Jansen was more nervous than she had ever been in her entire earthly existence. She repeatedly wrung out the white handkerchief on her lap as if to sap the last beads of a forbidden juice into some magic elixir.

Her husband, Nathan Jansen sat dutifully beside her in the waiting area of the Ministry of Education Directive with his news reader on his lap, his finger whipping across the screen to find the financial section of the recent issue he had downloaded.

Their son Percival had his head deeply immersed in an old school (meaning actually *paged*) comic book depicting a red and black masked superhero punching a lizard-like foe in the mouth on the cover of the \$ 15 monthly pulp comic book.

“The New Adventures of Spider-Man” the title proudly proclaimed in electric font as the child’s eyes danced from frame to frame.

“He’s not getting in Nathan! He’s not,” Nancy fretted, squeezing the handkerchief as she spoke.

“There, there,” reassured her husband whose eyes never left the news reader, “I’m sure his performance was perfectly fine and you are worrying all for naught.”

Nancy removed one her hands momentarily from the handkerchief to shield her face as she whispered to her husband, “He’s different. Like, look at the little girl across from us. She’s so much more..*mature*.”

Nathan’s eyes flicked momentarily from the screen to appease his wife.

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There was a sweet 7 year old Asian girl, (*likely Vietnamese..theyâre all Vietnamese*, thought Nathan) sitting with perfect posture and wearing a bright blue dress with floral pattern patiently awaiting her Admissions Appointment. Her black hair was neatly straight and trimmed in a Bobby-style reminiscent of the vintage cartoon character *Dora The Explorer* from ages past that Nancy herself had fond recollections of.

âSheâs a girl, honey. Girls are different. Equal, of course, but nonetheless different,â her husband reassured her. His eyes dove back to the page on the financial blog of the reader.

He shook his head in dismay. âLook at this, the Ministryâs Financial Directive says that property values are expected to plummet by 18 % in 2085. 18 % ! Makes you wonder why I even invested in the first place.â

Nancy glared over at him. âThe only thing I care about right now is the Ministryâs Educational Directive and so should you!â

Nathan rolled his eyes skyward and then quickly downward to absorb more financial statistics.

Nancy reached over and attempted to part Percival's hair with her hand. âPlease Percival do put that trash away. Mr. Claremont will be here very shortly and we want to make a good first impression.â

The boy attempted to duck away from his motherâs hand and his eyes never left Spidermanâs exploits as he turned the page with rabid fascination.

Marty Claremont sauntered down the long hallway of the Ministry of Educational Directive towards the waiting area. He was in a good mood today thus far, fresh bodies to interview, a bright future ahead for most, actually scratch that, *all* candidates whether they got accepted or not.

To Marty, everyone was winner; in todayâs society education was never finer, never more efficient. The whole learning process over the years had become streamlined, condensed and accelerated to such a pace that children were reaching greater and greater milestones in life faster and faster. The old adage of the world wanting âmore, faster, cheaperâ could not have been more true and the Ministry knew exactly how to handle it.

Gone were the divisions between âprivateâ and âpublicâ schools. No religiously themed schools existed anymore; there was no more âgiftedâ, âenrichedâ or even âspecial needsâ programs

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any more. No, the Ministry of Educational Directive simply says, "You are in or out".

After an intense screening process during their early educational years, each child is appraised to see if they are an appropriate candidate for the rigours of what they deemed "speed training". School only lasted 7 years. Kindergarten to Grade 6. Kindergarten to Grade 1 were your "test years" to see if you make the cut for the real deal. After that Grades 2 to 6 provide them with the tools to their ultimate goal: a doctorate degree in whatever discipline their muse took them. No second chances. Education was all government funded of course, irrespective of ethnicity, disabilities, sociocultural demographic..didn't matter..if you made the cut, you got educated and fast. No more high school, universities, colleges or technical school. There was simply no need.

There was only one institution: The Ministry of Educational Directive, a sprawling 8 acre empire with perfectly manicured lawns, state of the art computer access, purely white and completely sterile interior and exterior.

Mr. Claremont's cadence hesitated for a second when he saw the other figure headed in the opposite direction down the corridor. Clad in standard Ministry attire: white lab coat buttoned from top to bottom, photo ID badge proudly displayed over right breast pocket, this teacher differed in one major respect: his footwear. Instead of the shined, white leather Dockers that were typical Ministry protocol, this gentleman wore olive green socks visible between the divider of his open toed sandals.

His shoulder-length black hair was tied tightly back in a ponytail, so tight in fact that it pulled the skin by his eyes backward. His goatee was impeccably trimmed, wisps of gray evident of the sides. He nodded to Claremont as he approached, "Marv."

Claremont nodded politely avoiding eye contact, "Pravesh," he murmured.

Pravesh stopped momentarily and gestured to his colleague, a lime green apple in right hand. "Getting some new blood in today?"

Claremont stopped in his tracks, annoyed. "Yes, if that's how you wish to call our future, yes it is new blood."

Pravesh grinned. "Maybe I'll show up too. I have a spare class and it's good if the parents hear of some..alternatives."

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Claremont snorted, "I don't think so Pravesh. Not today. Do that on your own time." Claremont continued forward, head slightly bowed.

Ms. Jansen nearly leapt from her seat when Claremont entered the waiting area and clapped his hands eagerly together. She had seen his face many times before in the Ministry of Media's news channel but never had the opportunity to witness him in the flesh.

Claremont cleared his throat and began, "Welcome prospective students and parents. I'm sure today will prove to be as exciting for me as it is for all of you. Today, the Jansen family will be advised by myself and the Shiu-Win family will be advised by Dr. Bardmore, to be by very shortly."

The Shiu-Wins nodded politely in compliance.

Claremont gestured curtly, "Jansens? Follow me please."

Nancy beamed from ear to ear while Nathan neatly pressed his pants on the thighs, folded his news reader and encouraged Percival to divert his attention from the comic book for the moment.

The Jansens followed Claremont through a side door which swished open, activated by foot sensors immediately outside the door. The quartet entered the immaculately white room and sat on the leather winged-tipped chairs replete with hover rollers so the chairs never actually touched the white carpet and caused stain.

Claremont himself seemed to hover over to the large chair in front of the white desk whereby a large manila folder (brown for a change) sat open with the name "JANSEN, Percival" proudly emblazoned on the front page.

Claremont quickly glanced through the first few pages of the file while the Jansens sat balanced on the edge of their seats, Nancy's silver-highlighted eyes never blinking.

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“ Well, ” began Claremont, “ As you know, this is a huge day for Percy. Huge day! I can call him Percy, yes?”

Nancy screamed a laugh so inappropriate that Nathan winced. “ Percy is fine, just fine! Oh honey, that’s so sweet ..Percy,” she squeezed the 6 year old’s thigh.

Claremont cleared his throat again and continued, “ Now, as you are aware the program from Grades 2 through to 7 is highly accelerated and advanced. Our motto is “ we want our children ready for the world before the world is ready for them ” . By Grade 5 they have to decide what domain they wish to enroll in for the rest of their lives and from there the courses became more specific towards the attainment of that goal.”

He tapped the desk in front of him which lit up and demonstrated flashing menus and graphics before the excited parents.

Claremont pointed with his index finger and said, “ Grades 2 to 5 focuses on the arts, sociological studies and sciences crucial for your child’s knowledge base going forward. By the end of Grade 2 a firm foundation in calculus and geometry, military history, relevant world geography and the foundations of Asian, Arabic and European dialects will be established.”

Nathan raised his hand and Claremont placed an index finger to his lips. “ Questions and concerns later please. The active physical education programme will provide a young student with maximum volume of oxygen consumption (VO2 Max for the uninformed) ensuring optimal blood circulation and maximal voluntary muscular recruitment. As you know, our finger-painting Kindergarten program outlines Matisse and Rimbaud with the masters of Cubism and Pop art by Grade 3. Drama begins in Grade 2 with contemporary masters such as Beckett, Miller and of course our favorite Bill Shakespeare.”

Nancy squealed, “ Did you hear that Nathan? They called him *Bill*.” Percival quietly re-opened his comic book and placed it on his lap.

“ Let’s not forget about the literacy program,” said a voice from behind. Pravesh Kahn leaned against the door which had slid open without a sound and grinned, still cradling the green apple in his right hand like a martini at a cocktail party. “ Salinger in Grade 1, Hemingway Grade 2 and I believe it’s Fitzgerald in Grade 3. Or is it Dickens?”

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Claremont gave him a look that would have given a lesser man a heart attack. "Dickens," he said through gritted teeth.

"Right!" Kahn exclaimed raising his hand. "That's right. No Mother Goose here, folks. Sorry, I'm Dr. Pravesh Kahn, a member of the Ministry of Educational Directive."

"Who was just leaving," interrupted Claremont.

"Marty please," persisted Kahn, "Let the people hear the whole story. I am involved in a new Ministry Directive. The Directive of Retro-active Education."

Nathan's eyebrows rose. "I had never heard of that one.."

"Most people haven't," Kahn continued, "What it is .."

"Is a program for the lesser children that don't make the cut into the regular program. That will be enough Dr. Kahn, please and thank you." Claremont's normally pink skin was rapidly turning flush with each passing second.

Kahn regarded Percy's comic book. "Spiderman. One of my favorites."

He winked, took a bite of the apple, then turned and exited the room without another word. The door whished silently behind him.

"Don't mind him ma'am, he's very radical and different and wants to promote an experimental program which I don't find particularly appropriate for Percy."

Nancy was nearly salivating by this point. "Really? Like what do you see for Percy's future?" she breathed.

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Claremont arose from his seat and touched the right wall. A new menu lit up on the side of the room outlining the various degree programs offered. "Well ma'am as you can see, the programs are endless! Doctorates in of course the usuals: law, accounting, medicine as well as the equally rewarding domains of culinary arts, interpretative dance, woodworking and auto mechanics to name but a few. But before we discuss any of those specifically, let's review young Percival's progress thus far, shall we?"

He grasped the manila folder in front of him and squinted slightly as he flipped through the pages. Percival was too busy reading an ad for "Busty-O's cereal" on the back of the Spiderman comic. "If you don't get healthy.. it's a Bust!"

"Well Ms. Jansen, Percy didn't fare to well in his JK art class. His teacher wrote, "Instead of Rimbaud, Percival prefers *duckies* and *horsies*." As I see further, his Grade 1 contemporary literature teacher has written, "I am concerned about Percival. He expresses an interest in Spiderpants Underwear Man, but demonstrates no interest in *Jane Eyre*." We gave him samplings of various foodstuffs the cafeteria will be serving. Coq Au Vin, Braised Duck Cofit Cassoulet and Eggplant curry in light Saffron broth were all profoundly rejected by your son. His brain scans were all normal and he responded well to the glucotacordamine intravenous injections..but!

Nancy felt tears welling up in her eyes, "But!"

Claremont dropped the file on the counter. "He's not suitable for the program, Ms. Jansen."

Nancy felt light-headed. The world started to swirl around her. Nathan grasped her shoulders and asked if she needed mineral water. She shook her head no, but her eyes screamed yes.

"Now, now Ms. Jansen, let's not be dramatic," Claremont said, returning to his plush chair. "There are many options available for Percy here." He regarded Percival who now had the comic folded on his lap and was biting his fingernails.

"Like what?" asked Nathan with an edge. "Like what? We all know without the Ministry of Educational Directive kids have no chance in life."

"Not true Mr. Jansen, not true," said Claremont reassuringly. "For instance, there are plenty of children that cannot meet the rigours and there is no shame in that. No shame at all sir. I mean, how do you

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think we maintain the properties here? There is always a need for landscapers, painters, cleanersâ people that can help out in the kitchen area etc? Percival will always â I mean *always* be employed until the end of his days, rest assured.â

Nathanâ s brow furrowed as he thought. â Just one moment here sir. What about that other gentlemanâ s program..the Retro-active Educational Directive?â

Claremontâ s expression turned deathly serious. â Mr. Jansen with all due respect to you and your family, what would rather have: Percy faithfully serve the Ministry with honour or be degraded as an invalid?â

â Come again?â asked Nancy, apparently now returning to earth following her emotional trauma.

â Dr. Kahn will be founding an educational program based on archaic methods whereby children do not even know how to multiply by the second grade! Masters of literature and art are not even contemplated until mid teenage years! I assure you, such a model will serve no good to anyone, lest the fruit of your loins here.â

Percival stared at him, one finger cautiously circling his left nostril.

Nancy started bawling when a voice from behind them said, â Why donâ t you just leave â em?â

Claremont blinked. â *Excuse me* Dr. Kahn? Leave â em? Thatâ s a good strategy to you? That will do the boy justice?â

Dr. Kahn softly said, â No..I mean leave â em to be kids like theyâ re supposed to be.â

There was a stunned silence in the room for a few moments. The Jansens abruptly arose from their seats, Nancy still sniffing. She snatched the Spiderman comic book from Percival and tossed it into the white trash basket beside the desk. She roughly grabbed Percival by the arm and ushered him out of the room, Nathan tracking quickly behind.

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Claremont stared at Kahn, unspeaking. He shook his head and walked past him.

Kahn sauntered over to the trash bin, retrieved the comic book, rolled it up and placed it in the inner pocket of his lab coat.

He too left the white room and made his way over to the Retro-active Educational Directive hoping that tomorrow will be a new day.

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