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## Product Management

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# PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

by Jared I. Lemus, Jr.  
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My father always told me that a fully loaded eighteen-wheeler should weigh between sixty and eighty thousand pounds, depending on what you're transporting. Telling me this is what he considered emotional bonding. All I can think about as I walk up to the reflective doors of the doctor's building is that I look just like him. From the natural part in our hair to the overarched heels, I am him. I remember the on-the-road wisdom he would impart to me when I was a kid. Things like the fact that most truckers are men, so using a glory hole at a truck stop is a bad idea. This was the sort of fatherly advice he gave me.

When I walk up to the reception desk at the free clinic, a nurse in scrubs asks me for my name, and I tell her it's D.H. Lawrence. After she types it into the computer, she says that she doesn't see my name, and asks me if it's an alias. I smile at her and tell her all truckers have aliases. She rolls her eyes and hands me some paperwork to fill out, tells me that she'll need my legal name on the documents, and tells me to bring it back up to her when I'm finished.

I sit down in an empty seat and start filling out the information. The form they have me fill out asks, "Do you now have, or have you ever had, any of the following..." and I wonder how many people have had to check yes to herpes because of me, or yes to a heart attack, because bromadiolone, ingested orally, is an anticoagulant that will cause death by internal hemorrhaging a few days after you take it, so you never know exactly what you ate that gave you poisoning, or that I might be responsible for it.

A guy with tattoos of different symbols on his knuckles, and a beard down to his gut sits in one of the chair across from me, and all of a sudden I'm fourteen again, with my father telling me how there are all of these codes that truckers use to communicate with each other over CB radios.

“CB,” he would say, “stands for Citizen’s Band,” and how the national channel for truckers is nineteen. He taught me that “Smokey the bear,” is code for a cop, that an alligator on the left lane on I-10 means the remnants of a popped tire, and that every trucker has a different CB handle, a nickname, but how every member of the Deadhead circle’s CB handle starts with D.H. His was D.H. Macho. Mine is D.H. Lawrence, after the writer.

“A Deadhead,” my father would say, “is the term for an empty truck headed to pick up a load.” I sighed in relief because my first thought upon hearing ‘Deadhead circle’ was a bunch of old hippies with long white beards standing around listening to The Grateful Dead, circle jerking each other. Luckily, that’s not what this was. He told me that all of this started because a trucker had been watching the required hazardous material video, and gotten the idea to mess with his freight. It wasn’t long before he noticed that bored truckers wanted something to excite their monotonous lives of driving the entire country without actually getting to see any of it. He told me that they felt underappreciated, but that if the world was a stage, and there were actors on it, the truckers were the people in charge of costume changes, and no matter how good the actors were, the whole play would stand still without the backstage hands. “We are the unrecognized machinery of the watch,” my father said. “We control the lives of every American. I’m telling you this because you’re about to be inducted.”

Now, my father was one of the hardest working men I knew. He worked every day from the day he was eight until he killed himself four years ago, at the age of fifty-nine, and left me his truck. His most prized possession: a blood-red-orange Model 567 Heritage Peterbilt, and a book of instructions for being and inducting Deadheads, and locations to safe spots. When he had first told me about this, sixteen years ago, I had turned away in horror. I couldn’t believe my father was killing innocent people, but the way he explained it was that there was only so much food to go around. He told me that as bees died out, there would be even less, and he asked me if I wanted to be one of the people deciding who got to live or die, or if I wanted someone to choose for me.

The induction took place when I was only fourteen years old. My father had pulled over into a remote location off interstate eighty, and taken me to the back of the truck in which we were transporting supplies for babies. This was when he taught me how to put cocaine in baby formula. He taught me that some cocaine is already cut with baking powder, or ironically enough, baby laxative, so you have to add more or less to the baby formula, depending on the cocaine

concentration, but typically, one gram of cocaine in a 22.2 oz tub of Enfamil is enough. This was my first lesson in population control.

My father knew a thing or two about not getting caught. He grew up poor in the small town of Las Cruces, Guatemala. The only way to survive in a place like this is to steal and not get caught. My father once told me he stole a cow. You heard me. A fucking bovine creature. He had no idea what he had planned to do with it, but he rode that thing all the way to the main city, two miles away, and sold it for money he used to purchase booze and clothes. My father, the person that was supposed to be my role model, the guy who understood only Spanish and trucker-talk, he'd once asked me if I'd ever stolen anything, and I'd told him no. He told me that I was the worst Guatemalan gypsy he'd ever met. He told me that I didn't understand why he was part of this group of population control agents, and I agreed. He told me it was because third world countries like the one where he grew up didn't even get the chance to have their food contaminated because there wasn't enough to go around. People died of starvation, not of high blood pressure from eating too much red meat.

I finish filling out my paperwork and take it up to the reception desk. On my way back I notice that there are at least fifty people in the waiting room. Most of this is our fault. The Deadhead group has gotten so popular, that we basically make up 60% of all truckers. My father always told me that the government suspected that there was something going on, but that there's no way to stop it. Ceasing transcontinental deliveries would send North America into another dark age. Not to mention that newspapers today will tell you that transcontinental eighteen-wheeler delivery is expected to increase up to forty percent by the year 2045. Especially now that we have The International Fuel Tax Agreement that lets us deliver to Mexico and Canada.

As I make it back to my seat, I hear the flushing sound of a toilet and see someone walk out of the bathroom with toilet paper stuck to the bottom of their left shoe, and I think about D.H. Bill. He told me that he makes sure that every load of toilet paper and paper towels in public bathrooms are sprayed with any local herbicide that contains chlorophenoxy before it gets to the store. This is why you think some toilet paper smells like nature or mint, but that's how you get colon cancer. That's one reason if you're ever at a truck stop, you'll notice every member of the deadhead circle carrying in their own toilet paper and toiletries. Another reason is that having to use truck stop showers is the worst part of being a truck driver.

Imagine what it would look like if you left six people with IBS and compulsive masturbation disorders in a ten-by-fifteen-foot room with the lights off for twelve days. That's what truck stop showers look like. There is an unquantifiable amount of pubic and taint hair on every inch of the floor. Shit, including dog shit from when truckers bring their dogs in with them to bathe, can be found on every square inch of the pubic hair. Our only solace when we walk into a truck stop shower is knowing that we picked out our own shampoo and razor blades. Knowing that we are avoiding dichlorophen and carbaryl. These are the main ingredients in most flea powders. These ingredients can enter the body through any orifice or pore, and cause liver damage with prolonged usage, but will also make you go bald within two weeks. We gave Rogaine their target market.

After my father died, I decided to take up the family business. The main reason being that I was a homeless, terrible writer, trying to live the life of Bukowski, but failing. I couldn't write a poem to save my life, but I could write one that could end someone else's. Having my father die was the best thing that ever happened to me. Not only did I get a place to live, as truck heads have beds in them, but I also got to make money without having to do any real work. You see, it's tradition in Hispanic culture to name your children after yourself, who was named after your grandfather, and so on. I looked like he did anyway, only twenty-five years younger, and no one bothered to check. To be safe, I did use my father's handbook, communicated with every Deadhead I could find along the road, made friends, connections, and introduced myself as my father's son. They all admired him, the ones who knew him, at least, and they told me stories that I'd missed about him during our long mutual silence. They told me he was convinced I would never join, but there I was to prove him wrong. After a few of these encounters, I found a Deadhead who could doctor my I.D, so that it said I had a Class A license. And I'll tell you, I'm four years into this game, and I love it. So does every other Deadhead. You can leave whenever you want, but no one ever does.

In the waiting room, I see some fat fuck taking up two chairs, one row down from me, and I wonder if he's ever eaten an apple. Then I chuckle, recalling that almost every type of fruit or food wrapped in trans-polymer paper comes in a cardboard box filled with the fruit or snack, and all we have to do is open, apply, and reseal. Every time we rip open the hotdog wrappings to add an organophosphate, or xylene to salt and sugar, we have to vacuum seal it, glue it back, or

use candles and incense sticks to reseal plastic wrappers. We make it look so that it hasn't been tampered with, and the average buyer doesn't take the time to check.

How do we keep from harming ourselves? Well, most truckers eat at truck stops. Another precaution is having these things called dead spots where any Deadhead member can always get the clean supplies they need. We meet in remote places right outside every major city, to exchange goods. Truckers transport every and anything you can imagine. From toilet paper to water, Benadryl to paper, flannel shirts to boxers. As a trucker, every load you unload, you get to keep supplies that have been "damaged." These "damaged" items are things that the seller doesn't think will sell in the store. This is stuff we've purposefully chosen to keep while tainting your supplies. We take all of these supplies to the dead spots in case any other Deadhead needs them. Every trucker that's part of the Deadhead circle messes with at least one load a week, and there is nothing off limits. If it can be tampered with or poisoned in some way, we'll do it.

I'm getting bored by the time the nurse finally calls my name, and I get to follow her to the back. This is where she asks me if I'm getting enough sleep, and I think about how when you're a truck driver, you have to drive eleven hours, or fourteen if you count loading and unloading, then there's a ten-hour break in which you're supposed to fit in the rest of your life— showering, eating, shitting, and sleeping, but I lie and just tell her yes, I get enough sleep. She then asks me the reason for my visit today, and I tell her that it's just a routine visit and that any major trucking company like Heartland Express, CFI, or J.B Hunt makes you get a physical every year before they'll pay your insurance premium. I tell her not to worry, that I'm one of the healthiest people she'll ever meet.

She takes my temperature and blood pressure and scribbles it on my chart, then tells me the doctor will be in shortly, and leaves, but the smell of her perfume lingers. This makes me think about how the things that I tamper with the most, are things that I think are ironic, like, putting benzene in colognes and perfumes, because it has a sweet smell, but causes cancer through prolonged inhalation and skin contact, or putting lindane in alcohol, because while you're in the stall at your local nightclub projectile vomiting and shitting your pants at the same time, you're thinking it's the alcohol, but this and liver damage are the main effects of consuming lindane. The best part is that all of these chemicals we use are accessible to any American with a debit card;

some of us just know how to spend our money better.

The doctor finally comes in. I read his name tag: Dr. Henry Collins, and I laugh. D.H. Collins. He has the same name as a Deadhead that's responsible for medical deliveries, but it's not him. He asks me the reason for my visit, and I tell him that Cannon Express requires a yearly physical and flu shot. He takes a look at my chart and says everything looks fine, then he tells me he'll get me my shot and gets up to leave, but I put my hand on his shoulder, slip him three hundred, pull out a proof of authenticity slip and a .05ml single-dose prefilled syringe that says, "Influenza vaccine," and I tell him, "It's ok. I brought my own."