

# The User Illusion

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09 May 2025

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EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

A black-and-white image of an EYE printed at low resolution. In slow motion, a big DROP OF WATER approaches. It splashes against the eye and explodes into a spray of droplets. More rain follows, hitting like juicy bullets.

Close-up of a living person's eyes. Water trickles into them but they remain open. Their gaze is fixed on a shiny granite FAMILY MONUMENT. Etched onto it is the word "KNIGHT". Below it are names and dates:

EMILIA 1 DECEMBER 1985 -  
LEONARD 22 DECEMBER 2002 - 21 JUNE 2022  
JAMES 22 DECEMBER 2002 -

A black-and-white PHOTO of a handsome young man next to "LEONARD". The face of the person watching the monument is a perfect match for the face printed on the monument - it is JIM KNIGHT's (20s). Time picks up speed very slowly. Thunder rumbles; thunder from another planet.

Jim's eyes remain fixed while somebody in front of him lowers a CREMATION URN into the ground, covers the hole and walks away. The ceremony is finished.

The rain falls heavily and loudly now, a shimmering curtain between Jim and the world. A WOMAN (40s) stands next to him. Both are dressed in black, but the woman grips an umbrella while Jim's clothing rapidly soaks up the rainwater.

She stands uncomfortably close but Jim avoids looking at her. We hear sounds of her voice, barely audible over the rain. She tries to force a PLASTIC ENVELOPE into Jim's limp hand. He pays her no attention. She lifts the plastic envelope to Jim's nose, as if he's been a naughty dog and pissed all over the carpet. No reaction from Jim.

Her voice breaks into a shriek but it is drowned out by a thunderclap. She smacks the plastic envelope against Jim's wet face, drops it onto the grass by his feet and storms away. Under the rain beading on the plastic surface of the envelope, we can read the words "EVIDENCE BAG".

INT. PSYCHIC'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

ON SCREEN: "5 years and an eternity later".

Thunder rumbles. A white CARD on the table reads "CLEO". Female hands hover over the card, fingers splayed.

PSYCHIC  
 You are tired of  
 pretending... pretending  
 like everything is alright.  
 But she says...

PSYCHIC  
 Du hältst es nicht mehr  
 aus... so zu tun, als ob  
 alles in Ordnung wäre. Aber  
 sie sagt...

The PSYCHIC (female, 50s-60s) opens her eyes to look at Jim, who is slouched in a chair across the table from her.

Jim's moist red eyes stare into the distance. He looks broken. The Psychic watches Jim react to her words.

PSYCHIC  
 ... she says that you do not  
 have to be ashamed to have  
 secrets. Everybody has  
 secrets.

PSYCHIC  
 ... sie sagt, dass du dich  
 musst nicht dafür schämen,  
 musst Geheimnisse zu haben.  
 Jeder hat Geheimnisse.

The Psychic says the last line with extra tenderness.

PSYCHIC  
 But...  
 (frowning her eyebrows)  
 Oh my word. Your grandmother  
 did not leave this world in  
 peace... Did she?

PSYCHIC  
 Aber...  
 (frowning her eyebrows)  
 Oh mein Gott. Deine  
 Grossmutter hat diese Welt  
 nicht in Frieden  
 verlassen... oder?

Jim's face crumples in a grimace of unbearable pain... a grimace that, for a second, looks like a smile. Jim twists his body to hide this smile from the Psychic. As he whines, we see him adjust a MICROPHONE concealed in his pullover.

The Psychic's eyes are shut when Jim pulls himself back up. Drama builds in her voice. Jim's face relaxes as his attention focuses on her movements: hands, body, eyebrows.

PSYCHIC  
 I sense an incoming vision.  
 It is... big, angry... She  
 is scared, so very scared...  
 It is moving so fast, closer  
 and closer!  
 It is a... a... bear...?

PSYCHIC  
 Ich spüre eine aufkommende  
 Vision. Es ist... groß,  
 wütend... Sie hat Angst, so  
 große Angst... Es bewegt  
 sich so schnell, immer näher  
 und näher! Es ist ein...  
 ein... Bär...?

THE PSYCHIC'S FACE AND BODY FREEZE INTO A STILL IMAGE.

The last signs of stress vanish from Jim's face, all of his attention now on analyzing the Psychic. Jim TWISTS with his hand, as if turning an invisible dial.

THE PSYCHIC'S BODY SHUDDERS BACKWARDS IN TIME AND FREEZES.  
 (THE BACKGROUND AND JIM ARE UNAFFECTED BY THE FREEZE.)  
 "PLAYBACK" RESUMES.

PSYCHIC  
 It is a... a... bear...?

PSYCHIC  
 Es ist ein... ein... Bär...?

TIME REWINDS.

The Psychic's voice slows down: sliced into separate frames of audio, synchronised with the Psychic's NOISY, GRAINY MOUTH that is taking up the entire frame, complete with MOTION BLUR. It's as if an unseen editor is scrubbing through the "footage of reality."

PSYCHIC  
 Aaa a . . . bb e e e e a a  
 a a a a a a a r r r  
 r . . . . . ?

PSYCHIC  
 Eee i n . . . Bb ä äää ä  
 ä ä ä ää r r r . .  
 . . . ?

FREEZE FRAME.

A digital news feed that looks like a Facebook "timeline" scrolls up, partially obscuring the magnified Psychic.

We see bits of a Facebook profile of a woman (80s) named "CLEO EDWARDS": a photo of a graveyard with an announcement of her death ("💔 our angel is with god now 🕊️"), comments from mourning relatives.

Dates of posts are magnified. A CURSOR highlights TEXT on screen: "tragic incident," "long assumed to be harmless", "she thought they were friends". Then: "Barry the Bear." This post stays on screen (other posts vanish) and playback resumes in the background: the video footage of the Psychic grainy as hell. Her face is scrambled by a "mosaic" effect and the pitch of her voice is adjusted to hide her identity.

PSYCHIC  
 I see a name... Thomas? No,  
 it's a "B". Bernard?  
 Brendan? Barry. Oh, Barry...

PSYCHIC  
 Ich sehe einen Namen...  
 Thomas? Nein, es ist ein  
 „B“. Bernard? Brendan?  
 Barry. Oh, Barry...

The Psychic continues to move and speak but she freezes every 1-2 seconds when the video is paused. Her hands and body are zoomed-in to and tagged with explanatory remarks ("deceptive projection of sympathy," "sleight of hand"); her speech is captioned ("Barnum statement", "hot read: she's regurgitating the bait I set for her").

A red INFOGRAPHIC whooshes onto screen over the Psychic's face: the word "FRAUD", styled like a rejection stamp.

DANCING BEAR ANIMATIONS appear on the screen, moving to a remix of "The Teddy Bear's Picnic", TikTok-style.

VIDEO MUSIC

If you go down in the woods today,  
you're sure of a big surprise.  
If you go down in the woods today,  
you'd better go in disguise!

The music intensifies. Big and aggressive text on screen:  
"THIS IS HOW THEY LIE TO YOU" and "THEY PROMISE MIRACLES AND  
DRINK YOUR MONEY"

ROLL CREDITS  
OVER VIDEO

INT. HEURIGER - NIGHT

We see a Heuriger: a traditional wine bar. Photos of long-dead patrons adorn the walls. The atmosphere is lively. The warm light from overhead fixtures bathes all faces in gold. Every face is lovely.

From a distance, we see a COUPLE (20s) chat excitedly. A FINGER points at them while an obnoxious voice comments.

MAN (O.S.)

She's a 7.2, he's barely a 6. You can  
see the bald patch from here. First  
guy who's 9% better...

(Fingers snap)

It's over.

Finger points to a COUPLE (30s-40s) sat further back: a woman chews as she watches her male companion play with his phone. He is completely absorbed. She takes a sip of wine.

MAN (O.S.) (cont'd)

2%. He's in love with his phone. Next  
month she'll be sitting there with  
someone 2 inches taller.

WOMAN (O.S.)

The confidence in your voice goes up  
precisely 12% when you make things  
up.

A COUPLE (late teens) is wrapped up in each others' arms in bliss.

MAN (O.S.)

5%. Teenagers.

BERNIE (male, American, 20s) cringes in embarrassment (what if other patrons see?) and lowers HANNES'S (male, Austrian, muscular, 20s) finger. ROSE (female, Czech, blind, 20s) leans against Bernie forlornly, her eyes downcast.

BERNIE

Can you... not point fingers at people in public?

Jim rocks up and beams at the table with a bright "Good evening!" Hannes responds with a throaty bellow, Bernie with a relieved "Oh thank God!" Rose tilts her head toward Jim's voice. Jim takes a seat.

JIM

Have you started without me?

ROSE

Shhhhhh! Our brilliant Hannes is converting love into decimals again!

HANNES

Why am I the bad guy? All I'm saying is that any human being would leave their partner if they met someone better. For some people, it could be 70% better, and for others it would only take 10%.

(turning to Jim)

How am I wrong?

Jim looks around: people's body postures as they engage in conversation, status symbols like jewellery, men's muscles flexing. A woman flirtatiously brushes a strand of hair from her face. Hands lovingly clasp hands.

JIM

Age, health, social status - it's there for everyone to see... All they have to do is look.

HANNES

(to Rose)

You see? I know how people work. People are made of numbers.

ROSE

Oh, really? Is that why a blind mathematician has been ahead of you all year?

HANNES

(dismissive)

Early leads rarely last.