



# Mind Reader

a PsyCop Short

*Jordan Castillo Price*

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BY JORDAN CASTILLO PRICE

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I leaned over the display case and stared down through the glass.

“Pretty messed up,” Crash said.

I thought for a second that he was reading my mind, but then I realized he was talking about the display. I shrugged. The mummified babies were just some brown, withered husks. I’d seen worse, lots worse.

“What does it say about a culture, that they’re so obsessed with their dead that they go through all this preparation and ritual to preserve the body?”

I glanced up at a small sign on the wall I’d noticed that said something about it. “They, uh, thought they’d need this stuff in the afterlife. Just being thorough, I guess.”

A female security guard watched us with the same expression she probably wore while she was waiting for a load of laundry to dry. Crash petted the pocket of his leather jacket as if he was jonesing to have a smoke right then and there. “I take it you can’t find any Egyptian ghosts to talk to.”

“Nope. They’re probably in Egypt, not in a museum in Hyde Park. And they probably didn’t stick around more than a few dozen years after they died. I hardly ever see ghosts that are more than a century or two old.” Then again, there weren’t many white people in the Midwest before that, and maybe all the Native Americans were smart enough not to stick around once they’d died.

“If you can’t see mummy ghosts, then there aren’t any to be seen.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“But it’s true. I can’t wait to blow a hole in ScienceFiend’s theory that the whole mummification process ties the spirits to the physical realm.”

“ScienceFiend.”

“It’s an online nickname.”

I knew that. It just sounded stupid when Crash said it out loud, especially because he said it like he cared about what someone thought about him even though they’d never actually met in person. “You never know,” I told him. “Mummification might keep a spirit around a lot longer than normal. Say a ghost was going to stick around for ten years, and instead it stayed here for fifty.” I shrugged. “You’d need some newer mummies to test that out.”

“They mummified a guy in Baltimore in 1994.”

They? Who were They? I thought it was better not to know. “Too recent. Plenty of ghosts have bodies that died in ‘94. You’d need some mummies from the sixteen, seventeen hundreds.”

We turned a corner and found ourselves in the gift shop. Mummy key-chains. Gummy mummies. No ghosts.

“And this concludes our tour,” said Crash. “Unless you see any spirit activity in here....”

I thought I felt a cold spot, but when I looked up I saw an air conditioning vent set into the ceiling. “Nope. What if I just make something up? Will you be happy then? There’s a Sherpa in the corner chewing on some ectoplasmic yak fat.”

“No use lying to an empath, even a lowly level-one like me.” He took

another look around the gift shop. “What about that doorway? We haven’t been in there.”

“That doorway” led to one of those museum displays that looked like they’d been conceived by the cheapest guy on the board of directors, then executed by the apprentice display makers on a day they were all hung over. It consisted of a narrow passage with some signs in it that were covered in tiny little type, and a few faded photos.

“I don’t see anything,” said.

Crash narrowed his eyes. I looked again. Maybe I really had missed something. He’s the empath, right? Maybe he had a feeling about that room.

I stepped into the cramped space. It felt close and overly quiet, a windowless corridor in the center of a building.

“No. I don’t hear anything eith—”

Crash shoved my back against the display wall and planted his hands on either side of my head.

He’d say something nasty, I was sure. It was always push and pull with him. He’d begged me to drive him to the Oriental Institute and look at mummies, and yet he’d followed that up with some remark at me about being too narrow-minded to do it. He’d cranked my passenger seat all the way back and sprawled in it with his leather jacket hanging open and his hips tilted up in such a way that it looked like he’d shoved a pair of socks down the front of his jeans to get my attention, and yet he’d scowled at me every time I looked in his general direction. And now, here we were in the most awkward position I’d been in since I could remember, and it was only a matter of time before....

He kissed me.

I stood there. I don't think I kissed him back. I was too floored to move.

His mouth didn't feel like Jacob's. His face was clean shaven. His lips were warm and slightly wet, as if he'd just licked them. And he hadn't come at me as hard as I thought he might, as if he'd changed his mind at the last second, decided that maybe this kiss wasn't such a hot idea after all, but the momentum had built up behind it so long that there was no way he could put the brakes on even if he'd wanted to. Or maybe he was just more gentle than I figured he'd be.

Neither of us had closed our eyes. His were open wide, and they looked as surprised as I felt. Maybe he had herded me into that room with the intention of putting the moves on me, but if so, I don't think he'd planned it out all that carefully. I searched for something to say, but the look he was giving me had me pinned to the wall, helpless to do anything but stare right back.

"Sir—take your hands off the wall."

I'll admit it. I jumped.

Crash eased back, cool as can be, turned to the security guard who was standing in the doorway, and smiled. He held his hands out, palms forward, the universal *I-give-up* sign.

"Sorry," he said. He didn't sound sorry at all. "My mistake."

How long had she been standing there? Jesus. I wanted a hole to open up in the floor and swallow me, despite the fact that there was probably a basement full of mummies underneath. Sure, they were creepy dead bodies. But at least they wouldn't have seen me liplocked with Crash.

I turned and headed back toward the gift shop, walking with giant strides to get out of there as quickly as possible without actually running. I didn't stop until I was fumbling in the parking lot with my keychain, its half-dead

battery and my automatic locks. Crash went around to the passenger side, put his forearms on the roof, and rested his chin on his folded hands. Even though I was doing my best not to, I looked. He was still smiling.

“So,” he said. “Where do you want to go for lunch?”

I shook my head. “I’ve got things to do.”

The lock finally popped open. I could go to the car dealership and get the battery changed. There. I wasn’t lying. I did have things to do. For real.

We climbed into the car and snapped our seatbelts on. I could tell he was watching me, but I kept my eyes on the parking lot. There was a ghost on the lawn with a parasol and gigantic hair that looked like she could’ve been pretty old, 1800’s even, but I didn’t mention it. She was old, but not thousands of years old. I didn’t trust my voice to sound normal, anyway.

I merged onto the highway. Crash played with the radio. I didn’t say anything, and either did he. It wasn’t that “companionable silence” that you hear about all the time. I just suspected I’d get roped into a conversation I didn’t want to have if I asked him what the fuck it was he’d thought he’d been doing back there, but I couldn’t think of a single damn thing I could bring up to change the subject, either.

Traffic was light enough that I got back to Crash’s store before I exploded and sprayed gobs of skin, blood and brain on the windshield, so I supposed I should be thankful for that, at least. I double-parked in front of his building. Crash turned the radio down and stared through the windshield, looking thoughtful. “All that history,” he said, “I’m surprised there weren’t any spirits at the museum.”

“I didn’t say that. I said there weren’t any mummy ghosts.”

He looked at me and raised an eyebrow. “You held out on me,” he said. Like he was surprised.

I shrugged.

“It really is that fucking easy for you.” He sort of looked like Billy Idol when he was mad and his lip curled like that, even though he’d been maybe five when MTV-punk was in its heyday in the early 80’s. He got out of the car and slammed the door. He lit a cigarette before he’d even made it to the sidewalk.

A car pulled up behind me and laid on the horn. Had I really been thinking about going after Crash and explaining myself? There wasn’t really much to say. If I piped up every time I saw a ghost, I’d never shut up. There was one at the corner, and another few wandering around in the grocery store parking lot across the street.

He didn’t realize how stupid it was to be jealous of my so-called talent. And there weren’t any level-five *empaths* walking around, at least not that I knew of. Who could stand to feel the weight everyone else’s baggage as acutely as if it were his own? How would you ever know what you actually felt?

The car horn blared again. I did a quick check in my rearview, flipped on my blinker and pulled into traffic. The thought that Crash might actually know how I felt was something I didn’t want to dwell on. I did my best to channel all my mental energy into the phrase “really bad idea” whenever he got anywhere near me. So what was that kiss all about?

He probably had no idea how I actually felt, not without a bunch of meditating and centering and whatever other maneuvers he had to go through to beef up his talent. He was just a level one, after all.

*Sample chapters of the PsyCop novels, Victor and Jacob snippets, the PsyCop blog and more can be found at [www.PsyCop.com](http://www.PsyCop.com)*