All There Is To Know

In an age of control,
imagination is the last rebellion.



A Novel by Ron Schultz

From The Renegade Fiction Collective

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Published October 2026
by Indies United Publishing House, LLC

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Edited by Jen Marshall and Flann Maguire
Cover Art by Jack Arnold

FIRST EDITION

ISBN: 978-1-64456-965-8 [Hardcover]
ISBN: 978-1-64456-966-5 [Paperback]
ISBN: 978-1-64456-967-2 [Kindle]
ISBN: 978-1-64456-968-9 [ePub]
ISBN: 978-1-64456-969-6 [Audiobook]

Library of Congress Control Number:2026921572



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC
P.O. BOX 3071
QUINCY, IL 62305-3071
INDIESUNITED.NET

“The laws of science do not distinguish between the past and the future.”
—Stephen W. Hawking, A Brief History of Time (1988)

“When you get to the fork in the road, take it.”
—Yogi Berra

Special Thanks to: Lisa Orban for her tireless efforts and support. Jack Arnold for his creativity and everything he does, Sheila Berg, Jennifer Marshall and Flann Maguire for their editorial expertise, and my Washington DC Congressional hosts for all their help in helping me get things accurate.

For Laura, who has informed my life with love.

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CHAPTER 1

Jake had always hoped God existed—that somewhere in the vast random choice, Something Other acted in a way that was more important and better informed. Growing up in the Age of Information, he was amazed that real information (information concerning what was truly important) was reserved for either some great spiritual Otherness or nothing at all. The concept of Something Other seemed more assuring than nothing. So, he spent the better part of his life in search, asking under his breath and aloud to both the empty rooms and the full, "Are you there?" And the response was usually silence.

It was the "usually" part of this that troubled Jake most. Actually, his name was Jack, but he knew he was meant to be something other than a mere Jack. So, at the age of eleven, he changed his name to Jake—and was. This continual ambition to be Something Other rode a steady shotgun to Jake's life. At thirteen, he had stated rather boldly, "If I can really be Something Other, I will join with God ... hopefully." He believed joining with God would certainly make him Something Other, Something Other than the masses, straining to know and do better but failing so obviously and continually. "What greater success in life could there possibly be," he thought in his young mind, "than to be actually joined with God?"

Twenty years later, he would still believe it was true. Jake was amazed by how little it took to keep him going.

Being born to parents whose lives were trapped in the Age of Anxiety, their fears were not his. Stability and death were not the motivating components of Jake's fear. He was part of the great "So what?" This was a particular feeling based on the idea that life was composed of matter and doesn't matter—and that most of life really doesn't matter. From his perspective, God seemed to fall into the category of matter, no matter if there was a corporeal being or not. God also seemed to matter to all kinds of other people, too,

and with a great ferocity of feeling and belief. As far as he could tell, God was the only real answer to the great "SW?" Because, as he often conjectured, "What if there isn't an answer? What if …"

As a child, "What if?" was a favorite game of Jake's: one where imagined horrors were easily created to satisfy the fundamental requirements of eliciting an, "Eeewww, God. That's disgusting," from a participating accomplice. This game troubled Jake's parents. They found the monstrous "What ifs" too real. Jake and his friends thought they were funny. But that was usually on long trips in the back of a station wagon when everything was funny. Even Mr. Elliot's snapped disgust about these childish atrocities was funny. Like the time his parents had taken Jake and his friend Kenny to Disneyland, packing the green-paneled Pontiac wagon with bags of provisions: grapes, potato chips, marshmallows (destined to be a morass of marshmallow sauce on the return trip), thermoses filled with milk, devil's food cookies, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, bologna sandwiches, oranges, bananas, and paper bags filled with Kix and Cheerios. Mrs. Elliot had tried to see to every possible desire two ten-and-a-half-year-old boys could want while barreling along on what was then an-hour-and-twenty-minute drive south from the San Fernando Valley. No sooner had they gotten onto the Ventura Freeway than Jake and Kenny were into the goodies. Jake was a good three inches taller than his slight, dark-haired, and freckled friend. Jake had been used to being bigger than his friends. He had always been the tallest kid in his class. His still-baby-blond-curly hair, which turned a light brown a few months after his twelfth birthday, had marked him above the others in every class picture.

At the time, Jake's head was turned toward Kenny as they tried to stuff as many bananas as they could into one mouthful. As Kenny shoved two-thirds of the ripe fruit into his bulging gob, Jake let out with a loud, "Eeewww! What if that banana got stuck there forever and maggots started pouring out of our mouths and then your nose?" This last bit of evocative description got both Kenny and Jake's father's attention. Kenny's immediate reaction was to choke and spit mushed banana over the cloth headliner. Jake's father's reaction was more severe, the sudden choking caused him to jerk the Pontiac to the side of the road as Mrs. Elliot leaned over the seat, prying the remaining banana from Kenny's mouth, trying

to prevent a cataclysmic disaster from taking place in the back seat. Even Jake's father roaring admonitions about how they all could have been killed by the game couldn't stop Jake or Kenny's laughter after he had swallowed the dislodged blob of banana. But then, as stated earlier, stability and death were far from Jake Elliot's childhood concerns. The "What ifs" would return later, when the silence he received after asking his question became too deafening.

As Jake grew older, he knew he would have to put these games behind him and get down to what it was he was going to do. He had decided to give himself ample time to properly check out the possibilities. After twenty-one years, he discovered a problem with this approach when he was rather rudely confronted by his parents' main "What if?" He didn't know what it was he really wanted to do. His first two decades had been filled with school, art, and baseball, but he was, by his reckoning, only really good enough in art to pursue it in any serious manner. Jake had grown into a 6'3", 195-pound, broad-shouldered, cobalt-blue-eyed, scraggly-brown-bearded, long-curly-brown-haired, talented-yet-perennially unemployed artist. At this stage in his life, however, he didn't view his current predicament as a terribly serious matter. At least he was someone he liked.

His basic problem, he found, was that he resented the idea of serious matters in general. That to be accepted in this society one had to be seriously involved in something to live a meaningful existence bothered him. At age twenty-one and with a paucity of real answers, Jake still wasn't sure there was a meaningful existence to be had, so the idea of pursuing an existence that didn't exist seemed even more foolish than not pursuing any at all.

There were those who accused Jake of frittering away these early productive years. His father was a prominent member of this group. But this was not the case: Jake was in search. The worst part about his search was that he had only a vague notion of what it was he was looking for, but he knew it had something to do with what he was constantly told he could never know. He often thought that this commitment to the unknowable should have been hailed as a noble and valiant choice. Had he chosen to be a Buddhist monk, things might have been different. Though his father would never have understood, his mother might have, but that wasn't why Jake

was living this life. At twenty-one, he did not feel responsible to his parents for the way he chose, even though they felt very responsible.

The main reason Jake had so much trouble was due to an experience he had at eighteen. Actually, you could go further back than that, but let's say this particular point in his life was a confirmation of those earlier experiences, which were registered at a much younger age and placed into a pile: "For Later Explanation."

Well, an explanation of a sort came as unexpectedly, as is the case with such illuminations. It was while attending his cousin Sheri's wedding (a typical Jewish affair with a chuppah filled with tears of joy and fear, white-carnation-filled flower arrangements, four-piece, accordion-led bands, dancing, and all the attendant hoopla associated with these events) that the blinding force hit him. Now, it is important to note this reverie was not Jake's first sexual encounter in the back of the temple with some distant cousin—that had happened two years earlier at some other cousin's bar mitzvah. But this was Jake's first profoundly Something Other sensation in his teen years. Actually, this "sensation" didn't even happen in the temple, although it is where it began.

As usual, upon entering a temple, or any religious building for that matter, Jake asked his question, "Are you here?" He asked it under his breath because of the great crowd that had packed the oaken pews for this righteous occasion, half of whom were relatives. Two rows in front, he could see the balding pink head of his grossly overweight aunt Millie scrunched next to the already bald head of her always old—but still relatively svelte—husband, Uncle Mort. Uncle Mort was Jake's father Martin's older brother. Behind Mort and Millie and directly in front of Jake was the whole Kohlberg side of the family—courtesy of his father's mother. The black, Vitalis-slicked-back-haired father, Alex; his stringy-dyed-red-haired wife, Ruth; their two con man sons, Harry and Nathan (both later imprisoned at ages nineteen and twenty for running a travel-related boiler room scam, bilking $40,000 from unsuspecting widows); and Alex and Ruth's twin daughters, Ester and Naomi. Jake could not imagine a less attractive family. Unfortunately, they were part of his—his father's cousins. He knew if he had asked his question out loud, he would have

undoubtedly received an answer from a party with which he wasn't concerned—most likely his second cousin Naomi, who had grown into as ugly a young adult as she had been a child.

Having asked the question to himself and received the big silence, Jake nodded knowingly. He shook his head at the congregation chattering expectantly before him, as if the Something Other was sure to show. Jake knew there was no way.

It was after the services. The main hall of the temple, filled with twenty round, pink table-clothed and carnation-laden tables, had been opened for the reception. Jake sneaked outside into the parking lot for a smoke. As he meandered through the cars, feeling the harsh trail of rebellious freedom course down his throat, he heard an unmistakable noise. Over to his left was a metallic silver Coupe de Ville, which was rocking and quivering from what could only be the Cadillac of human experiences.

Quietly moving closer, Jake got a better angle on the action inside. It was his cousin Rosalind and some cousin or other, who—from all appearances—was not too far removed. All Jake could see of him was his extremely athletic thrusts as Rosalind rode him high. Her dress had been laid carefully over the front seat to keep it wrinkle-free. Jake couldn't help himself, peering at Rosalind's well-developed form, her firm, full breasts automatically following the inertia of her galloping partner, her shoulder-length flipped coif bouncing in sync, her delicate shoulders arched back to maintain her position.

Jake asked again, "Are you here?"

This time, though, instead of the expected silence, there came an intensely involved and highly aroused, "Uh-huh."

Well, Jake was so startled by the fact that he had actually gotten a response that he let out a terrified scream…

About the Author

Ron Schultz has written, co-written, and edited 30 published books on social innovation, meditation, science, and social entrepreneurship, receiving the 2014 Social Innovation Leadership Award. He's authored two thriller series, including The Dangerous Places series with Sarah Lovett, plus hundreds of magazine articles and numerous TV/film credits, including He-Man and the Masters of the Universe and the acclaimed CBS movie The Switch.