

# Outline

Frank Hoff (“Little Frank”) and Frank Vlasov (“Big Frank”) grow up as children in the same small town community after World War II, soon becoming fast friends. Little Frank develops an early interest in science and becomes quite brilliant at it, even obsessed. Big Frank is a bit older, a bit slower and cares more about having a good time. They are shown enjoying some firecrackers which sparks Little Frank’s interest in chemistry: not content with blowing stuff up, his curious mind wants to know how things work. He dismantles some fireworks, determined to learn what goes on inside, which upsets Big Frank for “wasting” them. Little Frank does learn more about black powder though and soon makes his own fireworks, which placates Big Frank since he can now sell those to other children. This sequence sets up their future relationship and their characters: where Little Frank is about curiosity and pure science, Big Frank is about applications; business-minded and out for a quick buck.

## **Possible further sequences in this context**

- pending on coming up with good ideas for later pay-offs -

- Anecdote about dangerous 1950s chemistry sets which back then used to contain all sorts of stuff from cyanide to uranium;
- Where other kids stole candy bars from the drugstore, one or both of the two Franks are stealing nitric acid and fertilizer from a farm supplies trader in order to make bigger and better explosives.
- Anecdote about some sort of chemical prank, like using some weed killer from hell to write a naughty message on somebody’s lawn or on the school’s football pitch, or draw a penis etc.

There is an accident with self-made explosive, resulting in permanent slight disabilities or disfigurements, which teaches the boys more caution and a bit of humility while putting a damper on their enthusiasm for blowing stuff up. Still, Little Frank does retain his passion for chemistry all through high school and keeps pursuing it all through college and grad school.

Meanwhile, Big Frank does not really care what specifically he does. A jack of many trades, he lacks some ability to focus. When it comes to picking high school classes, college courses etc., he always goes along with whatever Little Frank does, just so they can keep hanging out together. In college, he turns Little Frank’s attention to the manufacture of drugs. After some initial experiments extracting “natural highs” from herbs, spices and mushrooms etc., they branch out into synthetic drugs. Coming from modest backgrounds, they start augmenting their finances by selling minor quantities of drugs to their fellow students. This would be mainly psychedelics like LSD and psilocybin, possibly also MDMA (ecstasy) and other phenethylamines, ephedrine and speed. They could market the latter as “cocaine” since most users are unable to tell the difference from the effects alone anyway. Big Frank is also very generous with his drugs and money in order to get girls, an angle that eludes Little Frank.

Being all about the science, Hoff does not aspire to becoming a drug kingpin. Big Frank Vlasov does not care so much what he does, as long as he can have fun. More of a popular hustler type, he

is the one to take care of the business end while Hoff remains in the background, keeping his reputation intact. People who know more about the two friends may suspect Little Frank to be involved in the manufacture but he keeps his grades up and his nose clean. Meanwhile, everybody knows that Big Frank is the guy to go to for “a good time.”

Little Frank Hoff graduates from college in timely fashion while Big Frank, partying hard, is a year or two behind. Little Frank immediately starts on his PhD on a grant or a similar source of income which allows him to withdraw from the drug trade. Slowly they start to grow apart, at first hardly noticing it. Little Frank finishes his PhD on time. Maybe a year before defending his dissertation, Little Frank meets his future wife.

Big Frank, meanwhile, has finally gotten around to completing a B.A. in chemistry and starts working minor jobs in academia as lab and teaching assistant to get by. He slides into a kind of stoner lifestyle, leching on and sleeping with young, gullible coeds while at the same time manufacturing drugs on the side in university labs, which he sells on campus and at the odd rock festival, spring break etc. His day job is a perfect cover. Limiting his market mostly to students and using middlemen, he avoids conflicts with law enforcement as well as emerging drug gangs and organized crime during the 1970s. There could be some sort of close shave with violent criminals, leading Big Frank to refine his distribution methods and become more discrete.

Little Frank Hoff meanwhile gets married after finishing his dissertation. He pursues an academic career with the goal of landing a professorship at the best possible university and start on the tenure track. During the 1970s though, he suffers a string of puzzling career setbacks, finding himself unable to hold down any position. A string of run-ins with conformist, risk-averse and materialistic superiors ruins his academic career. Unbeknownst to him and the audience, the underlying reason is the conflict between his inquisitive personality and the values of a conformist society under autocracy that the Aliens are covertly implementing. His wife fails to conceive a child while he is forced to leave academia and take on less and less prestigious industry and even government jobs to get by, which he also fails to hold down for similar reasons. He is caught up in a vicious cycle of personal frustration and professional failure, ending up where careers in chemistry go to die: as a pharmaceutical sales rep, a job which can pay decent money if you are the right type but which is an especially bad fit for Little Frank with his poor people skills.

While Little Frank stays in love with his wife, his failures prevent the couple from saving up any money, which spells doom when the wife finally does become pregnant in early 1987. Her pregnancy carries health risks due to some medical complication. At the same time, their healthcare provider declares the pregnancy a preexisting condition because Frank was between jobs when the child was conceived, so the cost will not be covered. The wife might die from substandard healthcare, and in any event, they will be ruined by medical bills.

Little Frank tries to get out of this pinch by starting to make drugs again and/or embezzling pharmaceuticals from his sales rep gig to sell on the side. However, he runs into trouble with junkies, the competition and/or law enforcement when trying to sell the drugs. In this situation, he meets up with Vlasov again for some convenient reason, like a class reunion. They catch up and Big Frank agrees to cut Little Frank back into his drug trade.

After some time of happily making, embezzling and selling drugs, it becomes clear that their old business model does not lend itself to rapid expansion or quickly generating the large amounts of cash that Little Frank urgently needs. Expanding the market might be an option but after their share of conflicts, both are aware of the risks and problems that go with increasing their own sales at the cost of other criminals whose turf they would need to encroach on. At the same time, Big Frank notes that college/university students, his traditional target demo, have become increasingly fun-averse and conformist in the era of Reaganomics, compared to the two Franks' own “wild days” as

rockers/hippies. The new breed seem to be increasingly focused on getting degrees and having careers instead of “experimenting” and “finding themselves”. Half jokingly, Big Frank suggests “if only we had a drug that helped them *learn* better and *study* harder - *then* we could really cash in.” This thought leads them to try and meet that need by adding Ritalin, some sort of Adderall precursor and other stimulants to their portfolio, as well as maybe downers and such for a good night’s sleep after all that cramming.

It is while trying to develop an even more effective “*superlearning compound drug*”, supposed to help all those eager beavers pass exams better by increasing their focus and calming their nerves in high stress situations, that the two accidentally discover the “magical” lens material that reveals the aliens and their subliminal messaging. The Franks are trying to make experimental, layered pills out of two different drugs which were supposed to be kept separate by a layer of some inert substance in between, to stop the different drugs from reacting with one another and degrading each other before they have been ingested. To achieve this, they first pour a molten solution of one of the drugs into a glass tray, let it solidify, pour the inert separator on top of that, and lastly pour the other drug as a third layer on top. However, something goes wrong and the contents of the tray transform into a brownish sludge. Moreover, when looking through that stuff, things behind it appear to lose all colour. The world is rendered in black and white, as though it were some kind of optical filter that removed all color from the light.

Such a filter is not possible in bright daylight because of the way the human eye perceives colors. This puzzles the two scientists. Trying to find out what is going on, they test the sludge with different spectrometers and such, but the results are ambiguous. While they don’t know what exactly went wrong, the data seems to indicate that the precursor substances have congealed into a weird, complex polymer for some reason. Big Frank slightly loses interest at this point and leaves to take care of business. Little Frank’s scientific curiosity is piqued though. He enlists the help of a black female physicist they both met back in college by the name of Cela Mann to unravel the mystery.

As a child, Cela grew up in one of the country’s largest cities, which made her sassy, streetwise, cynical and a little paranoid. But when it came time for college, she was sent to live with her aunt out in the boonies for money reasons, which is how she ended up at the same college as the two Franks [insert whacky anecdote], though not really befriending them. She currently works as a minor research scientist at the physics department of the same university as Big Frank.

Experimenting alone with the mysterious substance at her workplace, Cela gets ever more confusing results. At this point, it is she who observes the first alien in its actual shape through the bottom of the glass tray with the brownish substance. After her initial scare and freak-out, this makes her very angry because she assumes that the samples provided by Frank are actually a new type of psychedelic drug, which she believes Frank kept secret from her, and which she accidentally ingested in minute quantities just by handling the substance, much the same way that Swiss chemist who invented LSD received his first involuntary psychedelic high. At the time, it was not known that LSD is psychoactive even in very small quantities absorbed through the skin.

Convincing herself what she saw was a drug-induced hallucination, Cela storms off to give Little Frank a piece of her mind, make him confess and help her get the “junk” out of her system.

When confronted, Little Frank comes clean to her about the superlearning multi-drug compound tablets he was trying to make but denies it could cause any hallucinations. Data acquired by Cela leads them to hypothesize that the formation of the unknown polymer might have been catalyzed by an unknown type of radiation. When Little Frank takes another look through the tray with the sludge, it unveils a subliminal message on a billboard across the street. Cela sees it too and the truth starts dawning on them.

For the discovery sequence, they first pry the thick sheet of polymer out of the glass tray and cut it into smaller pieces through which they try to take the occasional sneaky peek during a walk across campus. The alien first seen by Cela turns out to be the dean of the university. They approach the city center, finding more aliens and subliminal messages. Getting increasingly anxious, holding a square of brown plastic in front of their faces feels like drawing too much attention, so they cut up the plastic into smaller chunks and stick those to their eye glasses with superglue, crafting makeshift sunglasses in hopes of being able to observe more while looking at least a little less conspicuous.

Many but not all of the aliens they discover are about money, power, or both. They include politicians on TV. In addition to the classic subliminal messages about conformity, submission and unfettered capitalism (“OBEY”, “MARRY AND REPRODUCE”, “SLEEP”, “BUY” etc), others promote religion as well as hatred of minorities, foreigners and the poor. From a distance, Frank and Cela spot some alien policemen. Increasingly paranoid and panicked, they escape by jumping on a bus. They make their way to the poor, black part of town and duck into a coffee shop to talk things over.

Removing the glasses gives both of them splitting headaches. Best guess at this point seems to be the monsters are covertly invading aliens who possess unknown, highly advanced stealth ray technology. For reasons unknown, the aliens are loath or unable to exterminate humanity outright to take over the planet. Instead, they are pursuing a strategy of subversion in secret. The aliens most likely chose that course because there are only relatively few of them and what technology they have, does not allow them to take over by raw force. Still, Frank and Cela have to fear that the aliens probably have other advanced and as yet unknown capabilities.

Frank desperately wants to read Big Frank and most of all his wife into this discovery. Cela however is like “Oh wow, *that’s* gonna be a fun conversation!” She points out that they would be putting any people at risk to whom they disclose the alien discovery, and urges more caution. “The first thing I’m gonna do is use these glasses to check *every* single person I know!” Although she does not like being a hero any more than Frank and both are very scared, she suggests that this is the time for both of them to step up and make a difference – nobody else can. They need to be smart about it though and first gather more information. There are many open questions. For instance – have the aliens been on Earth for several decades or arrived more recently? Have the celebrities and politicians on TV always been aliens or have they been replaced at some point? Might the real celebrities even still be alive, and kept at some secret location?

Cela wants to keep things under wraps for now until they find out more and come up with a plan. She makes Frank tell her the “recipe” for the magical polymer and writes it down. They agree to meet at the same place the next morning to continue before they both return home for the day. In secret, she sends the recipe for the polymer to the Gilbert character from the original movie in a closed envelope, with instructions to open it, should anything happen to her or he fails to hear from her again within the month. He used to be her philosophy or ethics professor in college.

At home, Frank puts on a brave face, having decided he wants to spare his wife the latest chunk of bad news for now. Noncommittal chit chat, everything supposedly went great at work, he gives her a little pep talk. He tells her he broke/lost his glasses and asks her if she has seen his spare pair. He reassures her that everything will turn out OK. He tells her he has met a former fellow chemistry student from way back when, and that he was able to help him with some research problem. She replies along the lines of “Oh darling, couldn’t that be an ‘in’ for yourself, to get back into academia? Do some proper chemical research again? Maybe still get that professorship after all? Then you could stop this awful job of hawking stupid pills to doctors. That job always gets you down anyway. And the university’s healthcare provider wouldn’t care about this pre-existing conditions nonsense, so my pregnancy would be covered and we could both live happily ever after!”

That would all be very neat indeed, except of course that it is all a pipe dream that can never happen. Frank, secretly despairing, pops two Xanax and an ibuprofen and cuddles up to her on the sofa, waiting for the drugs to take effect. She she flips through the TV channels, blissfully unaware of the truth behind the pictures. Several celebrities that turned out to be aliens during the day appear on TV in their human form, including Ronald Reagan who just that day gave his Brandenburg Gate speech (which makes the date Friday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1987). Frank secretly wonders how many other aliens are with the president on that podium, like for instance German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and glances sideways at some magazines on the coffee table, which he knows to contain subliminal messages. He drifts off to an uneasy sleep.

Meanwhile, Cela discovers that while her friends and relatives seem OK, her mean old landlady is an alien.

At their meet the next day, she and Frank still fail to come up with a fully-formed plan but decide they have to make more magical glasses, to prepare for the day when they finally do decide to share the secret with others. They need the glasses to look more unobtrusively though, just like normal sunglasses. Cela also hints she has a hunch about a way to pinpoint when the alien invasion might have started but she needs to do some more research to verify that, and the university libraries are closed over the weekend. They decide against reading Big Frank into their secret for now because Cela thinks he is an untrustworthy, drug-dealing sleazebag.

Frank raids the drug stash and makes more polymer, this time casting it into a much thinner sheet in order to be able to cut proper eyeglass lenses from it. He also cooks up batches of meth and MDMA to sell through one of Big Frank's minions for a quick cash injection, having decided he has to cut some ethical corners and take greater risks while at the same time acquire more funds to be better prepared for emergencies. Meanwhile, Cela goes to the mall where she finds out how to swap new lenses into eye glasses, and buys a couple dozen cheap frames. They make their first box of magical sunglasses.

It is now Frank's turn to check if any of the people he knows are aliens. The most shocking discovery is that his wife's own OB-GYN is an alien. There is a very tense scene where Frank in his capacity as pharma sales rep visits the doctor in his practice and can barely contain himself at the thought of this ghoulish monster grabbing his own wife by the pussy.

Shaken, Frank seeks out Cela. In order to make the wife switch doctors while avoiding to arouse suspicion, Cela suggests Frank tell his wife that the doctor was indiscreet and unprofessional about his patients toward Frank in their meeting, telling him lecherous stories, making misogynistic and lecherous remarks and such. Back home, Frank tries that but still has a hard time to convince the wife and has to all but start begging her before she reluctantly agrees to see a different doctor from now on.

Cela has been able to pinpoint the year the unknown radiation probably started flooding the planet. At the time, years or decades ago, the type of cyclotron spectrometer doohicky she first used to analyze Frank's polymer, started to show increased levels of some background noise or static. Back then, the research community thought nothing of it, chalking it up to speculative sources like astronomical phenomena, residual radiation from atmospheric nuclear testing, or simply advanced sensors getting more sensitive. Since it didn't get in the way of the research, it was largely dismissed and forgotten about.

Cela thinks at this point there is nothing more to gain from further quiet observation. She wants to kidnap an alien and beat information out of it, specifically her mean old landlady. They ambush her when she comes to collect the rent. Frank beats her over the head from behind with a blunt object. They tie her up and take her to Frank's garden shed/drug lab for questioning but when she comes to, she manages to reach her teleporting wrist watch and vanishes into thin air.

The next alien that Cela and Frank try to abduct is his wife's former doctor. Frank drops off his wife at her new doctor's practice, then meets up with Cela who has already been staking out the alien doctor's place. Frank is stunned when his wife unexpectedly turns up at the alien's practice, and flabbergasted when it turns out that *his own wife* is an alien. He convinces himself that the aliens must have taken his real wife hostage some time ago and replaced her with an alien for some reason. The plan is changed: instead of kidnapping the doctor, Cela and Frank go back to Frank's house and ambush the wife on her return from the doctor's.

They manage to successfully overpower the wife and take away her teleport watch before she is able to use it. Cela departs while Frank starts to question the monster. She claims there never was a real wife. It turns out the aliens became aware of Frank's chemical genius at some point and, trying to harness it for their purposes, assigned her to him as a covert operative to keep an eye on him, intensify his brainwashing into total conformity and steer him toward some sort of research project for them. However, it never worked out because stubborn Frank always remained too independently-minded, questioning his superiors and refusing to sacrifice his creativity for a conformist career. The high-risk pregnancy was faked; it had been the final ploy to try and make him submit to conformity.

At this point, Cela witnesses from a nearby bus stop how a mixed human-alien SWAT team swarms Frank's property. They break down the door to the shed, free the wife and disappear Frank to some black site torture dungeon.

Having sold out to the aliens, Big Frank Vlasov is seen being set up by some alien university administrators as the new head of the chemistry department while Cela is last seen at the Greyhound bus depot buying a ticket to Los Angeles, gripping a carton full of magic sunglasses.