

A Taste of Fate:

**ULTIMUS
PRIMED**



a novel, by
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Excerpt – *The Exceptional One*

Darius sat in his Lexus looking up at the carefully planted palm trees and sienna-colored roof tiles of First Family Medical's Spanish architecture. Suddenly, he fully understood the desire anyone could have to bomb a building. He imagined blotting out the Miami sun with roaring flames, smoke deep, dark and thick, soot coating the lungs of passersby. The wait for Dr. Gill to come jogging out in those funky blue Crocs, grinning to apologize for another lame joke, was now at twenty-three minutes and counting. Darius' gaze of the building bounced from hedges to windows and back to roof tiles. *No, buddy this here is a joke. Goddamn Chinese-Jamaicans. Can't be smoking that shit and doctorin' people.* Larise, an old faithful standby, rang his phone. He ignored it, turned up his AC and quickly began googling on his phone. *Ultimate garden... what the hell did he say?*

Darius got onto YouTube, certain to find some comedy skit with this Ultimus nonsense. Dr. Gill had always been jealous of his lifestyle. Darius' pictures and texts from women all over town always made the physician shove his hands into his lab coat pockets. He always enjoyed tormenting men like Dr. Gill, men with no game, but this as payback went too far. He prided himself on being a good sport when guys like Dr. Gill tried to get back at him, but this...

Yes, Darius thought, guilt for going too far with this joke will have Dr. Gill pounding on his window laughing through an apology as soon as some Ultimus Youtube video skit came up

on his phone. Nothing came up on YouTube. Dr. Gill never came out.

After cancelling his two remaining meetings with clients back at Hunter & Mandrel Law Firm, Darius sat on his bed in his loft over-looking North Miami's art district. He closed his eyes and slowly peeled off his left fun sock full of lively splotches of coral, burgundy and black. The air made his foot feel vulnerable and small. He looked down at the fresh bandage over his right ankle. It had turned purple since his diagnosis, a stark contrast to his ruddy brown complexion. He winced: *Damn, that fuckin' fast?*

Darius went over to his night stand. He kissed his Optimus Prime action figure standing guard by his clock. He closed his eyes and cradled the limited edition replica. As always, it brought back glory days of playing high school and college football. He recalled half-time pep talks where discouraged teammates begged him to speak in the low, raspy voice of Optimus Prime, the well-meaning, yet overly-pretentious half truck, half robot leader of The Autobots, sworn enemies to the evil Decepticons. He set Optimus Prime down and then picked up his high school freshman picture of him and the mock trial team winning the 1995 regionals. He sighed wearily and studied himself as an oily-faced kid, neck already thick from football. The navy blue blazer, paisley tie and white shirt had him looking like a draft pick among the other mock trial team members, Hispanics, whites and an Indian. All were stunned that this junior varsity football player actually had a brain. The usual ritual of dusting it off when he got in tough situations and needed confidence felt inadequate. He tapped the picture against his chest before setting it back on the nightstand.

Darius went back to the front of the bed to snatch the bag of pill bottles. He hobbled to the bathroom as if the regular weight of his body had brought on this strange syndrome he and Chanel, the office secretary, found little to nothing on in Google. He opened the bottle and downed the required antibiotic with two slurps of water from his shaking hand. The mirror held no answers, no insight. *God, man... Jesus... Really?*

The collar of his coral button-down was dotted with sweat. His mind raced through the particulars. *Ultimusgaudens Syndrome*, a waterborne disease. Got it in the last flood downtown. Take the treatments to cure, but the cost is damage to prostate, ejaculatory ducts, seminal vessels something... Paralysis of this and that. To not take the cure guaranteed heart failure.

From the bed, the cellphone played the intro to “Jay-Z’s 99 Problems.” The chords of the song sounded more ominous than usual. *Either my dick or my heart*. He laughed. No way could he go down for something as unheard of as this. It seemed outright disrespectful to so many storied escapes in his past. Why, he had went down on Yolanda Knight in the tenth grade, gotten a sore throat for the next two weeks and somehow cured it with listening to gospel and being really nice to people. Did he not beat Rickey Smote for the first string safety position at UM by throwing him off his game with talk of black male athletes being exploited by the white power structure in search of entertainment? That one always made him swell with pride. There was the time he caught crabs from Portia Veree during that same time as a freshman at UM where he survived a self-prescribed remedy of repeatedly spraying his crotch with a can of Raid until it went crunchy and burned. A cure’s a cure. Those

two times he talked his way out of speeding tickets were classic. And then of course, there was always getting through the summer of '97... What's more, he was over a decade out of playing ball and still held the powerful squareness of face, thick neck and rugged muscularity that vowed he could take the field at any moment. Almost 35 and his abs still naturally flexed when he laughed? How was he not built to be the exception?