

&amp

AUG 23
018

LUXURY PERIODICAL
dream edition

THEY'RE
WATCHING

WILL THEY
SEE THE
REAL ME?

YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE ME

PLEASE



BY ANTHONY THOMAS

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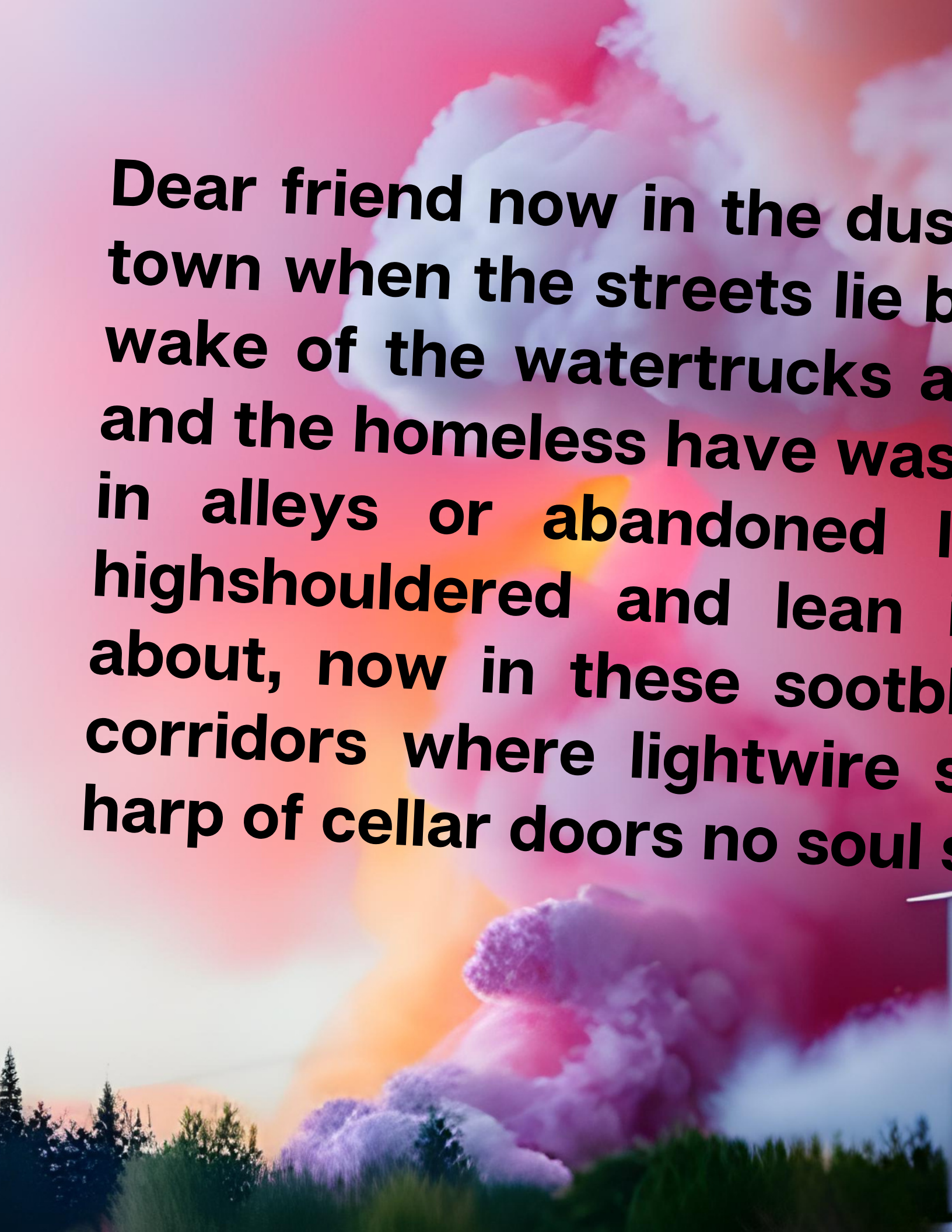
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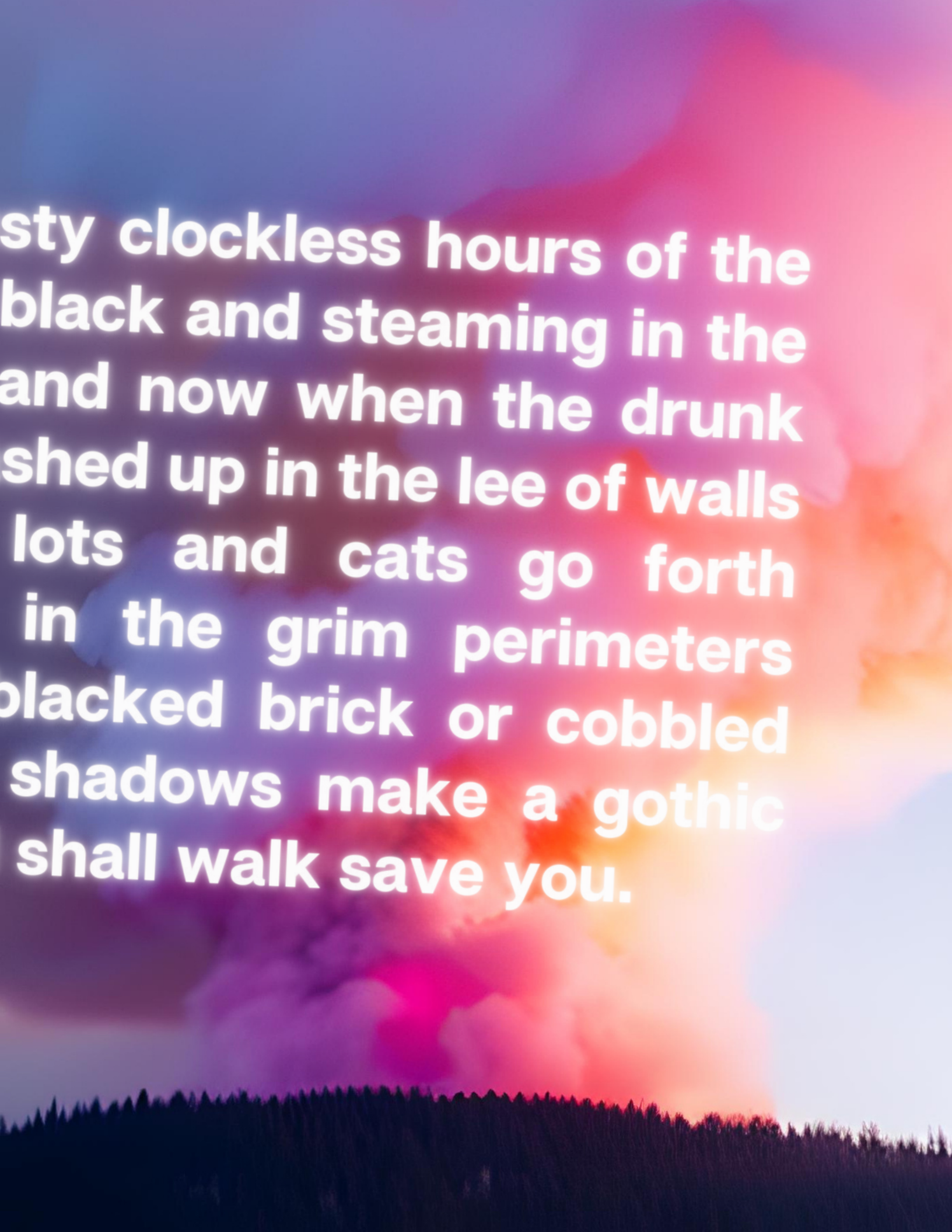


YOU ARE HERE

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**Dear friend now in the dust
town when the streets lie
wake of the watertrucks and
and the homeless have washed
in alleys or abandoned
highshouldered and lean
about, now in these sootblown
corridors where lightwire
harp of cellar doors no soul**



sty clockless hours of the
black and steaming in the
and now when the drunk
shed up in the lee of walls
lots and cats go forth
in the grim perimeters
blackened brick or cobbled
shadows make a gothic
shall walk save you.

**& Magazine is
most virtuously
enjoyed in print.**



steal these stories!

A software engineer discovers that the apartment next door is home to the Egyptian god Thoth, who is living as a NEET on government aid. Thoth is adamant that his secret not be revealed because he owes Hathor a large amount of money.

A serial killer's favorite knife develops sentience and limited telekinetic powers and uses them to bring its owner to justice.

Since his death, the reincarnated spirit of General George S. Patton has been trying to instigate World War III. The secret goal and primary purpose of the CIA since its founding in 1947 is to locate Patton's most recent incarnation via the most cutting-edge occult and scientific methods and kill him before he can end the world with a war grand enough to satisfy his desire for combat.

Behind every pinball machine is an imprisoned wizard forced to roll your pinball around for an eternity in pinball Tartarus. A wizard escapes from his pinball machine prison, and pledges to get revenge on the council of wizards that stuck him there.

An autistic man with a special affinity for heavy machinery embarks on a quest to find love in his local scrapyards.



A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR / PLEASE

Greetings, hedonists. We are pleased to bring you yet another dripping wet issue of & Media's Inc.'s flagship franchise, The Amazing Tramp Stampazine, all rise in the court of abominable crimes and indecencies to art! In this most delicious of artifacts crafted from the many busy hands of the likes of god knows who struggling and grunting into the night god knows where we bring to you none other than the very juice of the fruit that is our beloved community — the choicest berries most ripe for publication from the lush vineyard represented by any of several various nearby Competition Garden Weeding and Pickflower Forums, those without which we might not enjoy the sensations, the sweetness of such bountiful sugars produced therein, for this, our treasured basket of happy lies.

I do love a good story.

And this issue & Magazine is proud to feature the work of Daniel Gavilovski, author of the acclaimed short story *The Collapse of H. M. S. Mariana*. We are very excited to publish on his behalf his play, *The Tent*.

I would also like to extend my warmest and most sincere gratitude to the unsung writers and artists whose works are not yet featured in & Magazine. To those of you with a sparkle yet in your eye, let this issue be dedicated thus.

& Media Inc. executives are tirelessly working around the clock to develop and synergize new prospects for the future of our mighty paper. Follow us on all the gayest socials for mindless shitposts and low effort shilling: @LampByLit.

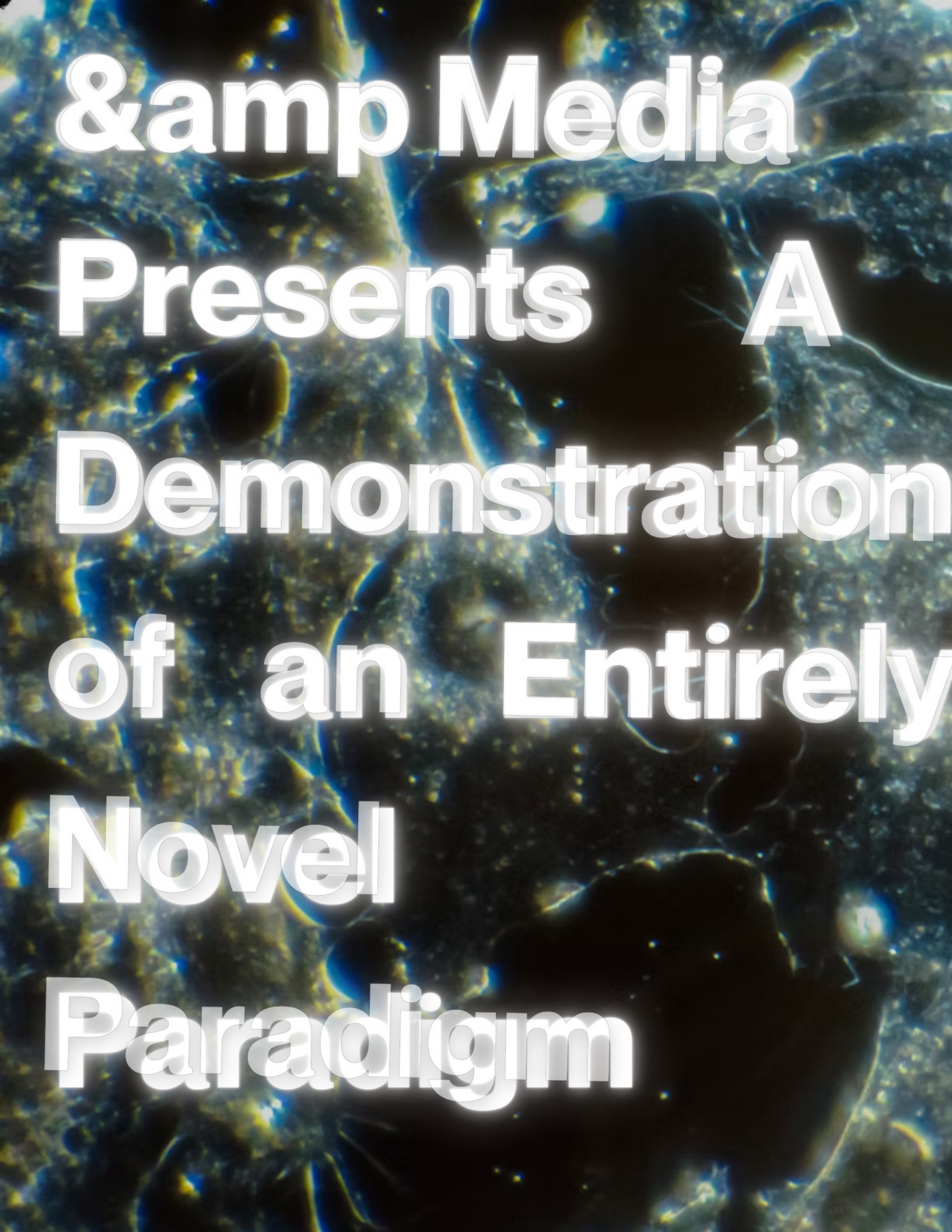
**An opinion on
*Gummy
Prompts*,
in the context
of &
Magazine Issue
Seventeen, as
offered by**

Hierophant

There were better stories in & 017 than *Gummy Prompts*, and worse ones. There were stories of similar quality which elicited a more positive emotional experience by way of taut-line addictive mania—looking at you, *Powerpunk*—but *Gummy Prompts* stands in a unique domain of terror. Here creeps a subtle horror that has no teeth or claws. There’s no monster, no serial killer, no supernatural plague; just an image of a life. This is horror in honesty, in dread perception, in the frank presentation of an existence devoid ambition. This horror lays low, sludgy, and gummy. It sticks to you when your hand brushes up against it by accident, and before long it spreads and you’re wearing it like a second skin. One day you find an odd satisfaction in the menial task of stocking candy at your retail job, and forty years later you approach invalidity and death having lived in the service of well-organized merchandise. This is the horror of a 65 year old man with no family, waiting tables at Denny’s since he was in high school, who will go home after his shift and get drunk while arguing on Facebook. This is horror in complacency.

This piece warns you. It’s a man standing on the sidewalk downtown wearing a sandwich board that reads in big bold letters REPENT and THE END IS NIGH, but this time the man is standing outside your front door in the morning. He stares you down and begs you to hear him as you leave for work. By God, be more! Heed his warning. Break yourself out of that Gummy Prompt funk.





**& Media
Presents A
Demonstration
of an Entirely
Novel
Paradigm**

THE

MASCULINE

&

THE

FEMININE

ORIGINS OF

**NOW STREAMING
ON YOUTUBE**

LIFE

: Anonymous

07/19/23(Wed)18:04:34 No.22283080

: Anonymous

07/19/23(Wed)18:04:34 No.22283080

: Anonymous

07/19/23(Wed)18:04:34 No.22283080

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i have formally and once and for all revoked the right and privilege of & to use or otherwise reproduce my posts in your malignant publication.

you are nasty, for the thing you publish, wretched, vile, wicked, miserable, disgusting, abominable, repugnant, putrid, palsied, traitorous, tasteless, uneducated, bad men.

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A Letter to the Editor

Thoughts on *Cognitohazard* from & Issue 017

By Brenda Sellers

“Abusers and their secrets, are the only people labelling somewhat mentally unstable. I feel pity toward the lost, and sadly for themselves, pathetic.

Thanks, sincerely, for your help. Keep on talking out there. There are no secrets. This type of junk—MNMDR skirting, "you" defending yourself or him—it's all getting forwarded, cataloged and dissected. Knowing I'd read it—you know by now—Unphased—with your only hope, last resort, denouncing my mental agility. Not happening. Russell, nor anyone else, didn't buy it either, from you.—Or, we wouldn't be here today.—With the end of your pathetic reign marching nearer.

And perhaps dragging some accomplices [sic] with you. Who you'll no doubt can't guilt to share toward —just as you had your WIFE.

Going to Russell—that you're printing my name on 4Chan.

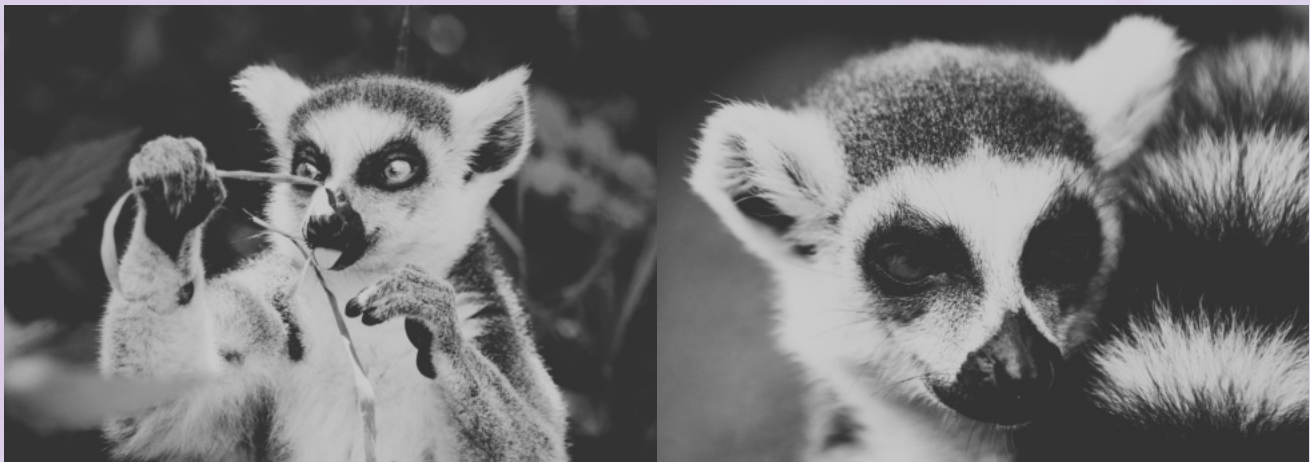
Why do so many on 4Chan think that their intellect surpasses the hand of justice, in their expression?

Until—it doesn't.

Your "article".

Everyone wanting at the topic of MNMDR has a robust—self aggrandizing—opinion/assessment—until reality, when they're brought into true observation by relevant people.

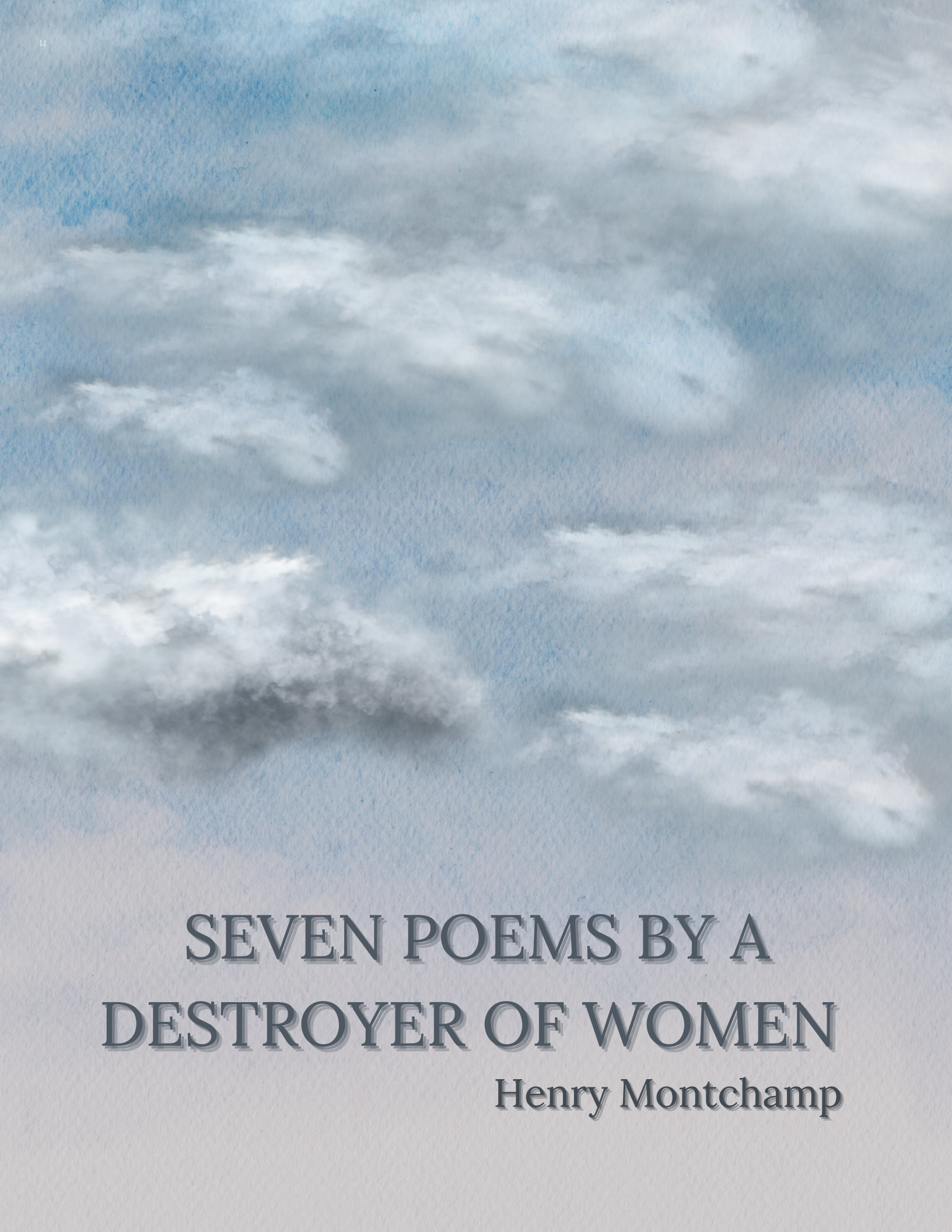
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SEVEN POEMS BY A
DESTROYER OF WOMEN

Henry Montchamp

Unfulfilled-accomplished sitting on a rake,
One giving up, one eager to take.
Easy comes lust, then they disparage
The nightstand, each-other, the baby carriage.

Reflected sins can only shimmer
Just out of reach, and dart off fast,
Refract, thin as our days get thinner,
And forgive tacitly at last.
And whether we or nature end it,
We get better than fate intended,
For though at last we drift afar,
A slighted world still bears our scar.
The senses know no sense of justice
That does not fade or fly away.
So still we stand and face the day,
So still we lie, still others trust us,
And shake our hands, say wish-you-wells,
And hide what they've to hide themselves.

(Prologue)

*I sung loud these dirges more turgid than turgid
To confess a crime that can never be purgèd.*

Poems by predators? —When have they not been?
Why make the matter worse? —Singers are such.
Unsayable! —So you'd rather the sin?
How praisable! —Calm down: that's a bit much.
Based? —No, never, and into the pit with you.
A defense? —For this soul no defense will do.
Debased? —But debasement's a holy affliction.
Your conscience? —Lies much less than reason's sweet fiction.

To those who would judge that the wrong one here's weeping:
That's right; I agree; that's the reason I'm speaking.
Let songs be my witnesses: here I stand guilty.
Let guilt be my albatross, lighthouse, and destiny.

I am H. M., howling music in harmony
With however many might justly wish harm on me.
I hoist high and mightily this heavy mantle
And holler misgivings out when it's mishandled.

Get up, you anapests, dactyls, and amphibrachs,
At my command fall in form and in time:
March in good posture now out of my barracks
To abuse these innocent feminine rhymes.

They speed into battle in slim single file;
Their bayonets sway for a cause they detest.
The censorious chuckle; the moralists smile:
This enemy combats this enemy best.

In such a battle, the price of their victory
Is very agreeable: either it's them or me.
So much had they hoped for, always from the start:
So much does art foster, and long is this art!

(Unjustification)

Down hill-speckled Brooklyn's sundry avenues
Lies murdered and buried so many a muse,
Blamed in their poets' thick hours of distress.
Huff, huff, huff!
Heavy howls Auster's breath.

This interment is no metaphorical thing,
For sometimes in summer rain still they all sing.
A heavy stench hangs: that stench is of death.
Huff, huff, huff!
Heavy howls Auster's breath.

The men for this vile act invent their reasons:
Their faceted souls' woes, their woes of the season,
The season when spirits and crops are depressed.
Huff, huff, huff!
Heavy howls Auster's breath.

But victims, like murderers, rarely sleep lightly,
If summer floods' buoyancy sets them uprightly
Like pus pouring out from a punctured abscess.
Huff, huff, huff!
Heavy howls Auster's breath.

And beneath the dark clouds' first pitter and patter
Light wind to the guilty seems some dreadful matter
Like a disinterested lover's slow, trembling caress.
Huff, huff, huff!
Heavy howls Auster's breath.

Skeleton-hoarders, although they be artists,
When wind rises stumble so artless, regardless,
Through insistent puffing that polishes flesh.
Huff, huff, huff!
Heavy howls Auster's breath.

(Untitled)

When at first God on high hobbled the serpent
And stuck to the soil his victim deserving,
Though the fetter of footlessness had been fixed sound,
The tormented tempter still writhed cross the ground.

What was his sentence? That seeking revenge he might
Confound forever the slighter and slighted,
Forget at last who first that low burn ignited,
So far then would Eden soon drift from his sight.

So the unseemly beast with his venomous tongue out
Prowls his prey and springs up from the floor.
Then when by saints or snake-catchers he's run out,
Thinking injustice done to him, he suffers yet more.

My desire is like that bad reptile too:
Once struck down it searches for victims anew
Through the dust underfoot.

The lower it falls, the baser it gets,
Lashing at mercy, responding with threats
To even a look.

(Untitled)

No, none of that ruckus should step past the doormat.
I'm tired, I'm sleeping: so keep the driveway clear!
No, don't twist my words so: no, I never said that.
Let everyone know who lives here, who lives here.

The aching on one side, on Sundays especially,
The dull tugging stomach-knots following ecstasy,
The clear autumn sky, saying, "Here is your way out,"
All offer a mirror: so put them away now!

Yes, I am an expert: though words are just alright,
Speak up with your fists, O you who abhor me!
Who wills it, who wants it: let him be my guest tonight!
Past crooked frames, peeling paint, let him step towards me!

In soreness like after when he and his love first danced
As mythical creatures that peopled his backyard pranced
He'd toss to a turn and murmur and mutter,
Wake up from his nap time and enter another.

His sword was a shapely, magnificent specimen
Not forged by Hephaestus but faultiest chancing
That had in its best days beheaded some better men
Efficiently, modernly, without romancing.

But those were all younger days: then it sat idly
'Til when it swung slowly, always justifiably,
And chopped up a carrot, or made the trees logs,
Or subdued a eunuch and finished the job.

On asphalt he ventured as faulty as verses
Or barren as bodies that starve their own muscles.
His errant companions would mutter him curses;
He listened instead to the yellow leaves rustle.

At present it was an unbearable burden
To drag through his day's work what no longer served him,
And cradle it carefully, polish it well,
And ask himself: when do we all go to heaven?

But sometimes a rushing wind rose from the Hudson
And hushing the sounds of the street overhead
Made mincemeat of all of his hopes of a pardon
And battered his body until he was—still alive!

On one night it lifted him out of his context:
He glimpsed the horizon, the stars, and the fairer sex.
That was but a moment: he never told anyone.

So in a last effort to wear out his tires
He drove in a circle for hundreds of miles
And sent east his heartache to follow the rising sun.

No, no one is worthy—and least he!—to end it.
The wind carries on, just as no one intended,
And disturbs forgetful sleep.

(The Ballad of Tony Soprano)

I.

Saltwater eating away at the concrete
Beneath our feet. Still sweat spills,
Oiling the crawl of the night's drafting, damp heat
Across the windowsill.

The eyes' blurred focus in the heat waves;
Currents that tow us through the heat waves
Towards long summer nights' pirate-swarmed harbors;
Burnt rubber wafts; pigeons bathe.

Cardamom, vetiver, cedarwood, bergamot
Mixing with notes of vanilla and lavender
Crowd up and cloud the night's course off the calendar.

Rhubarb juice, orange peel, fermented licorice
Conspire together to swell up night's furtive wish,
Night's knotted stabbing pains, night's too-loud thoughts.

II.

Stop, you dictatorial eye,
In whose gaze images wither and live, but barely!
You are worse than the dead fly
Whose splotch makes the whole ointment unfit to give: unfairly!

Halt there, you thieving, idolatrous senses,
Who chisel away with your toothpick and file
Against all experience's diamondoid denseness,
And hide with feigned guile
The truth beneath plain sight!

The light on the ride home, the pale, forlorn light
Decreed with some scorn: you, remember that night.
The heathen, tempter, electric light.

Remember the smoke's scent, remember its burn,
The screech of battery-powered decks,
The pressure puffing up your neck,
The sudden twinge telling you you'd still not learned.

How she told you at last that enough was enough;
How she shook as she slammed and locked the door shut.

It said: remember how it smelled,
And who did.
Remember the silence, how she never yelled,
Though nearly you did.
That light that stung unrested pupils.

And so I obeyed, and the images came,
And all became objects branded with my name.

Justice is a blinding white light too:
I caught a glimpse, though only one time.
It isn't beautiful; it can't and won't rhyme:
Pity that I can't describe it to you.

III.

If one day my body should slip in the Hudson,
(Passers-by might say: He wasn't careful!)
What was it? The cosmos cleaning themselves
Spit out a hairball.

If down through the decades, six if I'm unlucky,
It should be my duty to protect others from myself,
What was it? A would-have-been stopgap (alone very tiny)
Takes its smoothest course through society's fluxion.

If any number of times by the hand of another one
Justice should strike me (and strike me well)
What was it? A sacrifice delivered with unction
Upon the high altar of sanctimonious-no-one.

All the while,
The yammering animal that I call "I"
Will keep mourning his tummy-aches to the vast sky
Which will brighten and darken just as before.

And unto my gluttonous eye may I lecture
On how dull it remains to sin and punishment's texture
And pull down that infamous line from the shelf:
"You just have to make everything about yourself."

Epilogue

A rough breeze that once would have roused up my passion
Hit me yesterday and agitated nothing.
I barely felt it; it didn't even sting;
Who will for the guilty a better whip fashion?

(Saga)

Who can find a woman of valor?
No one,
Never again,
Since I have found her.

She presumed very little, belied very much,
Found an uneasy way in her confident powers
Through her heart like a labyrinth, hiding as such
All the twenty-eight astral seats, the arts' finest flowers.

She put first sweet experience, sole arbitrator
Of some earthly worth that had never betrayed her.
She knew all of the secrets of love's dismal trade,
And that it was a game, and one better not played.

We shared joy and distress: that was but for a season,
And whenever we shared tender times, as we did,
She preferred fewer words, for she knew what words hid
Beneath blankets of lying, idolatrous reason.

The end of the matter, all having been said:
I loved her; I faltered; I killed her; she's dead.

(Who I Destroyed)

How good at last am I, who am holier than thou?
I who have tumbled from bottom to top,
And impressed myself with a quick stop: Wow!
Thorn-drawn droplets drip as I wipe off my brow.

And if I've made youthful mistakes,
If I've played the rake, (For goodness' sake,
Don't do a double take, my dear!)
That was all one path to lead me here.

Because I've been through fire that refines,
(Slick metaphor for the burdened mind!)
Only to find there in agonized crawl
(They said of me: how he burns and shines!)
That my sin was nothing, nothing at all.

And how better to prove my worth for sure
Than to confess to a whore—yes, I said it,
And I don't feel shame or regret it,
Though I'll hide my notes under the floor.
(They'll say: how much meaning lies embedded!
But better they forget it.)

In the Prospekts' icy ocean, I was blessed
With the gift of navigation.
Though I made my famous divagations,
Oh, forget the rest!
My lips were not too frozen to confess.

Like so I've asked for absolution;
I've taken all the proper steps;
I've paid off my outstanding debts;
Be grateful for my contribution!
Time you all dropped and did your reps.

And if the ax I swung at another still stabs me,
Deep within, preserved just as when I first found it,
(How this imagery of mine just grabs me!)
Leave it in: I've healed around it!

And if a lady's ghost should haunt me,
Taunt me with visions of who bled for my art,
(And hand me a mop: how that task daunts me)
Show her the door: she's done her part!

And if after centuries have passed
I'm known for how God's love redeemed me,
For how fleshy mortal love cleaned me,
For what more can the sinner ask?

If I was written in that way,
That way was good, then. (So I pray.)

(Complaint of the Saved Raskolnikov)



**of dehydration
burning sensation in peen
endless summer**



THE LISTENING POST AND DEPENDENT ARISING

The listening post was an audio-visual art installation in London's Science Museum, built in 2003 and decommissioned some time in the early 2010s.

With aching feet, you've climbed the staircase to the first floor landing of the museum. You turn left and marble-white walls guide you into a dark corridor and out into an even darker space; a function room with the lights off. Your feet sink into carpet and the air feels close somehow. It smells of plastic and disinfectant – aromas which pull faintly at carefree times in your childhood.

And in that dark room a lattice of small screens covers the far wall, each an inch tall by four inches wide. It's a big arrangement that spreads across your peripheral vision with over a hundred panels. Some screens are dark, others are scrolling with text, throwing out cyan light into the blackness.

Shadowy people are observing the display from benches on the opposite wall. The dim light picks out halos of stray hair on their heads, but there's not enough light to make out their faces. You sit among them.

From somewhere in the room a booming speaker system is playing simple piano music – an inoffensive, meandering piece that dips comfortably in and out of minor chords. And a digitised man's voice - Microsoft Sam - is saying things. Strange, disconnected sentences with a dropping cadence that lends them assuredness:

“I am afraid.”

“I am lost.”

“I am seventeen.”

“I am a Pearl Jam fan.”

With every statement, a new screen lights up and the phrase scrolls across it continuously. When all are lit, the screens all let out mechanical clicks and everything goes black. Then it starts again, screen by screen, but with a different root to begin the phrase:

“It's incredible.”

“It's fucking annoying.”

“It's insane.”

The installation is scrubbing thousands of online chat rooms and forums for short sentences beginning with a certain phrase, then displaying them and speaking them aloud. Microsoft Sam has become the voice for whoever made the post, but these are real people, out there somewhere, tapping their words out into the digital aether. Many, though not all, hope someone will hear them, but they're unaware they're being heard here.

Critics say the installation is compelling because it's a calm, non-judgmental display of humanity in a digital space. It gives a sense of zooming out on the internet, helping us realise that it's just an extension of us as people. A new zone for to us to unfurl out into, only as threatening as we make it.

And the presentation of the art piece, its scale, Microsoft Sam's matter-of-fact tone and the gentle plod of the piano, plays into that sense of innocuity. Statements appear on the displays which could rightly be considered upsetting or distressed:

“I'm furious.”

“It's unspeakable.”

“I love to hurt myself.”

But stripped of a face, a voice and all context, they sink into the crowd, and then they disappear as quickly as they arrive. So it is that the piece feels calm and delivers a euphoric snapshot view of our species that speaks to what we are: ephemeral, and forever lost in the crowd.



Turning the listening post into an analogy for perception

Dependent arising is a Buddhist principle. It's the idea that nothing has any inherent existence, and that we make everything "real" by our perceptions. Starting simply, that means a bad day is only bad because our minds have grouped together the day's experiences (many of which might have been good) and hardened them into a singular, negative whole. On a more complex level, when we look down at our own hand, we see a giant set of phenomena which our minds have grouped together under the category "my hand", but can be broken down almost infinitely, from palm and fingers, to cells, to DNA, right down to the molecules the hand is made up of, and even then molecules are a fabrication of their composite parts. Nothing is anything without you placing it in the context that makes it so.

In our analogy, the messages coming through the screens at the Listening Post are the messages we receive about our surroundings from our senses, and the internal messages we receive from our thoughts: "I am hungry," "I am in pain," "I am upset about growing old," etc. To study the Buddhist principle of dependent arising, then, is to look at the physical world much as one might look at the digital messages on this art display – stripped of all context. In doing so we can remove the suffering, and push back against the forces in our heads that calcify experiences as good or bad.

In that sense, understanding dependent arising helps your mind to present troubling experiences in a neutral, matter-of-fact Microsoft Sam voice, then let them sink back into the crowd of sensory experience and fade off the screen.

And this analogy holds strong when you apply the three lenses by which a student can come to understand dependent arising:

Anicca: All things must pass

Nothing can be clung to in the real world without suffering, because it will all disappear in time. And so it is represented at The Listening Post as statements which come and go, impossible to trace once they've been swept from the screen.

Dukkha: All things are unsatisfactory

All things are borne out of our perception, so none have the inherent power to make us suffer. It is us that make the suffering by compiling phenomena together and clinging to what we've constructed, or clinging to the idea of being rid of it. So it is with the Listening Post's neutralising of distressing statements, through presentation and atmosphere.

Anatta: All things are not-self

The sense of self is a fabrication because, when examined, all things which might be considered to be us – our bodies, our thoughts – are fabrications made by the mind. That's even true of consciousness, which Rob Burbea understood as "a series of individual moments of knowing" – still not us. This idea is shown in The Listening Post simply by the divide between the display and the viewer. In this analogy, the viewer is the sense of awareness, disconnected from thought and experience, which we must accept we can never fully understand.

And so, through prolonged study and meditation on these three outlooks, a Buddhist student can hope to inculcate a calm view on the world similar to how one might feel at The Listening Post. That is, viewing thoughts as separate from us, inherently ineffectual and certain to pass.

Crucially, this is not nihilism. Recognising that our experiences are passing fabrications, like flashes on screens in an art display, isn't saying they don't exist. They are still something, born out of mystic patterns and energies which combine to make you feel a certain way. This is the middle way of the Buddha – to recognise that things aren't inherently real, but they are also not fake. They are somewhere in between.

So insight into dependent arising becomes a tool we can use when we suffer. Because seeing the world in this way gives you the freedom to choose to deconstruct the things that cause you pain. You're free to delve into the sadness of a digital message like "I am unhappy" in search of something beautiful, or you can see it for what it is – a construct of your mind, and let it pass.

Understanding dependent arising in this way, as a tool, is fundamental to untangling human suffering. The Patikasamuppada is a rough nine-step outline of how suffering comes to take place in this world, and ignorance of dependant arising is step number one. Recognising that suffering is self-made cuts it off at the source, but miraculously lets joy, calm, wonder and compassion bloom.



Seeing the room you're sat in

The Listening Post analogy frays at the edges when we move towards any deeper understanding of dependent arising, as it should, but it just about holds together to make one broader point.

What is it to pull back from the screens and see the art display and the auditorium you're sat in? That is, to understand that your senses and conscious thoughts are appearing out of something, and to examine where they're coming from. Similar analogies compare experiences to white-crested waves appearing and disappearing on the sea, or fireflies blinking on a black sky. So Buddhist practice is to reveal the water between the waves, to see the night air behind the fireflies. It's a primary goal of the spiritual journey to understand this mystic backdrop, this strange art installation your experiences emerge from.

Studying dependent arising, then, you might catch full glimpses of the flashing art display you're really looking at, and those glimpses are encouraging milestones on the journey towards enlightenment, satisfying and freeing.

But here is an interesting point: When you're strong enough to stay pulled back, to hold on to the realisation that you're sat in a dark function room watching blinking screens, you are still not enlightened. Your journey isn't over.

Because how could it be? You've reached another plateau of experience and sensation, but even while you're aware of the art installation your mind is still contextualising. You're still looking at the dark auditorium through some sort of lens – 'it is dark, it is calm, it is a museum art piece, it is where I draw my experiences from, I am conscious in this state'. You must apply the principles of dependent arising even to this space. It is all still a fabrication.

So remember where you are, reader. You, right now, are sat in the dark, looking at lights across a room. If you're feeling brave, you can develop the skill to pull back. To zoom out. To notice first the plastic frames of the screens. Then to see the black air they hang in and the shadowy figures around you in the auditorium. And finally, to choose which messages matter to you, and which to let pass you by.

But there is further to go. When you are ready - when your blood sugar's low and your shoulders ache from sitting, you can heave yourself up. You can turn away from The Listening Post and let it fall from your mind, understanding deep down that it's destined for a dusty museum archive, as you are destined to die. You can walk quietly to the exit, the same way you came in.

And, dazzled and disorientated, you can step back out into the light.

BY POM



MIXTAPPE

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ER
a



THE SCHIZO CANTOS

by Hierophant

In shock I saw some piece of Christ
 An early draft, a prototype
 Himself a river annual
 Who else but to his people?
 See: his body's bread
 Given for all
 With flesh the fall-time harvest
 All arrayed in green presented
 Where dead recline, the living pray
 The royal line is never ended

no. 31

First among the dead, you Westerner
 Whom the Jackal laid with linens, charms
 And sweet-perfuming spices
 When the promise of the Resurrection
 Was still a whisper
 Soft chattered out the beaks of desert birds
 Darting through the lotus-headed shadows



I am no phase lyrical
Delirious dripping, a dying man in the cold
A liberation label laid—paradox in the nude
But for this silver chain drinking
Out of every spot it touches

no. 10

The metal is warmer than the air
But greed is no measure of temperature
The medium we pass through living
Delineates the pace we're dying

When learning still-life, still I, some life past
A barstool subject stands rapping
Staccato knuckles on one steely lacquer leg
"Don't draw this," along an indicator secondary—
Knocking at the air between, "BUT THIS!"
But can you say which one was colder?

The vacuum holds its own device
And absence draws in stark designs
What nothing wants is wanting nothing, though—
Which way does river water have to go?

An echoing signal transmitting cold hatred:
A distant and rote formulaic resentment
Acknowledging faintly through infinite time, this
Euclidean satrapy's hold on a body
In bondage to physic and volituous vices
That anchor again with the tenuous power
Of light to the blind and insensate sight given
Of puppetry now to a master supplied for
The price of a lever, a link and a vantage
A hook with advantages dubious faring
Rough seas on the aetheric liminal thrum now:
That linkage decaying, a silver thread fraying

Some grand mechanic landscape darkly still
All calculation spent, a void of will
A final ticking-down machine
A fading face, a dimming screen

no. 50

Discorporation coy occluded by
The skyline, streets, and all between them penned
Their bulging frame that finds new ways to bend
Forever on in sunder over stead
This humming cage's wires inward thread
Contorting on until the tangled ends—
The interlinking ways and finer frays—
Resemble what had sprawled beneath the Sun
Before an eye to overlook it came
In company of hands that could amend

no. 99

A close-up photograph of a pink, textured fabric garment, possibly a hoodie or jacket, with visible stitching and a drawstring. The text is overlaid in a large, white, sans-serif font.

**& qm
by**



up/it/


GEMINI

It was a rare gift to hold in my hands the heat of his and feel that within our shared grip there was blood that ran beyond the known and into the spacious dark. Alone on the roof with the hunter's belt the only anchor in the deep, we had a strange, whistling dread in our veins. Down below a dark orange lamp glared at the slick street, and we in our fears labored to stay still and listen for threatening tires in pursuit. It had never come before. Its absence couldn't flush flutters from our hearts.

We laid together and fell into the expanse, beyond the foggy glow of civilized light, the elated revels, where time sleepwalked in an oneiric daze. Here there were rows of darkened houses, open windows, porch lights, and the thin glow of streetlamps. Above the clouds drifted, dark purple and deflated, painted across the sky with a stranger's hand that had held no brush or held one all its life. Formless and intractable, dragging us in their precession while we waited on this night, on our night.

We whispered. Our words were lute string melodies, and in the space between the night granted missing harmonies. The porch swing sang; the ground crickets pulled their rosin bows. The fluttering leaves of the palms were stirred by wind from the glassy lake. All in tune, in pianissimo, perfectly blended, and total. Then the lethargic roll of rubber on the asphalt. A few shallow breaths. A dread like darkness in the throat. The slick of the tire slithering into the black, and then all was quiet, all was safe.

We faced each other then, and his hand drew up to my face and held it. My dear. My sweet. That was all he could manage. His poor failing words. His long fingers on my cheek, those treasured hands playing the Steinway, caressing, lithe and lingering. The warmth of my own body in the warmth of the night against the warmth of his hands. My hand on his cheek. My dear. My sweet. My own words failing.



In a season before memory we were on a high hill. Junebugs screeched somewhere in the grass like the tiny winding of a battery. The wind blowing against the back of my knees, a thin stream, like the curling of fingers in a final farewell. He was smiling then. The moon was in his eyes. How could I have known that what it felt like then would be the same now—that the same brilliant pinpricks of white in the night would shine unerringly whether we fought or loved or cried? If a handful of Chronos's sand were in my grasp, I would return and see him as I remembered. He was smiling then, in a season beyond memory, and it never left me.

On one of those nights he passed me three bracelets. A reminder, he said, of the great hunter who was always watching, club always raised. His distraction would not last forever, so we had to make these moments last. Our hands together. And now and then and tomorrow joined there even when apart, when alone. The bracelets jingle against my wrists. Tires roll across the street. The obstinate clouds, my sensitive skin.

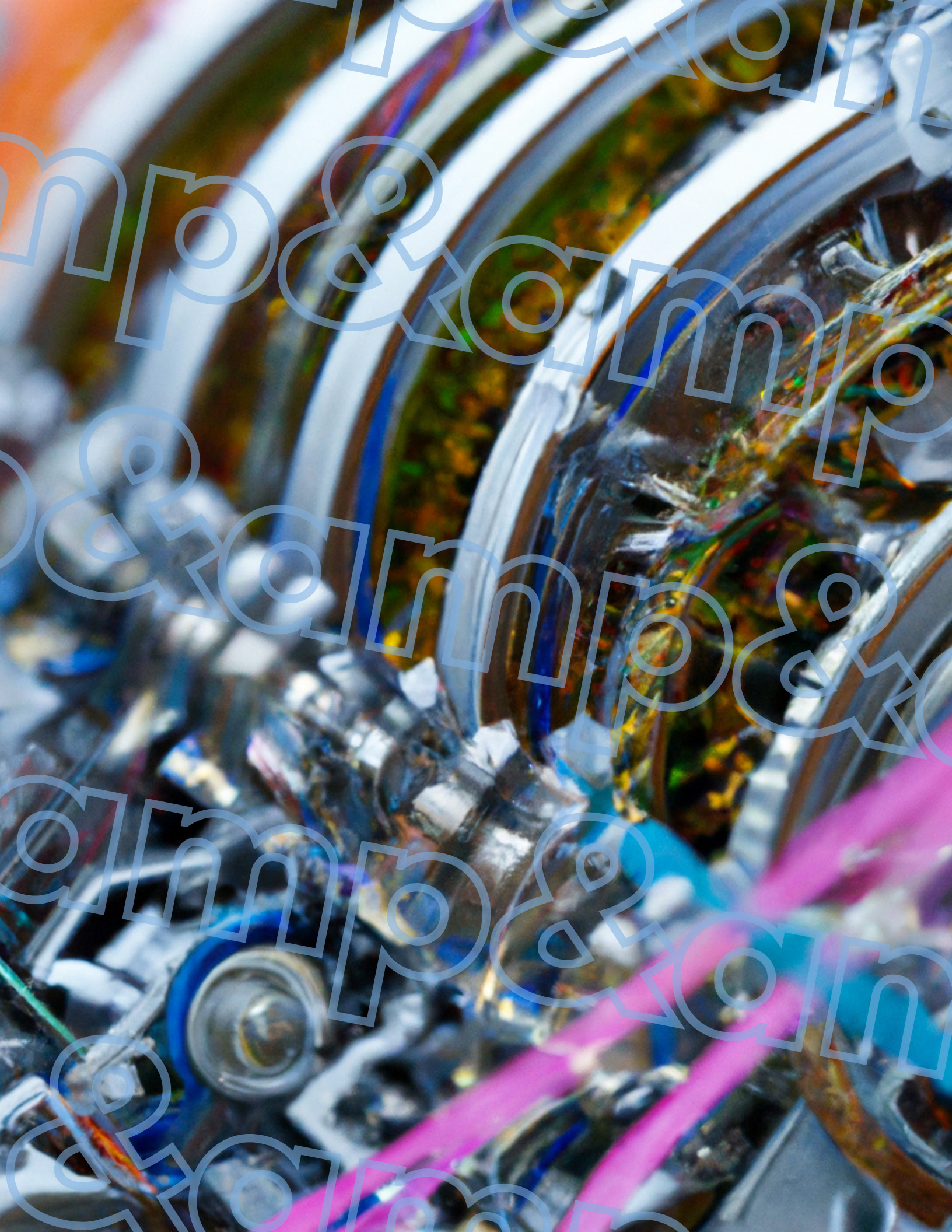
Is it too much to ask for time to return to me? Now that I finally have understanding, why am I cursed with memory? I hear dewdrops fall from bay leaves in the crisp and gleaming morn. By daylight, sparkles of a thoughtless life. Then at night he is there and he lingers in my mind—dark, meditating, assuring. Our frail spirits are frayed by the space shoved between. These nights allow for the briefest splice, a time where we can be whole, and then that splice turns to memory. The fray remains. The rope thins, worn, but unbroken. This little thread is my lifeline, my former Propus—my forgotten tether.

The shackles jingle against my wrists. Tonight they will come undone, but only for a time. Then we will be bound again, but only for a time. We against the hunter's unfailing eye. He is there in all corners of the world, in every face and feature, behind every mouth, hidden beneath the reassurances of friends—a relentless bloodhound that never lets us be. We made our peace. We whispered our vows and held on until the long journey would bring us again to our hill hidden in the trees. Soon that hill will be gone. Fugitives cannot outrun an infinite captor, within space or without, whether myriad faces or three damning glints in the inky night.

He took my hand and pointed. The clouds had drifted. The sky was clearing. The hunter was now hidden by the clouds, the brushed tails trailing along. I closed my eyes. I listened to the harmony and felt his hands and saw nothing and heard his breathing. He was waiting. I waited. There was no time in all the world save for the heartbeats in our palms. I could feel him stir and stare and I opened my eyes and let the sky take away my spirit.

There we were in the black together, in eternity, in flight—his hand in mine, our hands intertwined, running into the formless forever. Alone in the terrible emptiness. Our stars twinkled, two burning giants, resolute and noble. Hidden by day, delighting by the dark of the sleeping moon. We stood and gazed together and whispered the words we reserved only for each other. He reached for me, and I for him, and we marveled at ourselves, and in his hands he turned mine, his thick knuckles, his thin gnarled veins like twine, handling the softest things in the world like mother-of-pearl—my star-studded wrists, those little dancing ringlets, with his fingers in mine, with a touch like the kiss of a breeze, and his kiss was softer than space, warmer than the stars, tender, and beloved.







You'll Always Remember Fremantle

by Lewis Woolston

He dreamt of home again. At night, in his uncomfortable metal bunk onboard the HMAS Parramatta out at sea, his unconscious mind took him back home.

It was becoming more regular, this nightly journey back to home and family. He began to suspect, quietly to himself only, that he was deeply homesick and ought never to have joined the Navy. He'd been in less than a year and he wondered to himself that, if he was already feeling this way now, what would he be like towards the end of the four year stint he'd signed up for?

The dreams were more or less the same every time. He was back home with his parents in the little fibro house they lived in. Or more often they were in the Gawler Baptist Church where his father was the minister. The old stone building as familiar to him as his own face. The place where he'd spent so much of his youth, carefully guided by the loving hands of his father and mother.

His father was giving a sermon in this dream. Up there in the old pulpit giving THE WORD in his deep and loud but thoroughly gentle voice. A voice one parishioner had once described as a "nicer version of Johnny Cash sort of voice," a description that made total sense to everyone in the congregation.

In this dream his father was preaching from 2 Corinthians 4:7-18, an old favourite of his, a particular hobby horse you might say. The temporary nature of this life, the eternal glory to come, the trial of this world that must be endured faithfully first. It was his favourite theme and his congregation had heard it from him before.

He'd heard it at home from his father and mother too, the better version, the full story behind the scripture. How his father had been born into an old money family in Adelaide. People who owned property, people who knew State Premiers and business people, people who lived a life of comfort and pleasure. How his father had "felt the call" as a teenager and wondered if there wasn't something more to life than the acquisition of money and property. How he'd broke with a century and a half of family history and gone to Bible College instead of studying Law or Accounting. How he'd gone to Sri Lanka with a Baptist Mission group and worked tirelessly for the people there and the salvation of their souls. His family had washed their hands of him, disinherited him, he always told the story so dramatically "washed their hands of me, barred their door to me, forever!" he'd boom in that Prophet's voice of his.

Young Jones was always impressed at that part of the story. His father had chosen exile, poverty and the status of an orphan over the pleasures of the world and he'd done so for Christ. An epic sacrifice that he would always live in the shadow of.

For his father and mother had met in Sri Lanka, both working for the Baptist Mission, they'd fallen in love but not acted on it for nearly a decade believing the work they were doing was more important than their own personal happiness. Their marriage was delayed until they had given the better part of their youth to the Mission. Then they'd come back to Australia and married. Young Jones was the only child of their union, the lateness of their marriage meant there could be no more children for them. They'd given their youth and their fertility to the Mission but they did not complain. They believed the sacrifice was more than worth it. "For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison," as his father was fond of quoting.

The ship's PA broke his dreaming. He got up quickly and dressed like he'd been taught at basic training. Smithy came along and told him what was happening, Smithy always knew what was happening.

"Old Man wants us manning the rails when we come in to Fremantle. Respect for the Port City or some shit like that. Just make sure your uniform is correct and you'll be right mate."

He adjusted Jones's collar and seemed satisfied. "Word is we're all getting a little day leave in Fremantle Young Jonesy, fucken Freo you little beauty! Best port in Australia if you ask me. Sydney is nice but it's stupidly expensive, Darwin is a shithole, Melbourne is cold and grim and Hobart is completely pointless. Fremantle has it all and has it better in my experience. Stick with me Young Jonesy and we'll get that Cherry of yours popped for sure!"

Jones groaned inwardly. A week or so ago he'd had a beer too many in the mess and confessed to Smithy that he was a virgin. After much laughter and ribbing Smithy had promised him he would get his condition fixed at the next port. Jones was quietly dreading what might happen once they got ashore.

They got themselves in order and joined the others manning the rails as the ship sailed into Fremantle Harbour.

Young Jones thought of his parents again. How they'd reacted when he told them that he wanted to join the Navy. His father wanted to know why? What was appealing about the Navy? Young Jones had struggled to explain himself.

"It's just, I kind of..I want to do something meaningful, noble...sort of...heroic."

The words had struggled to come out and sounded silly in his own ears when he'd said them. His father, to his credit, didn't dismiss this urge of his son's, thought it a good impulse in fact, he just questioned if the Navy was the right vehicle for the ambition his son expressed.

"The days of saving the world from Nazis or Japs are long gone, Son. You'll mostly be doing pointless patrols looking for refugees up north or off the coast of Somalia trying to stop pirates. A lot of the time you'll just be training for things that never happen and having to endure hardships for no real purpose. A lot of what the Military does in peacetime is tedious and less than glamorous."

Young Jones had nodded agreement to his father but in his heart he was not convinced. His father realised this and tried to deflect his son's ambition.

"I understand that you want to do something worthwhile and noble with your life son. That desire does you credit and I'm proud of you, but is the Military really the best place to achieve that goal? What about the Ministry? Your Mother and I gave twenty years of our lives to a Mission in Sri Lanka and it fulfilled us. I mean that son, we helped deliver babies, looked after children, held the hands of the dying as they passed into the next world, we built things, we made a difference, a real difference. Even now as the Minister of this Old Church here in Gawler I make a difference. The Ministry is fulfilling, it gives your life purpose, if that's what you're looking for."

Young Jones had tried to speak then, opened his mouth to say things that he had felt for a very long time, but the words failed him. He meekly shook his head instead.

"I just want to see a bit of the world."

It was the best he could do at the time. His father had the good sense to realize that further disagreement was futile and would probably backfire. He'd agreed to sign the forms giving parental consent, and at the tender age of 17 Young Jones joined the Navy.

Now here he was manning the rails of the HMAS Parramatta as they entered Fremantle Harbour, with the promise of shore leave and the terror of losing his virginity before him.

They'd got their shore leave just as Smithy predicted. Smithy was always spot on about everything that happened on the ship. Smithy was a Navy lifer who, despite being in for ten years, hadn't managed to rise in rank beyond an ordinary Sailor. Smithy had taken Young Jones under his wing and tried to "set him straight" about how the Navy worked.

To Smithy the Navy was merely an elaborate way for a working bloke like him to milk the Australian taxpayer for a living and a comfortable retirement. It was one of his often repeated phrases whenever he seemed to be living good or scoring one off the system "Gawd bless the Australian Taxpayer" he'd say as if they'd personally handed him a big cheque or a cold beer.

The Officers loathed Smithy most of the time, they called him a "barracks room lawyer" due to his habit of knowing rules and regulations better than they themselves did and using that knowledge to his advantage. They were forever trying to catch him out so they could punish him and possibly get him kicked out of the Navy entirely but Smithy, in his ten years of service, had learnt every trick there possibly could be. He managed to maintain a basically clean disciplinary record while scamming the Navy for everything he could while slacking off as much as he could. No small achievement.

The officer on the gangway made a distasteful face when he saw Smithy approaching. They showed him their leave passes and he grunted his assent.

"Don't let this shitbag corrupt you, Young Jonesy. You're a good lad and he'll only lead you astray."

Smithy took the Officer's disdain in his stride.

"It's all good sir, I've taken him under my wing and I'll keep him out of trouble." He said cheerfully, every syllable a subtle "fuck you" to the Officer.

The Officer glared at him but had no grounds to do anything about it. They passed onto dry land without further drama.

He's just salty the Old Man has got him on public relations duties. They're opening the ship to the public, letting all the stupid kids have a look in the hope that they'll want to join up. Guess who got stuck with supervising that bullshit? Stupid cunt." Smithy explained as they walked down the wharf towards the gate that led them into town. Young Jones didn't care that much, he privately thought that that particular Officer wasn't so bad but hatred and contempt of Officers was an article of faith with Smithy.

The long line of Sailors in uniform straggled towards the gate and into Fremantle. Everyone was cheerful and full of enthusiasm. A day of shore leave was a treasure for these men.

Young Jones insisted on stopping at the Post Office much to Smithy's disgust.

"I'll just get a postcard off to my parents and then we'll keep going." He insisted, trying to pretend he was still keen for what Smithy had planned. Smithy rolled his eyes and said "go on then" and Young Jones raced inside.

He found a nice postcard with an aerial view of Fremantle on it. He paid for it and a stamp and then retired to the little desk with the pens on chains. He wrote out some quick banalities and carefully put in the address. Smithy was still waiting outside when he came out to post it in the big red mailbox.

"C'mon let's go, we've got a woman waiting to make a man of you son and you're dragging your feet like it's kitchen duty."

Jones felt awkward again but walked along with Smithy. He noticed the people, the civilians on the street, seemed to accord them some respect because of their uniforms. They made way, the girls looked at them admiringly. For a moment, just a moment, it made Young Jones feel like a man. Like he'd achieved something, like he was a somebody. Then the knowledge of what was about to happen made him feel like a little boy again.

They got there eventually. The other men had mostly turned off into various pubs and cafes along the Fremantle strip but they'd kept going. Now here they were. Ada Rose the sign said.

"This place is a piece of history. Been around forever. You know this place stayed open all through the years when it was illegal? The WA Police Commissioner at the time was a veteran himself and this joint had and still has a policy of ten percent discount for men in uniform so he let them stay open in spite of what the law said. A lot of blokes on their way to Vietnam got their first or last fucks in this place."

He stood there and smiled triumphantly before slapping Young Jonesy on the back.

"And now it's your turn young bloke! C'mon let's go in and get you sorted."

They walked in, Smithy confident and in front, a man who'd done this many times before, Young Jones behind him, feeling more like a boy than ever.

The Madam greeted them and they sat down in the waiting room with a complimentary can of coke each. The Madam asked them if they'd like to see the ladies separate or together.

"Young fella is here by way of making his debut if you know what I mean so maybe let him get first pick. You got a nice girl that will go gentle on him? Still missing Mummy and Daddy and the girls at school you know how it is with young ones."

Smithy's boisterous voice embarrassed Jones more than the actual revelation about his lack of sexual experience. He wanted to tell him to shut up or at least tone it down. Surely one didn't say such things that loudly? Even in a place like this.

The Madam seemed sympathetic to his plight. She directed her attention from Smithy to Jones and her face showed genuine care or at least that's how Jones interpreted it.

"I have a lady who might suit you, her name is Holly, she's a blonde, petite, very gentle and nice, you'd like her."

The last bit sounded insistent "you'd like her" a promise? Or a selling point? Young Jones wasn't sure, he didn't entirely understand how this all worked so he agreed that he'd like to see this lady Holly.

The Madam told him to follow her and told Smithy that the other ladies would come and introduce themselves to him shortly. Smithy was cheerful about it "I'll be fine waiting a bit just get the young fella sorted" and waved at Jones theatrically.

She led him into a bedroom and sat him down on the bed.

"Holly will come see you in a minute" she said and he nodded dumbly.

Holly came in and he stared at her. She was blonde, skinny but in a natural healthy sort of way, at ease with the situation while Young Jones felt like he was drowning. She sat next to him on the bed and put her hand on his knee.

"Hi Babe, my name's Holly."

"I'm Ben but everyone calls me Jonesy" He blurted out, his inexperience with women and his nervousness was so painfully obvious. He was sure he must be blushing.

Holly held his hand ever so gently. The warmth expressing a tenderness that might not have been faked by a professional but may just have been genuine.

"It's okay Ben, there's no need to be nervous, I'm here to help you relax, do you want to spend some time with me Ben?"

Jonesy very eagerly indicated that yes, he wanted to spend some time with her. She told him a price and he didn't hesitate to pull out his wallet and give her the money. She smiled compassionately at him.

"I'll just go put this away and then we'll begin. If you want you can take off your uniform and boots and relax a little okay?"

She went out and closed the door. Young Jonesy wondered what he should do, he didn't feel comfortable just stripping off and waiting for her starters but he felt silly to be still in uniform while she was expecting him to get undressed. He compromised by stripping down to his boxers and sitting on the bed. It occurred to him that she hadn't mentioned the ten percent discount for men in uniform but then he decided it was probably just automatically deducted or something.

He felt slightly foolish as he sat there and he momentarily wondered if he should really be doing this.

Holly interrupted this musing by coming back in all smiles and blonde hair. Jonesy knew right then that he was going to go through with this, doubts be damned.

"You can take off your boxers, it's alright, you won't need them just now."

She smiled and removed the flimsy silky thing she had been wearing herself to reveal her naked body to Jonesy, the first he'd ever seen.

All doubt left his mind.

She got on the bed with him. Jonesy froze unsure of what to do next, what did you do with a hooker? What was the correct first move to make? He sat there like an idiot staring at her naked body with something like awe.

"This is your first time, isn't it?" Holly said kindly.

Jonesy nodded rather sheepishly.

"It's okay, I don't bite, just follow me." She took his hand and put it on her breast. Jonesy was hers from that point on.

In the end the whole event from foreplay to conclusion took a grand total of fifteen minutes and forty seven seconds, not that Jonesy was watching the clock or anything.

So that's it, he thought as he lay back in post coital bliss and sweat. I'm no longer a virgin. I'm a man now.

Holly lay on her side gently stroking his chest and smiling.

"Feeling good babe?" She gently enquired and Jonesy nodded, the mousey grin of the happily deflowered on his face. They lay there a little longer Holly gently stroking his chest, before she was seized with a sudden urge.

"I want to try on your hat." She announced apropos of nothing and leaned over his naked body to reach his hat on the floor. Jonesy was momentarily unsure what to do as her belly brushed over his flaccid and startled penis while she leant over him but in a few seconds she'd got what she was after and had resumed her spot next to him on the bed.

She examined the black cap with HMAS Parramatta written on the front of it. She gently put it on her own head. The long locks of her blonde hair stuck out the sides and the back, she looked like a little girl who has found something belonging to a grown up and tried it on.

"Ahoy there mateys!" She said in a silly pirate accent.

Jonesy laughed a little. "We're the Navy, not pirates."

"Well what do you say in the Navy then?"

"Things like "man the rails" or "all hands battle stations" you know, military stuff."

She adjusted the hat and tried again.

"All hands battle stations" she said and performed a mock saluted naked except for his hat, her breasts on display, the finest and only pair Young Jonesy had ever seen. She leaned down and rested herself on his chest, his hat still on her head.

"Do you like being in the Navy?" She asked cheerfully.

"Not really, it's not what I expected or hoped it would be, I kind of think I might have made a mistake to be honest."

"What did you think it would be?"

He shrugged, unsure of how to explain himself.

"I don't know, something noble or heroic or worthwhile. So far all I've done is training and cleaning. It all seems rather pointless and not worth the bother to me. I think I should have gone to University or something instead."

"I'm doing Uni at the moment, it's pretty good but I'll be glad when it's over and I can go do what I want to do."

“What degree are you doing?”

“Agricultural Science.”

He nodded and thought. The idea that this woman had a life outside this place hadn't really registered to him before. Of course she did, he thought now, she was someone's daughter, someone's sister, someone's friend, and she had taken money from him so that he could lose his virginity finally.

He felt slightly unsure about the morality of it now.

“Do you want to have a quick shower before you go?” She interrupted his musings. He nodded and got up.

When he was showered and dressed she kissed him and led him back to the waiting room. Smithy arrived in the room at the same time.

“How'd you go, young fella? Shoot yer custard, did ya? She make a man out of you or what?”

His loud, boisterous voice grated on Jones. He felt he'd like to punch Smithy in the face one day, or at least tell him what a fuckwit he was. Tell him right to his face that he despised him and hoped to never become anything like him.

Holly said goodbye to him and he walked out with Smithy into the Fremantle sunshine. Smithy was in a good mood all the way down the street. This was living, he said, having a grand old time in the best port in Australia and all on the dollar of the Australian taxpayer. A bloke could live good if he was smart about it, he said, a man could have a grand old life if he knew what was what.

Jonesy felt deflated, the post coital bliss having worn off by now, as they walked down the street he wondered what his parents were doing now. He thought about the Gawler Baptist Church and the many happy years he'd had growing up in and around its old stone walls. He thought about Holly and what she was doing now. Would another man have gone with her by now? Would she remember him at all in a week's time?

Smithy led them to a pub called the Norfolk Hotel which had a large beer garden facing towards the main road. A bunch of the other blokes from the ship were there already several beers into it.

“C'mon Young Jonesy, you need a refreshing ale or three after your debut performance today.”

They joined the other men from the ship around a big table in the corner. Smithy got their attention as the beers arrived.

“Now we have a special reason to drink up today, Young Jonesy here has popped his cherry today, that's right, he's a man now.”

The other all roared with laughter and cheered.

“ONYA JONESY!”

“SHOT YA CUSTARD OLD MATE!”

“WATCH OUT NOW LADIES, JONESY'S GOT A TASTE FOR IT!”

The laughter and the shouting made him blush which only encouraged them to laugh and shout more. A beer was pressed into his hand and he was made to skull it. More beer flowed. He got slightly pissed fairly quickly. Someone asked how much time they had before they had to be back on ship.

“A solid four hours until we have to be back on the good ship lollipop, so drink up, mate!”

More beers went around. Jonesy, no longer the centre of attention, withdrew into himself. He thought of his parents, the church which had been the centre of his life growing up. He thought of the twenty years his parents had spent in Sri Lanka, he thought of Holly again, the shape of her breasts and how she'd looked with his hat on and nothing else.

A sudden feeling that he'd taken a wrong track somewhere overwhelmed him. He thought of that passage of scripture his father liked to quote: “For what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.” He looked around the beer garden.

The other Navy men, the locals, pretty girls dressed up for their day out, young bucks in suits dressed to impress, all of them drinking and talking and laughing. All of them alive for the moment and the moment only.



They have not chosen him for this,
The Fates command them all;
He does not know the way he'll go
Divines know if he'll fall;
The mighty folk, they care not when
Nor why the peasant dies,
They send him off to deathly work
In crypts where misery lies;
He'll follow where'er the Fate does call,
He'll trudge a path that's laid,
The resignation brings a pain,
The icy turning blade



Waffle!

by Philonius Fix

The birds were singing happily among the trees bordering the mountain lake, as Martin slowly approached the big stag he had been stalking since midday. He needed this meat for the long journey across the mountain ranges to the west. 'A little closer', thought Martin, 'and I will not miss.' Next to a large tree Martin halted and raised his bow. Carefully drawing the arrow back, there was a soft popping noise followed by complete darkness.

The darkness was quickly followed by Martin loudly cursing and violently slamming his mouse into the mousepad. He took a deep breath and thought about how he had put off buying a replacement battery for the much used UPC. He thought about the last time he had saved his progress - too long ago. A solemn gloom of resignation and anger at himself enveloped Martin as he reached for the always nearby flashlight. Power outages were a far too common occurrence out in the rural edges of the farmlands, so he really should know better by now. Angrily chewing on a fingernail Martin flicked the flashlight on and stood up. Giving the room a quick look around he headed towards the door leading outside.

As the cool night air invaded his being, he turned the flashlight off. The clear night of bright stars and waning crescent moon provided ample light to see the landscape of the distant fields of wheat and corn. Carefully walking along the path to distance himself from the house he looked up as the familiar stellar panorama filled his vision. Only 'familiar' was not quite the correct word - halting his walk he looked harder - 'Wait. What? Aren't there more stars than usual?' thought Martin. 'And they seem to be, no, they ARE moving somewhat erratically. WTF, have so many satellites been put into orbit that a saturation point had been reached?' As these thought ran through Martins' mind he heard what sounded like a low flying jet approaching, looking for the source of the sound he noticed one far brighter point of light that was rapidly increasing even as he looked. Sonic booms could now be heard as the object, for certainly it was an object, broke the sound barrier. He could now clearly see sparks and smoke coming from the approaching object. Before he could fully utter a heartfelt 'Oh shi-', it impacted nearby knocking Martin backwards head over heels.

Gasping for breath and brushing the debris of dirt and vegetation from his face, Martin's amazement and euphoria at being alive and unhurt was replaced by shock at the scene of devastation that surrounded him. Smoldering vegetation, dirt, and large rocks had been thrown everywhere, and a substantial berm had been raised from the impact. Overcome with curiosity, Martin scrambled up the steep earthen barrier and peered down into the crater. At its bottom lay the cause of the devastation, still glowing red from the intense heat, and emitting a little smoke and a few sparks. It was about the size of a riding lawn mower, of a shiny silver color, with clearly mechanical wings, or rather wing, for one was very mangled. As he gazed at this strange object it frantically flapped its single wing for a moment then went limp and silent as it ejected two large, and very burnt, slices of toast. 'Oh, it's a giant flying toaster' Martin calmly said aloud as his mind struggled to make some sense of the scene. He returned his gaze to the heavens and chewed on another fingernail.

Far above, a merciless war that had been raging across the galaxies for untold millennia had arrived to fight its final, conclusive, battle in our small quiet neighborhood. On one side were the great flying toasters, a race of mechanical beings. On the other, the flying pigs, a biological race of vaguely porcine appearance. More egg shaped than not these 'pigs' have small atrophied wings and stubby legs, and the only way to tell front from back is that the rear presents a small curly tail, they can no longer fly with their wings, however they somehow developed small saucer shaped platforms upon which they ride. These two races have been on a single minded mission of bringing about the total extinction of the other for a very long time. None now remember the reason for the extreme hatred shared by these opposing forces, only that each cannot, will not, tolerate the continued existence of the other.

The long war had taken a vast toll upon both sides, for there were only a few thousand each of pig and toaster left. As these combatants engage and fight, maneuver and shoot, dogfight each other in fierce battle, these numbers only decrease. The area of conflict becomes littered with fragments of both toaster and pig. Flashes from the weapons and explosions lighten the field as the battle rages on. There seems to be nothing but chaotic movement everywhere one looks, with one exception. Appearing near the darkened edges of the crescent moon one can see four sets of three lights moving in a very disciplined manner, behind them something large is occluding the stars. Many of the surviving pigs suddenly break from dogfighting the toasters and make a coordinated effort to reach this large mysterious object.

As the object moves from the shadow of the moon the light reveals what had so panicked the pigs. It is circular with a flat top and bottom, as it moves closer to the battlefield it slowly opens revealing a textured interior of large square protrusions on both the upper and lower halves. The toaster escorts valiantly defend the waffle iron from the pig assault but even then some manage to get close enough to fire their weapons at this toaster super weapon, although with seemingly minimal effectiveness.

The pigs regroup and make one last concerted effort to stop this new threat. Ignoring the remaining toaster they commit to a kamikaze attack upon the waffle iron. Hundreds of pigs gallantly give their lives for the sake of their comrades, hurling themselves at full speed into the maw of the beast. The flashes of explosions increase both within the waffle iron as the pigs successfully enter, and without as the toasters nobly defend their ultimate weapon. Suddenly, a much larger explosion erupts within the waffle iron as a lucky pig warrior finds a vulnerable spot. The explosive flashes increase dramatically as a chain reaction spreads throughout the weapon culminating in an incredibly vast detonation of destruction. As the sphere of annihilation spreads it vaporizes both pig and toaster indiscriminately. There are no survivors.

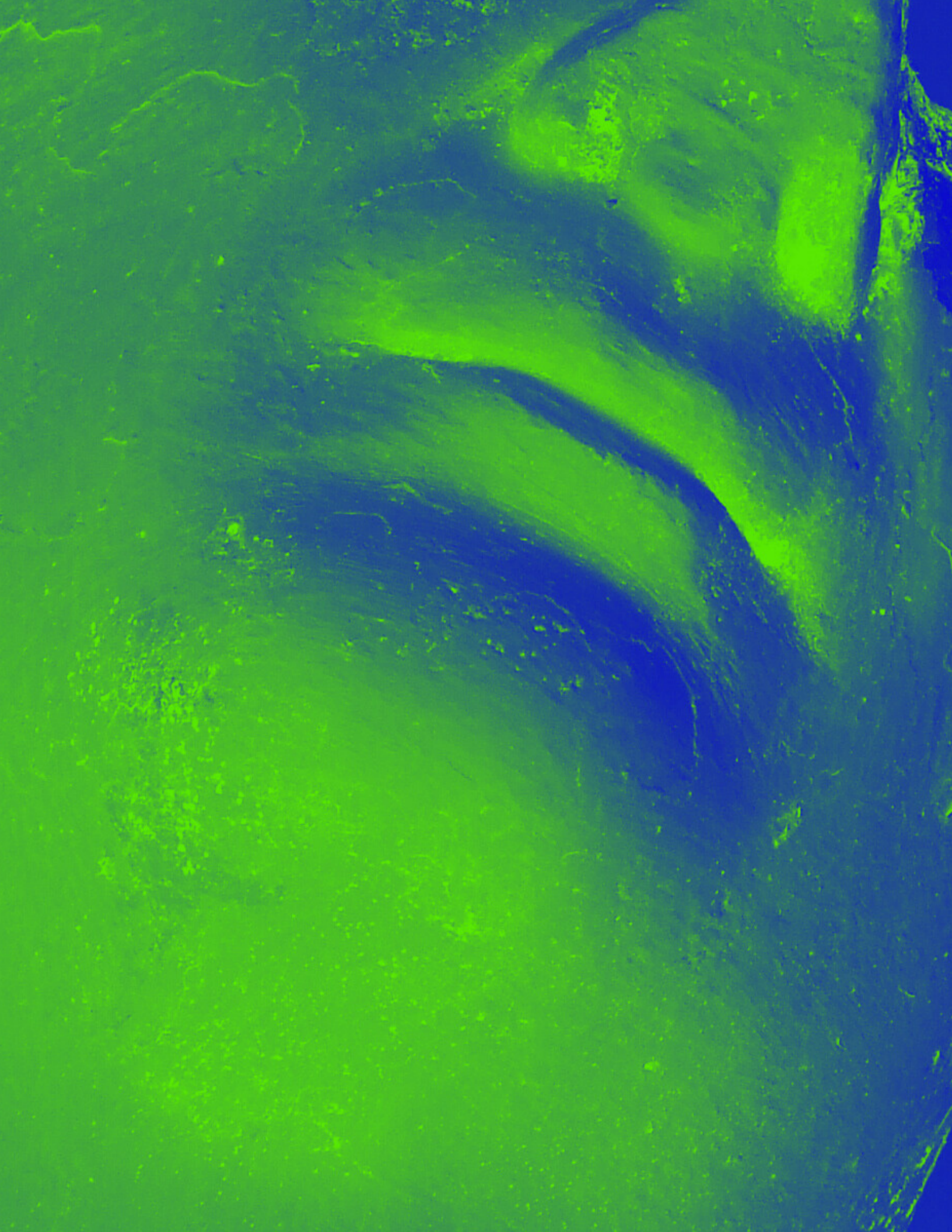
Martin sat on the ridge of the crater watching the lights in the sky as they darted here and there, shine brightly for a moment then fade to nothing. 'What I beautiful and unexpected fireworks show' he thought with a smile. Then the largest light yet appeared chasing even the darkest shadows from their recesses on the ground around Martin. He watched as the bloom of light spread ever wider, even sweeping and blowing a trail of dust off the moon.

Martin's smile faded.

The night was about half over.

And he was running low on chewable fingernails.







Have@It

by Robert James Cross

A choice was needed.

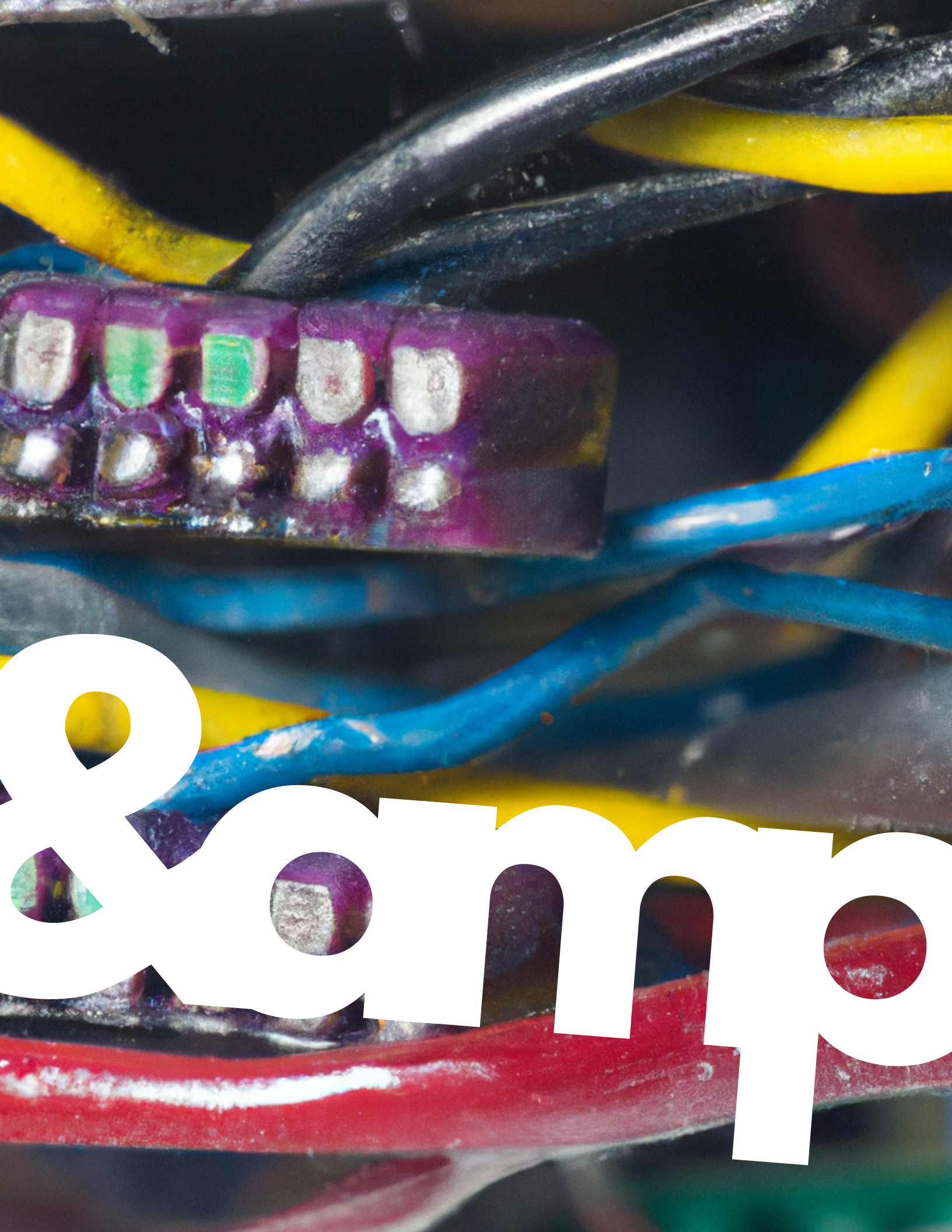
A: The queue to enter Walmart was absent. The mission was clear. Inside were the sycoschizophonic murmurs of the muzak mixed with various unmasked shoppers. Clouds of spittle flew from one mouth to another. Poison exchange at rapid pace. Four aisles from the entrance is where the yarn would be found. A savior amongst the unwashed. Lines formed to escape once the holy lace was in my hands. In retrospect the exit was more pleasant than the entrance. Mirror image of human experience. Rescue was within reach. Only a deadened transaction separates me from a fulfilling one with the boy and his mother. Departure. The drive was one of ease. Pulled by an irresistible force towards the immovable heart. Through her door was salvation. The boy's eyes told me that the deed was worth the effort. His mother gave a similar look. Moments caught in ice that melted choices never before made.

B: A phone call. She tells me that the boy needs yarn for a school project. My teeth grind. Eyes roll. The expectation is hidden under her tone. Have to do it. The thought bubbles like boiling piss in the sewer of my mind. Kneeling at the altar of servitude is not cute. What choice is there? Walmart is on the way to her home. If it is not done then blame will surely be thrown during the next disagreement. Entering the store reminds me that cigarettes are needed. Maybe junk food. Dopamine is needed and fried tortilla chips may be the only relief. And Diet Coke. Lots of Diet Coke. The yarn is procured. A straight shot to freedom and cigarettes is within reach. The cashier is silent except to tell me the total. All is paid for. Traffic awaits. Park outside by the trash bins that pray for retrieval. A knock. No answer. After less than a minute the wood creaks open and the yarn is handed over. The boy gives me a grateful stare. The mother does the same. Receptors in my brain that should care are not doing their job. Thankful that another job is done.

C: Ring. Ring. Yawn. Smirk. Drive. Grab. Wait. Drive. Knock. Give. Smile. Nod. Eat. Shit. Die.



**YOU'RE
READING**



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I posted a comic of Mickey Mouse getting raped in the ass by his dog, Pluto. “Haha, harder!” Mickey is saying in his Mickey voice. Pluto’s face is locked in placid tranquility like it was traced from a child’s coloring book. His member is mid-thrust so deep inside Mickey you can see it protrude out his stomach. Anatomy be damned. Minnie’s face is contorted in pure abject horror. One hand sloppily pretends to cover her eyes, while her free hand rubs her clit.

The replies start.

“lol, wtf”

“mods”

“hot”

“where’s goofy?”

It’s light outside, but dark in my room. On the bed stand beside me my concoction of Mountain Dew Code Red Cherry Soda mixed with Monster sits on top of a copy of Atlas Shrugged full of pages stained with cheetos dust. The air conditioner is blasting so I have a reason to wrap myself with a blanket. I mash f5 and see a new reply waiting for me.

“Fucking faggot”

My eyes go over it three or four times to get the proper experience. I mentally experiment with different cadences and my mouth turns into a devilish grin. A feeling makes me buzz inside more than the taurine, caffeine, L-carnitine, and whatever-else-ine is in my system. I feel more comfort from the words on the screen than the bbc (big black comforter) that surrounds me.

The thread is deleted and in its place is a big message in green.

“User has been banned for this post.”

I’m not perturbed. I expected as much, posting that on a yellow board. Blue board, whatever. The point is I posted NSFW content in a SFW zone. I alt-tab and click through the list of proxies available to reconnect as. Xanadu is a country I’ve never heard of. It sounds exotic and as I connect my eyes are drawn to the flag.

I frown.

The flag should be pretty. There’s supposed to be a lion in front of red, gold, and green lines in the background. I see the lion, but everything else is bland. I wasn’t always colorblind, but when I was a kid one day my genetics or God or a chance piece of gamma radiation decided I shouldn’t see color anymore. So now my reds are greens and greens are reds and purple is something I just have to believe isn’t a cruel joke.

I don’t have it too bad. At least I can tell the difference between black and white. It’d suck to be word-blind, though.

I didn’t know word-blindness was a thing until recently. I forget where I heard it from, but it made sense. Instead of mixing up yellows and blues, a word-blind person mixes up good meanings and bad ones. I’ve met a lot of people who didn’t know they were word-blind.

“Faggot” - my dad

“Nigger” - my schoolfriends

“Retard” - that girl

I wonder if the people on the forum know they’re word-blind, too?

I finally connect to the proxy and refresh the page. There’s a thread with a topic I’m interested in that I comment on. Someone must agree with me, because they reply “fuck you.”

“Fuck you too,” I type the words back, smile, and click send.



AY SUP NUB

GOT ANY NETHER

SICK HOW MUCH

Y U PVP

MEET AT SPON



no u

WART

tru

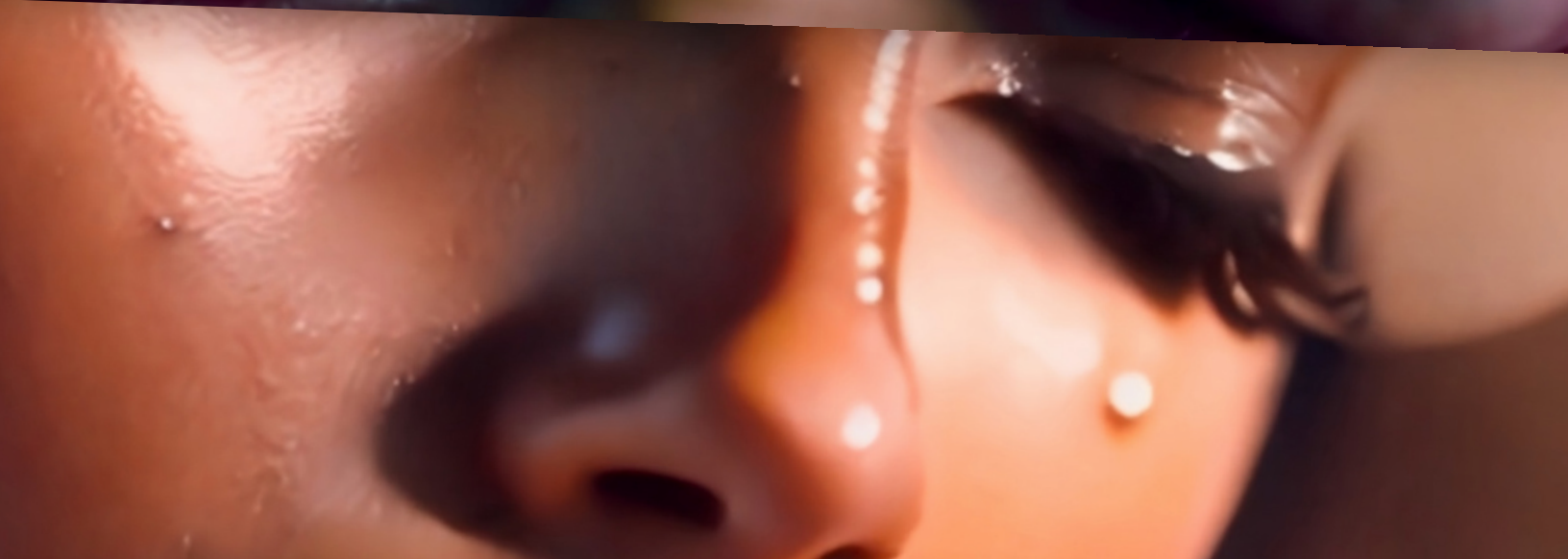
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no u



youtube.com/@lampbylit/



Good Samaritan



Leo remembered what his older brother once told him: Fox News is the network of Legitimate Rape. He thought about it as Bill Hemmer from Fox News went on nurturing some facts about the massacre as if trying to pitch a sale of eulogies and coffins for the victims. Twenty-Six victims. Twenty of them were children—Actually 27 if you count Adam Lanza, but we don't wanna call Mr. Lanza a victim now do we—and Hemmer gazes at the camera lenses of the American families who happen to be into Fox News, and repeats the repetition that some kid was found with eleven gunshot wounds on his body all the while the screen flashes a weirdly personal, 360p grained pic of ninth-grade Adam Lanza with all his mushroom-face glory.

Leo's father thought this was a fancy way to debut their Christmas shopping-spree flat-screen HD LCD TV, but at the sight of Lanza's face the father says Good riddance! With a face like that, I would've offed myself a long time ago!

And the mother says It wasn't his fault God made him so ugly.

God didn't make him ugly, he's ugly because he's an atheist, says the father and he peers right back at Leo with the look of a suspicious detective. You know what the Bible says about atheists, son? Read Romans 5:11, it says they're all fools, son. It says no fool shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Ecclesiastes says everyone's a fool. Everyone's ways are apart from Jesus, says the mother.

Holy crap. You think someone who does this crap is God-fearing? Hell no. Men do this because if you don't worship God then you worship death and that's what the Bible says ain't that right. Atheists can't be helped.

Faces of dead children flashing away all day across the TV's flat-screen like the faces of missing children posters. The news anchor went on. By this point, Leo was sort of bored of just sitting there with his hurt butt waiting for commercials to get back on cause commercials were way more fun. The family had been watching the LIVE and BREAKING news coverage of the latest all-American massacre since last night. They fell asleep with it and they woke up to it and Leo couldn't help but imagine this wasn't the healthiest way to spend a December Saturday morning. Leo knew he missed his brother, even if he missed his brother he felt he could forgive him.

Christian, on the other hand, never bothered to forget nor forgive their father for wearing a mask in the name of Jesus. Christian couldn't talk to his father without cackling or dropping some sardonic and sarcastic remark as if he were talking to a clown. For a while, the only person he could talk to was his younger brother.

Don't you know Joseph Kony's a good Christian boy? says Christian under the night sky and Leo kept looking at his brother wide-eyed like a scaredy cat. Christian flinches before his gaze and away from him as if he were flinching from a snake bite whose poison was festering upon his heart.

Jesus came to fulfill the law not to abolish it, said Christian. The violent bear it away and Kony puts a sword between children and their families, real hardcore, real Jesus-style. In Uganda, being a good Christian means sending little ones to war. It means laying them in the hay on the sacrificial altar. Ain't Joseph Kony a good son of Christ? Cause if Christ came down to you and gave you a sword and you saw his holy face and he said unto you 'This sword you will use to cut your family down, to cut children down' then what would you do?

know what good old Abraham would've done, but what about you? That's why Peter said Abraham was the father of faith. It sure as hell requires faith to believe good comes from the massacres of children. If I was a Christian, there would be no other way but to look at this and say God is good.

Christian smirked as if he wanted the smirk to be a friendly smile.

You know what I really believe in, bro? If I believed in God then I would believe he abandoned his people, cause there's just no other way, cause there are loving families still around and not the river of blood Christ's reeking corpse is supposed to drown you in. I'll vote for Obama for his second term. You know why? Cause that old man says no religion forgives horror. Well, let me tell you, he's wrong. When people realize there's shit you just don't need to forgive, that'll be the end of the Christian calendar.

But how will people tell when it's Christmas day—

Here. Christian squatted up and got up close to Leo and extended his arms wide into an enormous hug as if he was about to lift some great truth and he was about to show Leo the weight of his burden. A new age is coming, bro. I don't know if fucking Yellowstone will explode or if a black hole will appear or maybe the magnetic poles will reverse. I don't know, but do you know who mother creation is?

No, not really—

The Milky Way, bro.

What—

You believe in talking snakes but you don't believe in the Cosmos, bro? At this point Christian pulled out his Droid DNA smartphone like a preacher pulling out a church pamphlet and showed Leo a JPEG of the Milky Way, in case you were wondering. You see this whole-ass thing? The enormity of it. That's the whole Milky-Fucking-Way. Now look at its center. It's engorged. It's a womb surrounded by the white starry seed of men. She's pregnant! See what I'm getting at!?

No—

Have you heard of the winter solstice? Do you know what's going to happen during this year's winter solstice? It lands on fucking December 21st, bro. The Mayans predicted this two thousand years ago.

Like a sacred serpent coming under the first equinox, the sun of the winter solstice will cut the sacred womb of the Milky Way and—will it be an abortion, or the birth of new life? Who the hell knows!

Christian went on gawking alone and as he laughed he inhaled the aroma of that starry night like a patient breathing his last breaths and he plummeted back against the grass and stretched his arms out like the wooden limbs of a corpse and he saw the seeds of that starry night spilled all over the sky like a divine tinkerer had just broke his old clock and forgot to fix all that mess.

Leo loved when he was all alone next to his brother like this. He enjoyed it because each time Christian became more personal. He would open his heart and say extraordinary things, and the younger brother would feel his brotherly warmth bulging and blazing, cold as ice all over his body, and fear and trembling got hold of him as if a giant were pulling him under. Then Leo said The stars are beautiful. Right, Christian?

Fox News goes on. Twenty children, aged between six and seven. Leo realizes Oh yeah, those Sandy Hook Hook kids will never have an eighth, and Leo feels himself plunged into a dark well of accomplishment like he had just won a secret lottery that he didn't remember buying a ticket for. He will now live longer than those children ever will. He thinks thoughts and prayers for the children and thinks none of that for his brother. He thinks I know I love Christian I know I love Christian. He says he forgives his brother even if he feels like he shouldn't. Even if his family says to not think about it.

Dad, will we give Christian a memorial service?

Of course not.

The mother interrupts. He's still part of the family.

The father's lips were in between plucking and pursing as if he were musing about the matter. Sandy Hook is interrupted by a Stanley Dip it n' Dunk it flashlight ad which showed two grown-ups playing hide-and-seek like children, scampering away from predators. If God separates people, the father goes on, those in hell and those in heaven, then there's no shame in doin' the same in real life.

You're gonna scare Leo...

I'll scare him damn straight. The Lord terrifies us all. These are the end times. Abortion, shootings everywhere, gay marriage. Like your brother — the father jerks his taut gaze back at Leo — That would've never happened under God. Christ will soon come from heaven and drown all this depravity away. Damn straight he will and that day will be the last day of the Christian calendar. You know what we are, honey?

We are God's chosen people.

Sure as hell we are, and the truth shall set you free. Free from Armageddon. Now, that Stanley flashlight looked like a good deal. The TV said you can use it underwater.

Later that night Leo sat on the cobalt-gray carpet of his parents' room. He had taken the Nintendo Wii into their room because for a while now he had been too afraid to be alone with anyone other than his parents. He played Mario Galaxy 2 because that's what he played with his brother and his parents didn't know about it and it comforted him and made him feel like all their brotherly time together was normal. Yet his parents only looked at him the normal way if he said and acted like he hated his brother.

Leo doesn't want to feel like a kid anymore. This isn't the body he once knew. No, he isn't playing Mario Galaxy 2 anymore. He sees from a galaxy far, far away a child that plays his video game and this child feels lonely and distant like a homeless alien—and hey! There are aliens in Mario Galaxy 2.

Mario running around in that Hell Valley Galaxy level and looking around with the clunky nunchuck zoom-in camera into the vastness of digital space and in the vastness of the Hell Valley overworld space a congregation of salad-fingered shadows with a gangling poise and eyeless faces lay atop a ridge peering and creeping at the player from afar like ghosts captivated by actually illegitimate rape. Leo fan-named these creatures the Watchers cause they watched you like they had just seen the naked body of a drunken dad.

That's here. That's home. That's us. Everyone you love. Every young couple in love and every hopeful child: On a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam, says Christian proudly like a Twitter skeptic.

Mario Galaxy 2 was their favorite game to play because Christian barely had anything to do so he took time to do a lot of watching and, among other stuff, lecture Leo about Cosmos—the vastness of Carl Sagan's Cosmos, which nowadays you can just replicate with a free HDRI skybox in Blender—yet Leo is always freaked the hell out by the Watchers of Hell Valley and on nights when Leo couldn't sleep Christian would let Leo into his room and let him sleep under his arms as he reassured Leo that he wasn't too old for that kind of thing. And when he asked about the Watchers of Hell Valley Christian always told Leo they must be angels. I mean, he says, Angels waiting for the demise of humanity. After a while he let go of his younger brother.

Don't be afraid of stuff that cannot hurt the flesh, bro. Be afraid of the crap that shits up the spirit. Like religion. Superstition, now that's scary: Make a man believe in something he has never seen.

What's a superstition—

Faith. It means believing in something you know ain't true. Like believing in hell. I'm not afraid of hell and I wish I was, cause even if I knew hell was real I would behave the same way, bro. I know that there's no salvation for me or anyone and that's the only thing that matters, and I wish people acted like it cause they know salvation ain't true. Who the fuck trusts people with so much freedom. Do you know what people get to do when they're free? They jack it to loli hentai.

What's a loli hentai—

The family of three walk the walk of Christmas mall shopping. This was a family tradition. The mother feels as if she were wandering around a desert, fleeing from some great evil. This fleeing woman wears Crocs with a moon imprint on them and a sort of Sunday lazy shirt with a print of a constellation around the sun and the sun about her abdomen. And of course, you can tell what time of the year it is since All I want for Christmas is You echoing under the Mall ambient white-noise of crowds crowding and chattering, and Leo can't believe the world is just going on and not going to end. People sure don't act like they think the world is gonna end one day. Last week was Sandy Hook's 24/7 entertainment hour. In Newtown, Connecticut, the news said Christmas got canceled cause people felt too guilty to celebrate the Birth of Jesus. Even Obama himself came out and gave out a very serious speech and there were days of mourning in the country but here everyone is at the mall frolicking and giggling while All I want for Christmas is You blares on like daily ambulance alarms. Then the Little Drummer Boy plays.

I played my drum for Him, pa rum pum pum pum. I played my best for Him, pa rum pum pum pum.

He wants to talk to his parents about Christian. Then All I want for Christmas is You plays again.

After a few more days of watching more hours of Sandy Hook television than any sensible human should consume, Leo felt old enough to watch 2012: We Were Warned or whatever it's called. Since Leo wants to be a good Christian he asked his father about it, about if he could watch the movie since he felt old enough and his dad answered.

Absolutely not. We both know it will freak you out, son. Said his father as he sat down for their family TV night and he turned the TV back on to the channel that was already playing. You know what was playing, but now it was interrupted by Sean Hannity's Hollywood Hypocrisy and after that the New Benghazi Evidence special that would surely put Clinton in jail this time.

That night Christian had another of his routine freakish nightmares. He thought he would be bored of them at this point but no way he could get bored of them just like he couldn't get bored of Mario Galaxy 2. Anyways, in the nightmare, there is a Great Flood that's washing the world away with Californicated waves of darkness and here are the Watchers watching and looming over the End of the World as they always do. No one is spared, children and adults alike go on drowning like cursed cattle. Leo sees a divine spark of hope as he sees the white sunlight rising and blasting away the coal-splotched clouds of the flood and a rainbow creeps over the horizon—a waving rainbow. Oops! It was the Pride Flag. Leo drowns. As he drowns Leo prays a prayer for God to give him the strength to hate his brother, for God to damn his brother if he really can damn anyone at all. Leo's using logic instead of faith now. Leo thinks his brother must be proud of him.

In the morning, Leo is woken up before the usual time for his awakening from another barely not-sleepless night. He rushes and starts to skitter downstairs when he hears his parents talking to a stranger down in the kitchen. He hides behind the stairs to overhear the conversation. His parents are talking to a policeman, who tells them about a man abandoned and lying down on a dark street. A homeless looking man, and the man cries out all battered up and he tells the streets he has just been robbed by the streets and the streets walk all over him.

The policeman keeps preaching the story. A minister comes by and the minister notices the beggar and decides to walk across to the opposite sidewalk where the Sex Shop is and so he walks past the beggar. Then a priest comes the same way. Well, the priest does the same. The beggar goes on wallowing all alone. He says he has no home. He says God has given up on him. Then here comes Christian from inside the Sex Shop, he crosses the street and kneels down next to the man and takes out a can of Monster Energy and offers it to the beggar and gives him some change and offers him a meal. So the beggar notices that Christian has enough money for charity and to take a homeless man out for a meal, and all of that after spending some cash at a Sex Shop and the beggar eyes Christian's heavy-looking leather bag.

So naturally the beggar stabs Christian and snags his heavy bag away and leaves Christian to bleed down and out under the rain. No good Samaritan comes for Christian.

The policeman goes on about how they caught the beggar. It wasn't hard since the beggar went under the effect of nameless dangerous drugs to a 24/7 pawn shop and the beggar didn't realize his homeless rags were reeking all over with blood. So the pawn shop guy was just a bit suspicious about giving a bloodied-up man some money in exchange for a laptop. Let's just say it wasn't a hassle for the police to recover Christian's laptop.

At first, they thought it was a premeditated murder since Christian walked that route frequently like a lone wolf walks his nightly walks, but after they dug up some evidence they knew that wasn't the case. The policeman said Christian's murder was an act of God, and the cop goes on talking about What We Found on Christian's computer. And Leo imagines his parents nodding and going Amen Amen like they do at a good sermon. What We Found, the cop says. We can't let that go so easily you understand.

Leo is sure he's grown up cause now he understands why he's compelled to hate his brother. He googles 2012 Movie Online For Free, and after scrolling down and browsing a few pages of results—after several failed attempts with MegaUpload links taken down by SOPA—he finds a website that streams 2012, but not before getting machine-gunned by a foray of porn pop-up ads. Leo tries shutting down as many as he can, but after a minute of struggle he realizes that fighting against porn ads is kinda impossible for him and he tells himself he doesn't really care since he has seen a lot of porn before while next to someone he loves and that's normal for kids his age.

He says he's grown up and he feels disgusted, disgusted with his family, and disgusted with the pleasure he has felt in his body. He thinks to himself that he deserved what happened. Maybe it's a good thing if God ends the world, he tells himself.

Guess what happens in the movie! There's this scene with a bunch of people praying under the roof of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, where Medieval God stretches out his hand with a visible effort to touch Adam and Adam is all slouched out on his heavenly cloud, half-assing his reach out to God's helping hand. In the movie, an earthquake or Mt. Vesuvius' second coming or whatever happens, and there on the heavenly dome of the Vatican forms a crack between Adam and God and the Vatican ceiling collapses and kills everyone inside while outside the light-blue dome of St. Peter's rolls down the streets of Rome killing everyone in its way as best as PG-13 violence can showcase. Guess God abandoned humanity. Leo freaks out. The end is near.

Leo remembers that sultry summer-esque April midnight on the twenty-second—or technically the twenty-first depending on how you look at it—with his brother. They were alone for a while but after that they went out on moonlight midnight across a highway deserted of vehicles on Christian's e-bike and their travel was colored with the lifeless eclipse-like hue of HPS lamps that strewed over the landscapes of middle-middle-class sub-yuppie suburbia that stinked of wetted soil, and they were all sweaty and the gust cutting against their bodies brought no cleanliness for it was laden heavy with a suffocating humidity. This was the part that excited Leo. How daring and novel everything he did with his brother was, withstanding the rages of how-good-it-feels guilt that came afterwards.

The two brothers arrive at a boxed Episcopalian church in the west of a half-emptied shopping Plaza whose margins were drawn like a disk. The old plaza was designed as a disk with a roundabout in the middle, and a second shopping circle in its womby center, and of what was left standing there were twenty shops in outer rim and and thirteen in the inner rim and the church could've been mistaken for any other gypsum-covered grown-up business—for example, there was a piercing shop and a tattoo shop and a faux Mexican cantina—and the shopping plaza now decaying from an excess of unkempt trees and ferns foxed and withered like cracks of forgotten temples. The church towered over all.

The older brother parks his bike against the church's wall and takes out his licensed Kony 2012 Vandalism Kit under the flash of a neon Cross sign that splashed Christian's white countenance like a jihadist bathed in Holy Blood. Kony 2012's Twitter page posted all those videos that implicated the implications of children dying and then posted videos of well-behaved American children—probably Christian children—and a page protesting the protests of children throwing tantrums for other children they never knew. There was that Oscar-winning documentary about a Christian fundie camp that indoctrinated children into crying their way into Christian activism, something Christian couldn't stand to watch thanks to an itching burn that told him children crying was a good thing cause it was against God's will.

Love your neighbor as yourself, Christian tells Leo, Don't you see that children don't even need a neighbor to love? They cry for children they don't even know. Even as a teenager, Christian felt he could only communicate with children as if he only spoke their language and their prayers. He knew he wasn't a kid anymore but that didn't stop him from loving children the way he knew God never loved them. God sends children to die, you see.

Oh yeah, Leo's still right there next to Christian peeking like an awkward stork at whatever musings his brother's face signals. Christian thinks he better get the confession over with before he makes his face into a mask. He jerks the Kony 2012 kit from his backpack and bulges it open and takes out posters and glue and clutches a can of spray paint and throws another can to his brother and all of that under a neon Cross. He sticks the posters against the Church's window like a true missionary and sprays an amateur KONY SOI2 on the church's walls and the wall smells of sour vinegar.

They will remove all of this you know. They care more about this building than the salvation of children. Children dying because of their religion.

Why is Kony killing children if he's a Christian—

Christian ruffles Leo's hair and kneels down to his height.

Harold Camping predicted last year the world was gonna end. It was a huge deal. He spent money on it like you could buy salvation with that money. Christian laughs, Cause yeah, the End of the World is what a good God would've done a long time ago. Then Christian looks at the neon Cross, The guys at Kony want to do something about it instead, they want to make Kony as easy to find as porn on the internet, what a stupid idea. Because who are we to go against God's plan? All the evil that happens is ordained by God and God is good. This God lets children grow up to birth children of their own and they birth their self-sustaining evil. Think of the children. The children under Kony, given to him by God, are corrupted beyond belief. Like, have you seen the Lorax?

The Lorax—

Yeah, the Lorax movie by Light Studios or whatever. Well, Dad says the movie is gay and liberal propaganda— Oh well. The Lorax spoke personally to Jason Rusell. Who—

The prophet! The prophet of Kony! The Lorax spoke to him like Jesus. You know what Jason did? He went out to parade naked on the Hollywood streets. It's like he went to Sodom and Gomorrah to warn them like a true prophet, naked and jacking off in front of everyone. He said if he didn't do that Kony would win.

Then there was silence.

They say evil is hard to find because it's inside you. If it were really there then it would be easy to know yourself. What I'm saying is, some kids have it really tough out there, bro.

Leo still hated that there was no funeral. He understood it all but he couldn't accept it. It had happened to him. His brother was so nice and kind to him, he didn't think Christian hurt him in any way. Christian always gave him gifts after they spent time together. Leo knew he had lost something precious and now he would never be the same again.

Dad, is the world ending on the 21st?

Don't be ridiculous, the Bible says no one knows the day or the hour. But with God's help, you're gonna be okay. We're all gonna be okay because God protects his children. You're gonna stay with us because we're God's family.

Leo knew what his father meant, that he wanted nothing to do with Christian, nothing to do with his own blood. After thinking about it, Leo feels all sulky like a dollhouse doll taken away from her family. For some reason, Leo feels really effeminate right about now, and now he doesn't feel like he's part of any family, not since his brother went away. He can forgive his brother if he has more faith and he knows what he wants in his heart. And what he wants in his heart will put a sword between him and his family. Christian would've wanted him to use his brain. He remembers a crack in the heavens between God and humanity, even between God and the children. Leo knows there are no innocent children because he's still a child.

That night, Leo falls asleep after watching *An Inconvenient Truth*, another movie forbidden by his parents. He dreams of a global flood. He's drowning, he feels the forbidden hand of God pulling him down into the abyss of the waters, and Leo tries clutching at the edges of the cold land and tears up his nail against the land like a polar bear clawing at a melting iceberg and it all melts under him and Leo keeps drowning under an apocalypse heavier than sin itself. He was not part of the elect cause he refused to partake in that evil creation. He drowns as far as eyes can see under that endless, snaking trail of a river. God has answered his prayers.

After he's finished being drowned up, Leo sees a new beginning: There's a new earth with a new kind of human being. Leo sees a pride flag swinging over the horizon like a patriot flag, he thinks, God is with those who drowned, God is with the departed. He wakes up gasping like he was just jerked out from the water.

Now here's Leo and in front of him is the State-sponsored children's psychologist he was forced to meet after he continued insisting he loved his brother and the father begged for someone to see him.

How do you feel about your family?

I love them.

How do you feel about your brother?

I know I love him.

Why do you love him?

He's part of our family. I know I love him cause I've forgiven him.

But you keep fighting with your father, who wants to protect you. Those who truly love you want to protect you Leo, they don't harm you.

Well, Jesus loves me, and Leo remembers what his brother once told him.

Jesus promised that if you were to follow it meant that you would bleed and he never promised miracles to save you from that bleeding.

Jesus has nothing to do with this, Leo. He wasn't just doing this with you. What the police found on his laptop...

The last few days I saw Christian he couldn't stop going on about the Olmecs. He was, like, fascinated by the idea of their culture being wiped away, without reason. At least that's what I remember.

The psychologist kept peering at him like a concerned cat. Still, I wish he were still alive, I truly do. Do you know what day it is today? My brother was really looking forward to this day. I think he called it the Age of Aquarius.

Are you still having nightmares?

I've been having these dreams. There's a flood and everyone there is drowned under the flood like in the movies. There are, like, messy stars in the cosmos. I think they are angels and they are watching over the corpses of those who drowned.

Oh my god.

That's not the end, Christian tells Leo. These angels have abandoned heaven to be slaves of the flesh and they rape the corpses. But a snake comes down from the sun, she's an old snake. She devours the corpses of the luminaries and the deceased and then there's new life. What I think is that... I think I feel happy for the snake.

I'm old enough. I know what he did, Leo says, I'm old enough to forgive because I love him. I'm old enough to forgive.

The *Little Drummer Boy* was playing in the background of the clinic's white reception room, Leo noticed.



by
Remember _ Summer _ Days



SUBMIT.





THE ANNUAL
SEPTEMBER
ELEVENTH
COMMEMORATIVE
MEMORIAL
REENACTMENT AND
CANDLELIGHT VIGIL



When I was a teenager, my highschool, in an effort to signal to the county and by extension the state government that the local board of education was indeed setting a sterling example for developed-world secondary educational programs—the type that most certainly endeavors to foster regional collegiate-level curricula in the humanities and was indeed deserving of an increased budget and perhaps several promotions of well-to-do and/or ambitious educators into the municipal offices of our small but prosperous county—did near to the end of the school year organize for Memorial Day what has now become a most notorious origin story for my humble village's local tragedy and coverup, our own Small Town Nine Eleven.

I was in my junior year, almost eighteen years old. I worked at a convenience store that my family owned. I was a model student, and my favorite subject was math.

Mister Adelbaum taught Social Studies. He was a serious man, an intrepid professor of History (capital H), and he fulfilled the rather tired archetype of an overeducated countryside academic, a fish too big for this pond yet beached in its recesses notwithstanding. And it was ultimately his idea to host the event, an extramural affair that would take place during the holiday weekend. The idea was innocuous enough: Reenactments of American History. The school's handful of classes were amalgamated and split into groups of ten teenagers each who were asked to take part in the choreography and performance of "A reenactment of any moment of our nation's illustrious past that bears historical significance to modern day America." Naturally my group chose September Eleventh. Unfortunately, Mr. Adelbaum prohibited us from performing a reenactment of Nine Eleven on grounds of propriety and sensibility, an act that would in two short years lead to major consequences for him, both personal and professional, to say nothing of our community. I argued on behalf of my group instead for Iran-Contra. We were eventually assigned Watergate.

Reenactments of American History was the official name of this event, coined rather unoriginally by Adelbaum himself, and it was slated and indeed proclaimed in the local newspaper (which was no longer in print and existed solely on the internet) to be the year's premier social mixer, proudly produced for the benefit of our simple population, not to be outdone by the Drama Department's Christmas Pageant, nor Radio KRVN's Summer Bang, a strictly non-institutional occasion. And the event itself came and went without any palatable sense of importance other than my portrayal of Nixon wherein I did deliver the line "No Jews, is that clear?" which did hilariously exacerbate Adelbaum's overall anxiety, rather to my delight. Reenactments of American History was never produced again. It would be overshadowed months later.

And the weekend would pass much like the school year itself had, quietly fermenting the aspirations of the young and the eager, themselves much more grown at their age than the generation prior though still not as accomplished, all owing their brave ignorance to the long dusty highways and nameless farmers' fields that interposed the only conveniences for miles, the aureolin nightfall, myriad greatness abound. That summer we agreed to put our town on the map.

The Annual September Eleventh Commemorative Memorial Reenactment and Candlelight Vigil would take place on the day itself, long a national holiday, and would serve additionally as an informal freshman orientation for the school year which officially began the week thereafter. I established the Committee for the Reenactment of September Eleventh and all summer long I led preparations, confidently marshaling dozens of students through the organization to the construction to the eventual demolition of our model towers. I remember this first year fondly.

Although I was not alive during Nine Eleven, my Grandfather was, and he and several others of our community did contribute their varied opinions and experiences to us, demonstrating the emotional power of this historic day and its effect on our elders. For some of them, the tragedy had struck close to home, and we learned a great deal and gleaned much detail that would help us refine our project and bring it to life. Our event, which had come to be known simply as “the show,” was surprisingly quiet in retrospect during its initial iteration, especially given what would eventually transpire of it. This first year we hosted some hundred and a half souls amid the barley and wild grass outside my Grandfather’s tractor barn, refurbished in part by the graduating class, a strong endorsement from our upperclassmen, some of whom were even entertaining initiative for careers in law, medicine, and—to our good fortune, architecture. One senior particularly shone during the erection of the towers, Cecil Wiles. He would return every summer over the next two years from Massachusetts to help us improve our design.

And our second reenactment was indeed a vast improvement of our first, and it enjoyed numerous stylistic and thematic upgrades, such as jumpers, helicopters, sound effects, and more. This time situated in an abandoned field which itself would later become the subject of crop circles—a first for our county—the scope of the show also grew as we experimented with interactive elements, like delivering a group message to our audience’s mobile phones that alerted them of a simultaneous catastrophe occurring at the Pentagon. This feature didn’t go quite as planned as the stunt actually did raise some genuine alarm among attendees though this was never the intention. We were also unable to finalize plans for the mock destruction of Building Seven, nor the crashing of an additional radio-controlled aircraft meant to represent Flight 93 (both features would take shape in our third and final year). Our second effort also introduced the show to an element of controversy not seen the previous year.

It was less family-oriented than before, this time by chance without any adult chaperone, and naturally it accommodated a higher degree of delinquency among students and young adults. The attendance also ballooned threefold to roughly four or five hundred souls. The local newspaper ran a story about the desensitization of youth which vaguely referenced the show and was written invoking themes far beyond its purview. The article itself was submitted to the paper anonymously and was largely suspected by myself among others to be the work of Adelbaum. This was perhaps one of the earliest conspiracy theories to develop surrounding the tragedy to come and still provokes sensitive debate among locals.

By the beginning of my final year in highschool, it had become thoroughly apparent that the show needed to be reined in and would no longer be the sole enterprise of students. Not a month after the show and into our senior year, Mr. Adelbaum himself succeeded to principal of our highschool—his predecessor abdicating over alleged health issues—and before long convened an assembly with the parents of the student body and convinced them to appoint him as Director of the Committee for the Reenactment of September Eleventh, ousting my leadership and relegating me to the shadowy backstage of puppetmasters who acted behind the scenes.

For our final year, Adelbaum galvanized whatever thin support he found among brown-nosers and apple-polishers—mostly Mormons sycophants and outcasts from the Chess League with a score of under a thousand—and marched them straight into the grinder, collectively producing little more than matchstick models throughout either their research or their development. They struggled to harness the same creative vigor that characterized us, the radical mighty, and they failed when tasked to meaningfully produce even a report. The official Committee’s eventual process consisted simply of infiltrating our backstage channels and subverting our efforts. The adults perhaps expected that we could not be stopped. We may never know for sure.

After my graduation, I was contacted by two very high-profile national news outlets and offered interviews, both of which I accepted and conducted and which added to the growing mania that orbited the show. Our final year would outdo all previous iterations in spectacular magnitude. That summer we toiled as all the players took their marks and set the stage for the unwinding of history.

The decision makers backstage with me already had the design engineered and drafted by summer. The towers would be about fifty four feet tall without the radio mast, designed as such to take advantage of standards commonly associated with carpentry; the base of each tower would be eight feet wide. They would be composed of candy glass and thin styrofoam panels framed evenly from stick lumber around a cylindrical core of cardboard wrapped in layers of foam net and metal leaf. The interior of each tower around either points of impact would be fitted and densely packed with incendiary devices and an admixture of sundry flammable materials, mostly paper insulation and sawdust but also other agents like potcrate and bismuth trioxide. Fireproof containers with specialized heat-sensitive springs would rest strategically at specific heights on both towers, loosing miniature human likenesses cleverly fashioned from raw beef and glass vials of ketchup, which of course were not proportional (humans would be a fifth of an inch at the proper scale). The towers would be built upon a preexisting concrete pad that formerly supported electrical infrastructure at the site of some auctioned land generously leased to us for free by a local developer and truther who also abetted us considerably by securing several important permits quickly and quietly. Ground Zero would be beset by prominent nearby towers to scale, most notably Brooklyn Place and Seven World Trade Center, all constructed from similar materials, the latter configured to topple onto itself by remote control. Nearby loudspeakers would generate the ambience, the looping malaise sampled from historic footage. Six students agreed to fly drones near the towers during the show—too many in hindsight—most of them to capture video, as well as a remote controlled helicopter which was not at all to scale but which did lend the scene a distinct air of caricature.

The airplanes would be fashioned to scale entirely from elements fabricated on CNC routers and 3D printers (aside from fluids), both of which I had access to as an engineering prospect, and I would design them not with propulsive functionality but rather as sailplanes, somewhat bulky but still guidable gliders that, when released from a crop duster, would be navigated to their targets with enough speed to ignite the pyrotechnics but not so fast as to fully penetrate the structures. I would construct and destroy thirty of these final glider designs that summer, honed from hundreds of prototypes throughout the school year. Other students in the organization of the show would pilot a third model airplane into a nearby field to simulate Shanksville. And that year, my class, the graduating class, did forge innumerable hours of industry from their own will to help create that which could never truly be destroyed, not even once completely obliterated. That summer was the last of its kind, all of us happily unaware, young and old alike, dumb to the permanency that lurked beyond the next corner. And once that very humid and hungry summer had concluded, the lot of us took to our stations, ironed our dress shirts, pulled tight our double windsors, and presented ourselves to the world at large for the taking. But not before one final show.

To recall the morning, it was a feast of atmosphere, a Saturday. The show would welcome just under three thousand souls, and most of them from out of town, and many of them camping overnight beforehand and watching on from the encircling hills, and to be quite sure—all present would agree—there was a prominence of rebellion, some several hundred at a time gregariously chanting and in full spirit descending the area. I arrived at Ground Zero at sixoclock in the morning and already there was an animation to the crowd. I accorded my command in the driver's seat of the Safety Van, our primary control center and our only legal physical protection from Adelbaum, who was not allowed inside so long as we refused him. And he was so refused not long thereafter which immediately confounded the protocol and officially began our timeline of events:

06:09: Adelbaum arrives at the site and is refused entry to the Safety Van, initiating a verbal confrontation and triggering a call by an unknown person to the fire marshal. He announces that he is in control of the show by megaphone.

06:16: Adelbaum leaves the area of the Safety Van. It is not known where he goes from here.

07:30: All safety officers scheduled for duty arrive at the Safety Van and continue the live protocol for the day. The show quietly begins as personnel take their places throughout the site in preparation of the event.

08:13: An unknown person calls the police to report gun violence at the site of the show.

08:22: Local pilot Harlan Campbell takes off from his field in his crop duster seven miles from the site with both sailplanes in tow.

08:30: Ornithology student Jessica Bell arrives at the Safety Van to inform personnel that there is a family of marsh harriers nesting atop the South Tower.

08:33: Field personnel confirm via video drone that there are in fact harriers on the tower. Harlan Campbell releases the first sailplane whereupon I take remote control of the glider, unbeknownst of the birds.

08:39: Dozens of police arrive at the site and disperse, led by Deputy Richard Fax, looking to confirm reports of a shooting. Harlan Campbell releases the second sailplane.

08:46: I steer Flight 11 from an initial altitude of 100 feet directly into the top section of the North Tower, erupting a fireball and eliciting a raucous response from the crowd, some of whom are indeed crying and role-playing witnesses.

08:58: Fire marshal Wendy Erwin arrives at the site. She is accompanied by conservation officers who are concerned about the impact the show is having on wildlife.

09:00: The local newspaper stops the press (figuratively, of course) and alters their headlines to reflect the situation.

09:03: Flight 175 crashes violently into the South Tower, its fireball far exceeding expectations and reaching almost to the ground.

09:05: Wendy Erwin declares the show to be in violation of safety bylaws despite having secured relevant permits. She telephones Kelsey Vaughn, the Mayor of the nearby town of Arnold. I am warned by an unknown student that Adelbaum is swatting me.

09:06: I set Building Seven on a timer scheduled to implode the structure after an hour, and I vacate the area, taking nearby shelter among some dissidents in their tent.

09:20: A midair collision forces two video drones to the ground, injuring an attendee and causing over \$2599 worth of damage.

09:33: Kelsey Vaughn appears on local television appealing for the discontinuation of any further reenactment.

09:37: All willing participants are issued a text message informing them that a third plane has struck the Pentagon.

09:41: Several people witness Jessica Bell enter the South Tower via a hatch in an effort to rescue the harriers. She gains access to an incomplete interior ladder which she uses to ascend the tower.

09:54: Thomas Brie enters the South Tower in pursuit of Bell, his girlfriend.

09:59: The North Tower collapses. All two people inside perish, along with the family of harriers.

10:02: Other students behind the scenes take control of Flight 93 and fly it into the adjacent field, exploding it and starting a fire among the tallgrass. Deputy Fax declares the show to be a crime scene and orders all attendees off the site, inciting verbal altercations between students and police.

10:06: Building Seven collapses, out of synchronization with the historical timeline of Nine Eleven. More emergency detail arrive and attempt to douse all active fires and attend any injuries.

10:20: Police demand that the show be stopped. Cecil Wiles enters the North Tower in an attempt to manually disable the pyrotechnics.

10:28: The North Tower collapses. The lone soul within does not survive.

11:45: Kelsey Vaughn lands by helicopter and attends the scene. She demands to see Adelbaum, who was alleged by attendees and acknowledged by police to have taken direction of the show in the morning.

12:12: I am arrested in the dissidents' tent and brought to a nearby blacksite for advanced interrogation.

15:41: All fires are put out and the site is cordoned off from the public.

14:11: Vaughn recognizes the common marsh harrier as a state protected species.

17:30: The convenience store where I work burns down.

20:30: Mister Adelbaum goes on television to address the nation from his office in the highschool. Crop circles are discovered in our county.

It was a very regrettable outcome to an event that no doubt deserved much less spectre and much more cohesion during its execution. The liability for injury and death would tangle up courtrooms around my state for decades to come, and would ultimately end up bankrupting the local chamber of commerce and undoing any reputation and authority that the board of education or the local police force previously enjoyed. My culpability was determined to have been mitigated after my removal from the Committee, nor was Adelbaum indicted notwithstanding his apparent leadership in the scandal. On the contrary, Adelbaum used the tragedy to spearhead a popular campaign responsible for dissolving most youth local organizations and events in the coming years, and went on quickly to replace Vaughn as the mayor of Arnold, promptly dismissing the only law enforcement office left in the region from its investigation into the arson of the 7-II, suspected by most to be somehow connected. I was scheduled to work the night in question, but was advised to call in sick, which meant that there were no employees inside when it burned to the ground.

And I do remember the lot of us returning to the site that night, forced just short of the police tape, on the other side of which bustled scant forensic technicians, photographers' flashes alight. And we did light our candles and keep vigil for those three lives lost, my friend's among them, plus the birds. And so not to be defeated by tyrants, we few do return fewer and fewer each following year to pay respect to that loss of innocence, those of us that can, though most of us have moved on, our own children now the beneficiaries of such sordid lore. And every so often I think about my role in this little history, having forced its repetition, perhaps condemned to a legacy dashed, perhaps on the side of the light, and I imagine myself in highschool, those wild and fertile days, when maybe it wasn't enough to simply put a small town on the map—sometimes you had to change the whole world.







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PLAYBILL®



& Magazine Presents
A PLAY FOR THE STAGE

THE TENT
by **DANIEL**
GAVILOVSKI

OPEN CURTAIN. *War in Ukraine. A disheveled army tent. Nighttime. Two soldiers: KISLOV and BUNIN are in the tent. To the left is a sleeping lump on the floor - another soldier.*

Their equipment having been damaged beyond repair, the squad is stranded on the outskirts of a major city. They have been surrounded by enemy forces for weeks on end, with supplies dwindling. We never know if we're following Russians or Ukrainians. Kislov is gaunt and jittery. He looks off into the distance.

KISLOV: Look at that. That's the fourth fire this night. They're shelling the place.

BUNIN: I can't imagine there's anyone left.

KISLOV: Of course not. Everyone's gone and evacuated. Anyone who isn't planning on dying anyway.

BUNIN: It's like something out of a medieval painting, it's like a painting of hell.

KISLOV: Why are they doing it? Why don't they quit if there's no one left?

BUNIN: I don't know... to terrify us?

KISLOV: Can't they have a bit of mercy? Just stop it for one night? And that noise. That goddamn noise.

BUNIN: I can't hear myself think.

KISLOV: How can he sleep with this fucking racket? Every time I hear a blast...I feel it's the one. Heading straight for our tent.

BUNIN: He's cold. I am too—

KISLOV: You think you're cold? I'm a goddamn *plombir*. I can't feel my toes. If I lie on the floor I'm sure I won't wake up.

BUNIN: Shh. Don't wake him.

KISLOV: I could at least understand if he were exhausted from fighting all day. If I'd spent the day killing I'd sleep like a baby.

BUNIN: Goddamn it I'm so cold.

KISLOV: If only I could grab one and tear his mouth in two like a grapefruit. But even that basic pleasure...

BUNIN: Look at those blasts. They're getting nearer. They're almost on top of us.

KISLOV: They know we're here. We're dead men.

BUNIN: You don't know that. Krovachuk and his battalion could be here any day. Hell, that could be them blasting the enemy to pieces.

KISLOV: Krovachuk isn't coming. Twenty-two days. Twenty-two days we've been waiting. Protecting this useless piece of dirt. The rest of the army is miles east, or miles west. Anywhere but here. It's only us idiots left here. Starving, turning blue from the frost.

BUNIN: You don't know that.

KISLOV: They've left us for dead.

BUNIN: They could be here any day. You heard the General.

KISLOV: We're dead men. Unless...

BUNIN: Unless?

KISLOV: We leave.

BUNIN: Leave the camp? Haven't you been listening? We're trapped on all sides. Air drones, tanks...

KISLOV: We can make it through the North-side wood, while it's dark.

BUNIN: And what about everyone else?

KISLOV: They can take make their own way.

BUNIN: There's no way Grozanin would allow it.

KISLOV: If he doesn't allow it...

BUNIN: He won't allow it.

KISLOV: He'll never allow it. He's too scared.

BUNIN: They don't tell him anything.

KISLOV: Then I'm going to kill General Grozanin.

BUNIN: What?

KISLOV: The man will have us sitting on this village until we're blown up by rocket.

BUNIN: Are you out of your mind?

KISLOV: I'm not dying for his gutlessness. Have you seen him lately? He's gone barmy. He talks to himself.

BUNIN: Keep your voice down, or you'll regret it, Kislov.

KISLOV: I'll put a bullet through his skull, Bunin.

BUNIN: I can't allow that.

KISLOV: This is a fake war anyway. I never wanted to fight. It's a phony government—phony leader...Ukrainians, Russians. (*Cold laugh*) You know I have a cousin out there, on the other side? Maybe he's even over the woods there. Maybe he's looking at us right now.

BUNIN: Dammit, my toes. I can't feel them.

KISLOV: Maybe he'll even take me in once he sees me... That's a first cousin by the way. Not second, or fourth...

BUNIN: They'll find you and they won't just kill you.

KISLOV: Then it's better than dying here.

Enter General Grozanin. He holds a rifle at all times. Kislov has a knife, and Bunin has a short pistol.

GENERAL GROZANIN: (*To himself*) Count the water...doll the dividends...count the water...doll the—Huh? Identify yourselves! (*He raises his AR*) Who's there?

BUNIN: It's me, General, sir. Mikhail Bunin, sir.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Is that you Bunin? Who's that with you?

BUNIN: It's Kislov—

KISLOV: Viktor Kislov, General.

GENERAL GROZANIN: With the light I can't see, my eyes are adjusting. It's so dark with the others. Okay, okay.

BUNIN: Sir, the explosions.

GENERAL GROZANIN: (*Anxious*) I see them. That there—that's the government building. Those cowards. Why are they doing this? Do you know?

Bunin and Kislov look at each other and shake their heads.

GENERAL GROZANIN: (*Pointing at soldier*) What's wrong with him?

KISLOV: He's sleeping. He's cold.

GENERAL GROZANIN: I know. I'm freezing.

BUNIN: We all are.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Have you anything to report?

BUNIN: Nothing, sir. Although, when I stepped outside for a smoke... I could've sworn I heard something flying overhead. Far above... quiet-like.

KISLOV: UAVs. They're scanning the woods.

BUNIN: Maybe I imagined it. I've been imagining...

GENERAL GROZANIN: No, you're right. Last night I heard them moving about in the trees. I heard them whispering to each other in their language. I saw their helmets. I thought they don't know we're here, that we're far enough out from the city. That's how we've held out for so long. But then as I listened I realized: they're ground troops, sent out to scout us out. See what our defenses are like...(*Cold laugh*)...defenses. And then they stopped whispering and disappeared. So now they know. Now they know.

Beat.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Kislov, any progress on repairing the tank?

KISLOV: It's busted. Totally. For it to run the glaxis and belt would have to be totally restripped at a factory. Of course even then, it wouldn't be able to fire, the loader being how it is and even if it could...

GENERAL GROZANIN: Okay, okay. Can't you see I get it, I'm just trying to... boost my morale.

BUNIN: Is there no news from high command? From Krovachuk and his forces?

GENERAL GROZANIN: Krovachuk and everyone else is gone. Long gone. We're in the dog pit now.

BUNIN: Maybe if he...

GENERAL GROZANIN: Maybe if Krovachuk circled past the 3rd battalion and somehow, God willing, avoided the north

forces and joined up with the main army, maybe...look, all they tell me is "Soon, soon." They're making real progress. Very soon now this week is when they'll rescue you. Liars. Bastard lying cockroach maggots the lot of them. What I gave for them and they...

BUNIN: If the enemy knows we're here and they know our condition...

GENERAL GROZANIN: They'll wipe us out. No question about it. Eight men against... that.

KISLOV: We don't stand a chance.

GENERAL GROZANIN: The real question is how...and once they come, I fear to think... just...

BUNIN: Sir?

As he composes himself RUNS IN Grozanin's DAUGHTER, aged 7.

DUNICHKA: Papa, Papa!

GENERAL GROZANIN: Oh my little Dunichka. How are you my precious. Is your fever better?

He picks her up.

DUNICHKA: Papa, Missus Agafia is having her baby. She's having the baby now!

GENERAL GROZANIN: Oh. Now of all times! I need someone to take care of her. Bunin, go.

BUNIN: Sir, I've never—

GENERAL GROZANIN: Go now!

Bunin LEAVES stage.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Oh my dear... You're shivering like an aspen. Don't worry, we'll be back home soon. Once we're home we'll visit the beaches won't we?

DUNICHKA: Yeah!

GENERAL GROZANIN: And we'll drink *mors*, won't we?

DUNICHKA: Yeah. Papa, the sky is red!

GENERAL GROZANIN: I know, I know my sweetie. It's just the sun rising.

DUNICHKA: Are we going home soon, Papa?

GENERAL GROZANIN: Of course. Now go. Help the lady. You'll have to be a big girl and help with the baby.

Grozanin's daughter scurries off stage. Kislov and Grozanin are the only ones left on stage. The General wipes a tear.

KISLOV: Twenty-two days.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Twenty-three days, actually.

KISLOV: Not a sign of rescue in sight, not a sign of spring. Not a half-ration to go around.

GENERAL GROZANIN: The *fascisti* closing in on us.

KISLOV: We're all out of options, I'm afraid. And with the women and children...

GENERAL GROZANIN: I don't want to think about what they'll do if they get my little Dunichka. Kislov, I need to ask you an important favour. I've never asked anything more important.

KISLOV: General...I—

GENERAL GROZANIN: I beg you, please. If the time comes, and they decide to play with us, if they come down on the camp... (*voice cracks and tears emerge*)

KISLOV: What is it, man?

GENERAL GROZANIN: You can't let them take my daughter. And the other men and women. But especially Dunichka. When the time comes...end her quickly.

KISLOV: (*silence*)

GENERAL GROZANIN: It might not come to that of course. They might take mercy and blow a hole through the roof. But if they feel like toying with us, if they require vengeance for what we did to that poor squad... then they'll send in the men and... Oh I... I (*breaks down into sobbing*)

KISLOV: Don't wake him. Let him sleep.

GENERAL GROZANIN: I couldn't do it myself... not me.

KISLOV: Please...

GENERAL GROZANIN: (*in hysterics*) I've failed. I've failed my country, you. Oh I'm sorry. Yes, yes. Let him sleep. It'll all be over soon, yes it'll all be over.

KISLOV: Dammit, man pull yourself together.

GENERAL GROZANIN: You're right. You're right. I... am a leader. And I must act like one. I must take command goddammit. I am General Grozanin, not some sap. I must take command and—

A massive SHELL hits just offstage... They take notice.

KISLOV: What the hell are they doing now?

GENERAL GROZANIN: They're shelling the woods. They know we're here and they want to draw us out.

The General turns his back on Kislov as he stares out.

KISLOV: They'll shoot us off the map at this rate.

GENERAL GROZANIN: You know what they do to people like us. After what we've done? They won't provide us that mercy. They're going to send in the men. And not just

anyone. They outnumber us 50 to 1. They can afford to be selective. They'll choose the most savage, blood-thirsty rapists they can. Let me tell you, I fought with their kind in Chechnya so I know. You know what they do? They take a man and feed him a gallon of seed oil. They strip him and send him into the winter night to shit himself to death and to attract wolves which rip him to shreds. They take two girls who they find the most attractive, and after sodomizing them they stitch the girls mouth to mouth. The girls are starved for weeks until they're on the verge of death. Then the head lieutenant places a plate of ham between them and the girls cannibalize each other to death trying to get to the meal.

KISLOV: If there's no hope of rescue...

GENERAL GROZANIN: There's no hope.

KISLOV: Then why don't we escape?

GENERAL GROZANIN: Escape? What are you saying?

KISLOV: Through the North wood, past the battalion.

GENERAL GROZANIN: There's no chance.

KISLOV: At night, they might not spot us.

GENERAL GROZANIN: They have thermal sensors planted all over the place. Mines. And with the girls, you'd just as well surrender yourself.

KISLOV: Then what if we don't take the women?

GENERAL GROZANIN: Not take them?

KISLOV: At the least we could make it out alive and...

GENERAL GROZANIN: Do you have any idea who you're talking to? You think I'm your equal or something? You mouth off one more time and I'll... I won't abandon anyone!

KISLOV: But, the women—

A bloodcurdling SCREECH is heard offstage. STUMBLE IN Bunin, clasp his eye.

BUNIN: The pregnant lady. She took my eye out. My eye! I was just... I was just helping.. and...

GENERAL GROZANIN: Easy, soldier.

BUNIN: That fucking bitch.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Let me see. Kislov, clean him up.

Kislov cleans the eye and puts a patch on Bunin.

BUNIN: We delivered the baby, but...it wasn't feeding. She was...squeezing it to herself. Dunichka said it was cold... so I tried to look at it and...the bitch clawed my face.

GENERAL GROZANIN: How's Dunichka, is she OK?

BUNIN: General, these villagers. They don't even want us here. They don't want to be liberated. They actually... want to go to the *fascisti*.

GENERAL GROZANIN: *(deep sigh and slumps down)*
What's it all for, then?

BUNIN: I say if they're so eager to join em, let em.

GENERAL GROZANIN: What's it for if they don't even want rescuing?

KISLOV: It's all their fault. If it was just us men here...

BUNIN: It could've been a fair fight.

KISLOV: But these women. They're turning us into cowards!

BUNIN: We'd be with the others by now if it wasn't for them. Not stuck in this shithole.

KISLOV: They're dragging us down to *adt!*

BUNIN: Let them rot.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Don't say that.

BUNIN: I'm sorry, sir. It's just... it's just the cold... and the hunger.

KISLOV: Here. Have some clear.

He hands Bunin a flask of vodka. Bunin drinks. Bunin hands it to Grozanin. Grozanin drinks.

BUNIN: It's Ukrainian, sir!

He downs it in a long silence. Then he flings the flask off stage with a "clang-a-lang". From his sleep rouses the sleeping soldier.

ORLIN: Huh?! Wha!

KISLOV: It's just us, Orlin. Go to sleep.

ORLIN: Thought I heard...sleep...oh yes...mightily...

KISLOV: It's those fuckers that are doing this. They use neurotoxins. Causes hallucinations.

BUNIN: Are they really?

KISLOV: It activates the fear...receptors. It makes people turn on each other.

BUNIN: It's the night. During the day at least it's not so bad...but—

KISLOV: If only we could get face to face. But they hide behind all these damn machines. The drones, tanks.

BUNIN: EMPs, mines...

KISLOV: If I could just take a bolt-action. Like the kind my granddad used in the War.

BUNIN: Or, hell—even a knife.

KISLOV: Or even a knife, yes. I'd KILL one after the other. I wouldn't be afraid.

BUNIN: Kill them, yes...

KISLOV: But here, all pent up, for weeks on end, no sign of 'em except that goddamn noise. Waiting for death...

BUNIN: Why can't they just get it over with!

KISLOV: Keep it down. Let him sleep.

GENERAL GROZANIN: *(piping in)* Just get it over with, yes. All this torture and waiting. He deserves to rest.

The general pulls his AR on the sleeping soldier. The two soldiers lunge at him, breaking his line of sight. Kislov pulls his gun and aims at the General's head.

BUNIN: Sir!

KISLOV: Put down the gun.

BUNIN: Are you out of your mind, sir?! *Kislov, put down the pistolett.*

GENERAL GROZANIN: I'm afraid it's the only merciful solution. Only one I can offer...

BUNIN: To kill your own *soldati*? Is this what a leader does? Think.

GENERAL GROZANIN: I'm afraid, men, you have no idea what it means to lead.

BUNIN: I know it doesn't mean shooting your own.

KISLOV: What kind of an officer are you?

GENERAL GROZANIN: To suffer the cold, the hunger, only in the end to be butchered by monsters, no... ending it all peacefully, asleep: that's a mercy—

Facing the duo, he steps back and accidentally steps on the sleeping soldier's chest. The soldier—Orlin—LEAPS from sleep.

ORLIN: *YESUS MARIA! PALUNDR!* ATTACK!

He unsheathes a knife and STABS the General in his right shoulder.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Argh!

BUNIN: What have you done?!

KISLOV: Idiot!

ORLIN: What the—I'm sorry, I just thought—I saw the rifle—I heard laughing—

BUNIN: You've stabbed the General, you balvan. Help me get him up.

ORLIN: Sir, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I just...I thought it was the End and...

GENERAL GROZANIN: It's okay, Orlin, it's okay. It's not your fault.

KISLOV: He's done for now.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Kislov is right. I'm useless to you.

BUNIN: Don't be ridiculous.

SCREECHING FROM OFFSTAGE.

DUNICHKA: Papa! The old men, they're fighting with the soldiers.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Oh, my sweetie.

DUNICHKA: What's wrong with your arm?

GENERAL GROZANIN: I cut myself, is all. Orlin, tame the people. Tie them up if you have to.

ORLIN: Yes, Sir.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Go, Dunichka. He'll protect you. Well what are you looking at me for?

DUNICHKA: I don't want to go. I want to stay with you!

GENERAL GROZANIN: Leave this second, Dunichka!

DUNICHKA: But—

GENERAL GROZANIN: (*parental rage*) Listen to me, you brat! Leave me be or so help me God what I'll do to you...!

Orlin takes Dunichka away offstage by the hand.

ORLIN: C'mon, lady.

General, Bunin, and Kislov stew in silence for a minute.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Quiet. You hear that?

BUNIN: They're attacking.

KISLOV: From the south-side!

GENERAL GROZANIN: It's just one.

KISLOV: A spy.

BUNIN: Shoot him!

KISLOV: That's no enemy.

BUNIN: Yes it is. No, no you're right, it isn't.

They gaze offstage, alert, with weapons raised.

GENERAL GROZANIN: What's that on his head?

We hear pained moaning.

BUNIN: He's barely walking.

GENERAL GROZANIN: He's collapsed! Kislov, go get him.

Kislov goes offstage and returns carrying a moaning limping man with a totally bandaged head.

BUNIN: Is he one of ours?

KISLOV: No idea.

GENERAL GROZANIN: What the *chyort*...

The bandaged man walks independently for a few steps. Looks around, confused.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Well? Who are you? What are you doing here. Can't you hear me?

Then the man collapses on the floor. The soldiers look at each other, waiting for an order.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Check the bandage.

Kislov crouches and undoes his bandage. The audience doesn't see what's beneath.

KISLOV: Oh my God.

BUNIN: What?

KISLOV: Those bastards. It's Shikotov.

BUNIN: I thought he was dead.

KISLOV: Well, now he is. And...oh no...no wonder he couldn't hear you. His ears...they're gone.

GENERAL GROZANIN: What do you mean they're gone?

KISLOV: Lopped off....and his eyes too. They're just empty sockets.

GENERAL GROZANIN: What kind of monsters...

KISLOV: He couldn't see or hear a damn thing. Looks like they cut out his tongue as well.

BUNIN: Shikotov you poor sod.

KISLOV: He had no idea where he was.

BUNIN: So this is what awaits us...

KISLOV: They sent him here just to do in our heads!

BUNIN: Maybe he escaped.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Go and lay him outside. We'll bury him in the morning, when the earth softens.

The duo obey, carrying the corpse outside. Grozanin picks at his bleeding shoulder wound before the soldiers return.

GENERAL GROZANIN: (*to duo*) Men...I'd like you to finish me off.

BUNIN: Not a chance.

GENERAL GROZANIN: I cannot hold a rifle. I'm only a liability. For you, for everyone. This is proof. They're coming.

BUNIN: It's not over yet. There's still a chance Krovachuk and his men can pull us out.

GENERAL GROZANIN: The reports, that they're on their way, that they're almost here. It was a lie. I'm sorry, boys.

BUNIN: Sir?

GENERAL GROZANIN: I just thought, for the sake of my girl and for you...It's been dead silent. An EMP fried it on the second day.

KISLOV: You've been lying this whole time.

GENERAL GROZANIN: I just thought that... that a little hope might... but I see now: the only hope we have is a quick death. I've failed you, and I've failed my country. Please, make it quick.

General Grozanin surrenders himself.

BUNIN: Nobody is going to kill you.

KISLOV: Bunin...

GENERAL GROZANIN: You. Kislov, you're armed. Take your *pistolett* and finish me off. If I weren't such a coward I'd do it myself, but as I am...

BUNIN: You're exhausted. Kislov, put your gun down this second.

Kislov raises the pistol to Grozanin's head. Bunin gets in between the two.

KISLOV: It's what he wants, Bunin.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Go through the North wood. Maybe you're right, maybe you will get to safety. Without me here mucking everything up. Just promise me you'll protect my daughter.

KISLOV: We'll see to it.

BUNIN: Kislov, put your gun down, immediately!

KISLOV: He's telling us to do it. You're crazy!

BUNIN: He's silly! Out of his mind!

GENERAL GROZANIN: That's a direct order. Relieve me of my misery. Going on like this is the greatest suffering you could inflict on me.

Bunin pulls out his knife.

BUNIN: So help me God for what I'll do to you, Kislov.

GENERAL GROZANIN: (*putting rifle on Bunin*) Step aside, man. It needs to be done.

BUNIN: So. You can hold your rifle, can you? You really are a coward.

GENERAL GROZANIN: (*surrendering, totally confused*)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. You're right, what am I thinking.

The men freeze in place, hesitating in silence. Until...a'whizzing' sound overhead. They all look around.

BUNIN: You hear that?

KISLOV: I don't hear anything.

GENERAL GROZANIN: It's like a buzz.

BUNIN: A humming.

KISLOV: No wait. I do hear it. It's right outside.

After a moment of anticipation: The KABOOM! of a rocket explosion just offstage.

BUNIN: Get down!

SOUNDS OF:

1) *ARTILLERY SHELLS LANDING*

2) *GUNFIRE BLASTING*

3) *FIGHTER PILOTS ZOOMING OVERHEAD*

KISLOV: Duck for cover!

BUNIN: It's happening.

GENERAL GROZANIN: They must think there's dozens of us!

A massive ARTILLERY SHELL explodes offstage. In runs Orlin.

ORLIN: We're under attack!

KISLOV: Ha-ha! They're scared shitless!

BUNIN: Look! In the trees!

KISLOV: In the mud! Shoot, shoot!

GENERAL GROZANIN: Hand me that gun!

ORLIN: Aim for the knees, aim for the knees!

KISLOV: They're surrounding us.

BUNIN: If I'm going DOWN, I'm going down KILLING!

Bunin charges offstage, shooting and warcrying.

ORLIN: Die, you fascist scum!

Orlin follows. Kislov and General Grozanin are left.

KISLOV: (*yelling over gunfire*) General, about what you asked of me!

GENERAL GROZANIN: Yes, Kislov?

KISLOV: I'll do it. I'll do it.

GENERAL GROZANIN: No.

KISLOV: Maybe you can escape out the back—

GENERAL GROZANIN: (*with courage*) I'll take care of it...I will do it.

KISLOV: Sir?

GENERAL GROZANIN: Yes, soldier?

KISLOV: It's been an honor dying with you.

Kislov charges out. Noise of chaos, of shooting, of the villagers and women wailing. On stage is left only the General. Grozanin staggers up to call for his daughter.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Dunichka! Dunichka!

DUNICHKA: Papa! I'm scared!

GENERAL GROZANIN: It's okay, my dear.

DUNICHKA: All the noise! They're everywhere!

They embrace as the chaos of war continues.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Don't be scared!

DUNICHKA: What's happening?

GENERAL GROZANIN: It's nothing.

DUNICHKA: It's the *fascisti* isn't it?

GENERAL GROZANIN: No, my angel. It's just the army. They're here to bring us home!

DUNICHKA: They're getting closer!

GENERAL GROZANIN: It'll all be okay.

Grozanin takes out a pistol.

DUNICHKA: Will we go home?

GENERAL GROZANIN: Of course. Soon we'll have chocolate *plombirs* and warm our feet in the sun and make sandcastles...

He puts it to his daughter's skull.

DUNICHKA: They're right outside!

GENERAL GROZANIN: Don't worry...my darling...

He shoots her. She drops dead. At that moment all noise of chaos stops. No shouting is heard and gunfire ceases completely. It's almost the End.

IN RUNS Kislov with a big SMILE across his face.

KISLOV: General Grozanin. It's Commander Krovachuk. It's the allies. We're saved. We're saved!

He sees what his General has done. The curtain is about to close.

GENERAL GROZANIN: Ah...

His daughter's corpse is slumped over on the ground. Celebratory cheers are heard offstage.

GENERAL GROZANIN: We're saved. We're saved.

There's nothing to be done and the curtain is about to close.

CLOSE CURTAIN. THE END.

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LOST

LOST: All of my teeth. I was hanging out at my favorite gas station (the one where the owner doesn't yell at me for sleeping in between the ice machine and Amazon lockers) then some motherfucker comes up and knocks me out and I woke up with no teeth. I want my teeth back, man. Reward: this bag of barbecue corn nuts the guy left with me, I hate barbecue flavor.

LOST: my foreskin. If anyone has knowledge of its location please advise. It should be a little wrinkly. 123-4567

LOST: Naked woman. Handcuffed (not by me). Scars on chest (not by me). No eyes (not by me). Last seen in Brixton. Answers to "oh my god are you okay ma'am what happened?"

PERSONALS

Attention Demiurge: Fight me, cunt. I am not just pissing in your cornflakes, I AM the piss. Come taste piss fist you metaphysical bitch cyst. Contact: up your ass.

ISO Pen pal with interests in cryptography, foreign languages, and symbolism. Must express knowledge in steganography, homophonic substitutions, hash functions, and dead drops. Not interested in dis-cussing the Zodiac killer. If capable send a Signal to:

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