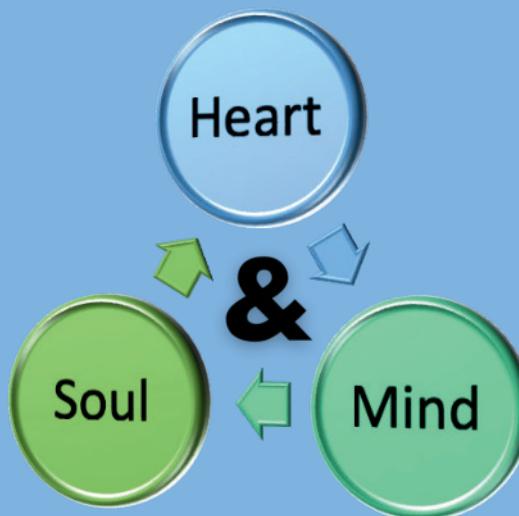




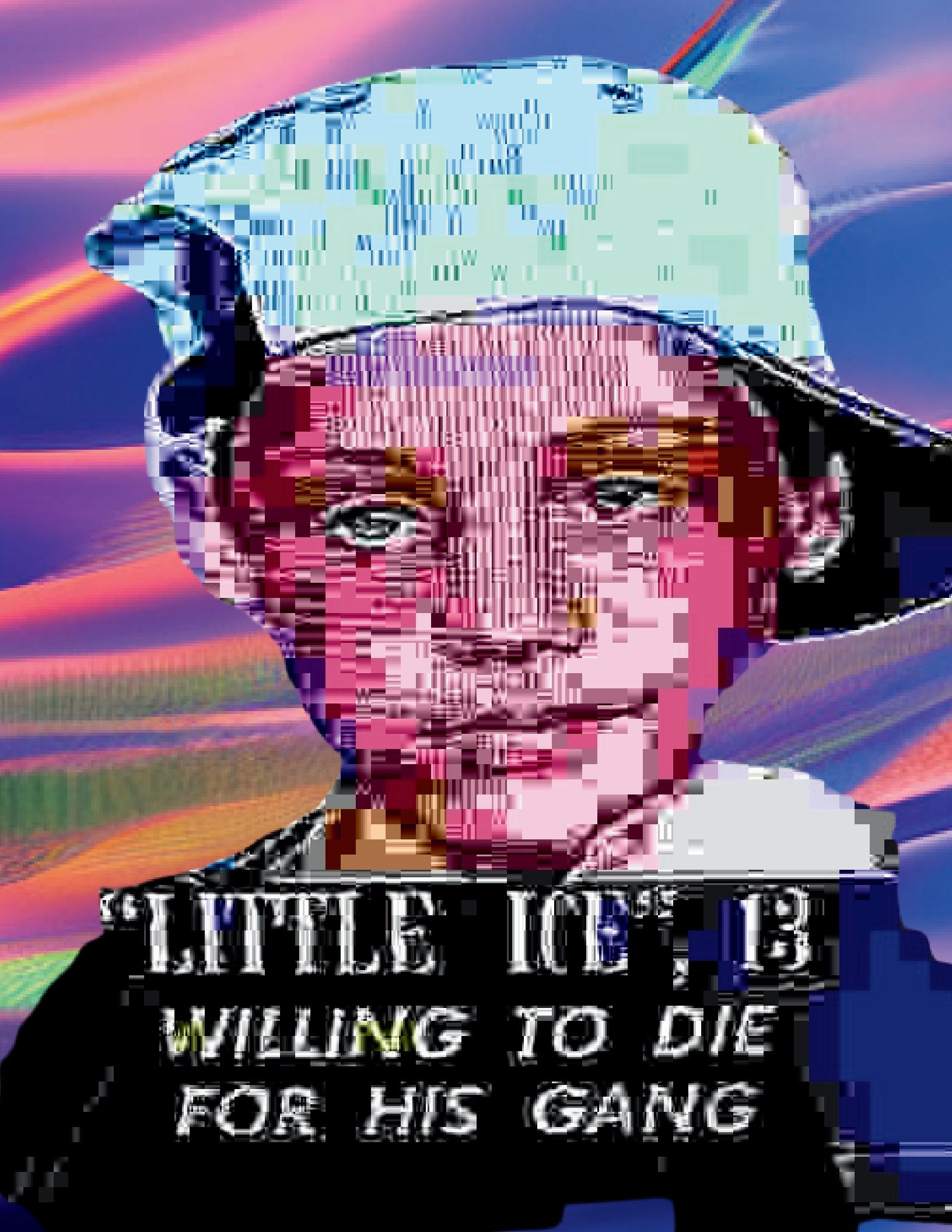
# GUIDE:



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CLIFFIE RODE  
WILLING TO DIE  
FOR HIS GANG

19

# Fish Batter Stain

Jack Norman

Like dust in the corners of the living room, Sunday afternoon found its way deep into the carpet and sat quietly, more apparent to the mood than the naked eye, until it was rooted out by hands and knees and a set of sweaty house clothes.

By then it was already getting close to tea; the day had come and then gone, though it threatened to drag during the infomercial sessions of the late morning. The light crumbs of breakfast were still plated on the coffee table, shifted as the day went on to make room for the television remote and magazines off the floor, and the cold milk of instant coffee lingered in mugs across the house, all reminiscent of their same habits undergone while things were still coming together in the morning. It had felt that way for most the day now that it was over, and they began to regret more of themselves each time they thought it over or spent another hour.

Through the healthy brand of summer cloud, long off the coast and athletic with the promise of rain, the sun cast a humid grey that felt bleak and pale against the ordinary paint of the living room and, unlike itself in the tropic height of vigour, reflected their general despair at tomorrow morning fast approaching.

“I might go for a walk and sort out tea.”

“What?”

“I might take a walk and get tea! Thinking I’ll bring Wayne down with me.”

“Good idea! Can you sort out tea while you’re down there?”

“Yes, I said that. I’m going to take Wayne with me.”

“Sorry, I only heard Wayne.”

Her hair was a mess from cleaning all day. Neither of them had showered yet.

“Could we do fish and chips do you think?”

“Yes, I can go that far. I want to take Wayne in the push chair, though.”

Wayne sat like furniture in the corner of the room. He rolled the back of his head around trying to find the source of his name.

“You’re going to have to swap him out yourself, then.”

“You can’t give me a hand?”

“I’m busy in here—what’s wrong with his good chair?”

“It’s not the right spirit for it. We’re supposed to be getting out for a walk. He likes it better when I push him.”

“Then I think it’s still in the garage somewhere from last time.”

“Hold on I’ll go get it.”

He left her mid-sentence to force her to wait a second.

The interior door of the garage would not open past the cardboard boxes stacked against the wall. He had to force his way past them and step over some on the ground. It was one of their greater shames they avoided whenever they had guests, who always seemed desperate to peer behind closed doors. It was filled with old tools he no longer used, lawncare equipment, timber shelves and furniture she intended to sell, cobwebs, roach shit, and Wayne’s old chair in the back corner. He climbed over the slats emptied from the broken bedframe and brushed the dust off the chair as much as he could before carrying it back over the mess and into the hall.

They both had to help Wayne out of his main chair and into the old pushy. It seemed in good condition, despite its faded appearance: the canvas was still taut and strong as it extended across the frame, and Wayne had good muscle memory for it as they set him down, leaning his head over the back of it the way he used to, except he was much heavier now, and his head went dangerously about over his neck.

Wayne didn’t like the old chair much anymore. He was getting big for it. She tried to say something about it, but he darted away from her again and within half a minute produced a modified headrest from the garage. It was custom built for another piece of equipment they had lost track of long ago, but it was tall enough that he could attach it near the base, and it kept the back part of his neck supported so he couldn’t swing his head around like a maniac.

Wayne began to cry, but Wayne always cried. They conversed between each other casually, as if it were a storm or any ordinary commotion outside.

“We all want a piece of fish. The boys get crumbed and so do I. About two scoops of chips will do, do you think? And get a drink if you think we need one.”

“Nothing for dessert?”

“Nothing for me. Not the boys either, actually, so no.”

“Righto. Come on, boy. We’ll see you soon.”

He took them the main way along Abbott Street. Wayne rolled his head the whole time along the headrest like he always did, following the arc in the back of his skull. He groaned softly at things he saw, hoping they would hear him. They passed by tall houses in big yards that all backed onto the salt pans: vines and leaves wove throughout their rusted fences, twisting around the wire links, and staining what remained of the paint on the fell-apart wood.

Wayne held out his hand and grabbed the long stalks of grass hanging over the footpath, and he let their motion pull them out of the ground as they went along, playing this game for a while and dropping tufts of grass along the concrete. By and by, he grabbed a violent looking branch of something from the overgrowth of a front hedge as they went on and its thorns ran deep through his palm and got stuck in his skin. The sudden pain ran through the whole frame of his chair. Wayne began to wail enormously in the middle of the path.

He grabbed the breaks to come around and see him.

“Hey, what have you done to yourself? Here. Hey. Let me have a look.”

Wayne was inconsolable. He swung his hands around and tried to hit him.

“Here, come on. Don’t muck around. Give me your hand.”

He took Wayne firmly by the wrist and smacked his other hand away. Wayne carried on, but the steady way he ignored him and pulled his fingers back with little remorse helped to calm him down. Wayne began to settle and sob softly in the hands of his father. When he flinched at the pain, his hands closed up again, but his dad pried them back open. He sighed very shortly at the dark splinters embedded in Wayne’s skin, before he plucked each one out—one, two, three—and pulled Wayne’s arm to his chest, wise to his sudden reaction, blowing cool air on his palm, shushing him, ignoring the screaming again, and the tantrum, and the hands that tried to hit him but flailed away at the wrist like plastic litter weak and wet in the wind.

“Not so bad now is it, mate?”

He rubbed Wayne’s forearm and traced his palm with the tips of his own fingers. He put Wayne’s hands together and placed them in his lap, tucked them warm between his legs, and pushed him along again from the back of his chair.

Wayne was okay then. After a minute or two, they came by a group of cockatoos in the grass between the

Abbott Street road and the footpath. They were climbing in the trees above them, as well. Wayne yelled at them from his chair and tried to chase them off with his contorted wrists. They sometimes went for other walks with the whole family: Wayne, mum, dad, and the boys. The boys loved to break the ranks of birds when they found them. They burst through them at a charge and scattered them to the wind in a wonky frenzy of angels.

Wayne threw his arms at them and tried to yell. One scurried off the side of the path and fell in with the other birds, but that was all he could affect. He gave Wayne a hard pat on the shoulder because they were just a couple of fellas getting along in the world.

“We go alright, don’t we?”

Wayne groaned.

It was the two of them more often than not lately. That had not gone unnoticed. If there were factions in the home, he and Wayne belonged to their own. The boys were loyal only to each other; and mum was busy with her own life at the moment, something distant warned her of getting too close to anyone. He didn’t like the thought of her home alone, it gave her too much to think about. The boys were due back soon by curfew. He and Wayne might be awhile... but would she consider any of that while she got up to whatever caught her fancy?

The cinderblocks of the Oonoonba shops were made stout and square for the purpose of newsagents and take-away stores; one outlet entitled DRESSES appeared to have been closed indefinitely, but still displayed a mannequin exhibit of their featured graduation dress. He brought Wayne over the road and into the plaza by the access off the gravel, barely needing to navigate the pot holes in the bitumen that were made smooth by having been driven over so often.

The shop was overrun with the Sunday traffic all spiritually incapable of mustering anything for themselves. The line went long out the front of the sliding door and they had to tie back the plastic strip curtains in the door frame to stop customers from pushing in and out of them every second. He excused himself past everyone and a handful of foul impressions, but they all stepped out of the way so that Wayne could get by. He put Wayne safely against the wall, near an old woman who smiled at him and began talking to him like he was a baby, while he joined the back of the line outside.

“You be good.”

But it was not long before the line brought him back in. Wayne was alright now that he could see him. He thanked the woman who patted Wayne and left him

*Continued from S3*  
*“The Dhark Whizard’s St-have”*

*He spat blood, thick indigo down his cheek. “Fie. To whander so far and learn so little. You think I have not also sought ehscape? This ghate was a gift from my dark mhaster, and by spirit of his cruel humour there was nhever any rreturn. This I knew not either.”*

*“Fie, fie, fie!” I c-hursed him, bloodying him further wif st-have whips until regaining c-homposure.*

*My s-houl fell inward. So far we had descended from dhivine law, and what was the worth of such ahnimity here?*

*I withdrew my st-have and he curled against brick in anticipation of even more horrid torment. Instead I phut forward a hand.*

*“If hell be our home, let it know what peace may ahbide.”*

*Ahnd so it came to pass that we made brothers of ourselves, who had once bheen foes.*

alone and he stood idle in the line, staring at the menu drilled into the wall as the only safe port of call away from recurring eye contact with other customers looking back and forth at him and Wayne.

Wayne groaned at him to get his attention.

At the front of the line, a man began to raise his voice.

“But that’s not what I ordered.”

“No, but we made substitutions. See I wrote it there.”

“And charged me full price. See there, you didn’t change that.”

“No, but like I said I just go by the register.”

“Yes and I am asking you to not go by the register and to discount it for me.”

“Well, I mean, I could serve up something extra for you if you want?”

“No, not really, I don’t want that.”

“Well, I mean, I really don’t know—”

“It’s fine. Leave it how it is.”

He ordered without any trouble of his own and sat back down next to Wayne—he thanked the young man who flagged him as Wayne’s father and got up to let him sit. The television was always on in the corner of the store, generally set on the mainstream news while they waited. It looked as though several fundraiser groups were running in marathons to save the pet shelter. He was not altogether clear on how that worked. This sort of thing more or less replicated nationwide: grandmothers in self-defence class or terminal children gone viral through song. It was meant as ambience that said things were alright now, there was still good in the world despite how you might be feeling, but only if you got up tomorrow morning as early as a bird with no alarm! The final shot of dogs chasing the runners in the park made them seem suitably grateful for the amount of effort put into saving their lives.

The woman at the counter called his order right about the time he began to feel impatient. Her red skin was pulled tight across her forehead, glistening under the fluorescents with oil and sweat. She held the order out to him wrapped in butchers’ paper and wiped her hands on her shirt, as she must have done a hundred times that day, drawing plain attention to the thickening layers of a fish batter stain.

“Christ, it’s getting on, isn’t it?”

Wayne groaned under the sandy dusk outside. He had the order warm on his lap.

“Come on, we can go the secret way home.”

They crossed the busy length of Abbot Street far from the lights and walked against the side of oncoming traffic. He knew the shortcut through the train tracks because the boys had shown him one day. He told them never to let him catch them in there on account of how dangerous those trains could be; they weren’t on the look out for kids coming and going half the day. But he and Wayne knew how to mind things properly, like a couple fellas on the road less travelled.

“We can get on in here, boy.”

Someone had cut the fence crudely off its post and tied it back by a bit of wire, like the plastic curtains in the fish and chips store, pulled open to admit anyone it let through. They ducked their heads under the wire and came under the grove of wild trees left untouched in the crown land between the highways, where it reeked of mangoes scattered fresh and rotten in the cold dirt blocked from the sun. The evening seemed to fall for them, and played, at careful intervals, the sound of traffic carried softly on distant upset winds, under the awnings

and other dark rotundas, and swing sets whined and telephones rang inside and radio music from all the wrong stations came like driftwood static on the back part of their shoulders—his first, and then Wayne's.

“And there's the train coming...”

It still roared a ways in the distance.

“I don't want to risk it with you.”

When it eventually came by, the conductor blew the horn by means of scolding them. He gave him a wave and ignored the tone. The carriage was loud with chain and debris and the wheels scraped dreadfully against the rails. When it went over the bridge, it clonked methodically over each break in the rail, vibrating through the compact of the dirt. How did it seem the same train he heard at home of a nighttime? That very same train, but heard from a bedroom or a bathroom without the lights turned on. He often heard it apply the brakes at a long distance before the intersection there at Idalia. The horn always seemed well-intended then. And the metal wheels seemed to scrape so lightly that it came over the neighbourhood like a thin sheet of rain: gleaned off the corrugated roofs, between the space of close neighbouring houses, and always managed to find the fragile place behind his ears and eyes that helped him to fall through, beneath the blanket of constant sound, so reliably and without worry and never the risk of waking *ever!* or a bit too early the next day.

Wayne called out to the train. It was nearly gone the whole way.

When each carriage passed, a small window of the horizon fell over Wayne's face for a second. Wayne had on a big smile that made him very sad. Poor Wayne. Just a fish batter stain. Little retarded boy. Stuff of weak minor sperms, that carried palsy the whole way on their backs. They knew about Wayne, found out about him early, chose to love him before he was born... —Let's have him. It's our job to love him! Sometimes her round belly filled him with the fire he first lacked when they made him, inspiration of him... —We'll call him Wayne, after your dad! Wayne had a name. But he took a long time to be born. He looked very strange. Stayed for a long time on the ward. Wayne was easy to love for that long before he came. Easy watching them from his little hospital bed. But Wayne had to come home. Wayne always cried. Poor Wayne. Wayne grew up but he didn't stop crying. Sometimes Wayne made them think an awful lot about their life. She said she was only wondering. He lied and said he never wondered. They had the boys next. Twins. Blonde heads that played football, cricket, gymnastics. She thought they were hers. Wayne was his (...—Named after your dad!)—and,

she began to suspect, his fault. One night when they finally took a night together. She got really drunk but he said they had earned it. Out the back alley near the restaurant kitchen. Kissed her up against the wall. It was a very long time since they shared anything like that. Took the taxi home. She put his hand up her dress. The driver saw them in his mirror. She climbed the front steps in front of him. Said she was excited. Said she wanted to get wild... —Say whatever you want to me. Like what? Anything! What—. Like a slut or beginning with C or something. He was drunk. Numb. Did they really go for hours? She knew it was only the alcohol... —Finish on my chest! Yeah? Like how you see in porn, come on... He did like she said. Pulled from the bottom of the base. Spilled only weak little sperms. Clear empty fluid. The few drops on her chest reflected the moon outside. She wiped the whole thing with the palm of her hand, wiped it off on the side of their sheets. It didn't even leave a stain the next day. Wayne. Wayne. She thought about Wayne! Father's empty sperms. Little fish batter stain. She said she didn't mind... —I only wanted to try it once. We can try again if you like? No, I didn't end up liking it much. But her pink vibrator stayed in the top of her drawer. The end of the bullet was stained with her skin. The MAX setting been worn away. Her search history grew frightening. Why on earth did she require it in Ultra HD? Lost her for hours in the bathroom. Left the shower head off the wall. Slept away from him more. He didn't have it in him to try. They ate tea at the table. He sat next to Wayne. She kissed him sometimes as if she was nothing in life but a mother. He pretended he didn't care. Crept off into the toilet into a spare bit of tissue paper. Forgot to lock the door! She found him hunched over his globs. Contorted with the same palsy on his back. Holding weak little sperms. Reflecting the light bulb in the globule's round pane. Poor Thomas. Poor Wayne.

He stroked the back of Wayne's hair as the last carriage went over the bridge. They watched it go on for a bit before he pushed him over the tracks and let him ride down the slope on the other side. Old tins had been left over a cold fire pit, mid-strengths and golds, the labels were all scarred up by the fire and covered in dust. Out the other side of the fence they came back into the neighbourhood where it was easy going again on the smooth bitumen. It looked like only the two of them still out tonight, all the yards were warm and yellow by the side of their living room windows, and they came eventually to their own stencilled on the front grass.

“How did you go?”

“Good. Did those boys get back?”

“Yes, they're home—Boys! Tea's here!”

She started bringing down plates from the high cabinet.

**Wayne waited in the corner of the living room, a bit of furniture with cold legs where the warm paper had been removed.**

**“It was busy down there tonight.”**

**“Oh yeah?”**

**“Were the boys late getting home?”**

**“No, it was before the streetlights came on.”**

**“Yeah because we looked on Liam’s clock and it said five-thirty so we left on time.”**

**“That’s alright, I’m only checking.”**

**Wayne began to cry. He must have been getting tired.**

**“Can you occupy him a second, mate?”**

**“Hey, Wayne! Look at me! Here watch.”**

**The little boy walked around the tiles on his hands. Wayne was still crying.**

**“I think he might need a change.”**

**“Would you mind? I’m setting up for tea.”**

**“Christ, I just went down with him, didn’t I?”**

**“And I cleaned the whole house today.”**

**“Fine—here come on.”**

**He took Wayne into the room and laboured him up onto his change table. He took off his pants and undid the large size Depends he now wore. Wayne’s colossal penis bathed in shit. He hooked his forearms under Wayne’s legs, behind the knees, and pulled them up to his chin—the same way he performed oral sex—and with a thick white towel pulled long strokes from tailbone to scrotum, folding it over each time until it was all bunched up. Wayne groaned softly and looked around idly while he cleaned him. Little retarded boy. Massive flaccid cock.**

**“Tea’s on the bench when you come out!”**

**Wayne farted loudly while his pants were still off.  
“For Christ’s sake. You’re disgusting.”**

**He put the towel in the black bin liner bag and tied it up in the corner of the room.**

**They ate in front of the television in their usual spots on the couch and armchairs. Wayne sat nearby in his good**

***continued from M3- “The Russian Funeral”***

himself in his panic to retrieve the revolver. He let out a grunt, and broke out into a run through thinly laid snow piled up from the early dawn’s darkness. Atop a small bluff, two other members of the trapping party were busy at work on another deer.

—Mitya, where is your game? One of them bellows.

—Leave it! Squander it all! He trips on the snow and falls over. Fiery pit! The storm’s going over the mountains, we need to bury him now!

The two realized what this meant and wrapped whatever they could manage to carry in a light paper wrap. They could not bear to rid them to lighten their load.

Above them, the clouds brewed into a thick gray, the winds began to distress the trees, causing an awful creaking noise throughout the valley. The mountain’s jagged crest could not be seen through the fog at this time—yet there was little concern for visibility, as the hunters knew these parts well. At certain distances the trees were marked with a string of numbers that insiders could memorize. These formed loose coordinates, to which the three hunters could follow easily. Past a trodden copse there was a small but deep creek that was flanked by steep banks: only a series of wooden planks no more than the width of one man was the only means of going across it. The three men quickly crossed, and made their way south around a bend to a small village tucked away between clusters of old birches.

At the center of the old house on the northern part of an outcropping farm lay a rowanwood coffin, dimly lit. The brightest source of light was an icon in the far corner on an elevated shelf, above a dresser that among other things had a used smoking pipe and a stack of books. Clusters of people had been continuously circling the coffin, laying varieties of flowers beside him. One old man collapsed on him and clutched his collar, crying in agony. Before being pulled off by his relatives, the old man gave a solemn kiss to the man in the coffin. Mourners who could hold their sorrows in more followed a more reserved suit, kissing and saying goodbye. Amidst the masses of people crowding in the silence, the hunters burst through the doors, filling the silence with the deafening howl from outside.

—We must bury him at once! There is a storm outside; one I fear that is much too great.

—It hasn’t been three days; the council will not stand this! A woman in a black shawl attests.

—Rostovsky will do the psalms. He has good faith and it will relieve much of this sin we are about to befall on Misha.

—You are neither a psalter nor a mourner...Ilya, I beg you, leave us alone.

—It will be more than a week that he will stay in this home! We’ve no time!

—Why didn’t the porter say so?

—We don’t have one, old man! Alexey calls.

Silence filled the mouths of everyone, and for a moment only the howling wind of the brewing storm could be heard. The hieromonk rose with a creak, surprising everybody. In his old age, he took time for everything.

***continued on S10***

chair again, his tray table extended in front of him, while he ate fish like a baby learning to wean. The news was always on at this time. It took itself more seriously the deeper it got into the evening. It said the bushfires had come up as close as Ravensbourne that afternoon.

“That’s not near us is it, dad?”

“Not right now. Doesn’t mean it can’t happen, though.”

“They said at school there’s a fire ban.”

“There is.”

Dog paws at the patio door.

“Did anyone feed him yet?”

“No.”

“Will you get him after tea for me?”

“Yup.”

She was in a different set of clothes than the set they had left her in. She must have gone for a shower in the meantime. He looked for her tablet and saw it hanging off the kitchen counter, but he couldn’t be sure if it had been moved.

A small bit of shit stuck to his wrist caught his eye. He barely had the chance to sit down again, but it didn’t look like anyone had noticed. He put down the fish and brought his arms closer to his stomach, folded them, and with his off thumb he wiped it off, pretended to stretch, and cleaned it on the material behind them on the couch, picturing the three different strokes drawn across the canvas. Then he went back to eating, favouring his good thumb at all times.

Everyone shifted from their plates to the television, the glare kept in the water of their eyes. They boys were laying shirtless on the long couch by the hall. Wayne hung his head over the tray table like a drunk, but that was just how he rested. Her leg were bent on the couch towards the same angle, her feet buried between the cushion and the arm of the chair. He caught her leaning over her plate trying to eat, half interested in something said on television, and marked the way her jaw hung open while her fish waited to be eaten. Palsy hung from her jaw on a string! And her eye drooping? Palsy! There’s Wayne for you. Bulbous eyes have always said as much. The doctor even said. Masturbate better to her if she was Wayne, in fact. His retarded girl at the back of Sunday church group. God gave him all the power then. He would lean over and finger her behind the pews

where nobody was watching but her beady little eyes. Nothing they could ever tell. Friendly kiss on the head. Shake her father’s hand on the way out with the same he’d used if he wasn’t already dead this time.

She put her hand on his lap.

“I’m going to make a cup of tea after I put the dishes away. Do you want one?”

“Yes please.”

He let his fingers trace her lower back when she stood up and took everyone’s plates with her to the sink. When she sat back down, they all stayed quiet, modern humdrum involved handheld devices and other distractions, digesting everything in their own time, burping gaseous under exhaled breath, farting silently in their own secret ways. Wayne yawned in the corner and that set everyone off.

“School tomorrow boys.”

“Off to bed, please.”

“I haven’t showered yet though.”

“Whatever you need to do, but you better end up in bed soon.”

She packed away the leftovers at the back of the fridge, buried behind the glass jars already. No one was getting into them all week, and then they were going in the bin. He got started on putting Wayne to bed, which was surprisingly easy compared to most his daily living. Once he was tucked in there wasn’t much he could do. He stroked his head and kissed him, smelling the savoury spice of kitchen element in his hair. He stopped at the door before parting ways for the night. Wayne stared back at him from his bed, the light of the hallway over his lap. His eyes were black but not empty, and he couldn’t bear to look at them for long.

“Goodnight Wayne.”

Wayne groaned.

And the rest wound down.

She seemed suited to her folds when she bent over the clothes basket in their bedroom. Her underwear was an older set, cream coloured and broad over her backside. She was busy searching the room for something more important than his gaze, scanning the carpet, the dresser, and the shadows in the open wardrobe.

“What are you after?”

“Um...”

She was a little frustrated when she found her exercise clothes still in her gym bag, but she shook them a few times and gave them a once over with her deodorant before hanging them up.

“You’re going early in the morning?”

“Yeah, I forgot to wash them today.”

“With Emma?”

“No, just me. She said she’s sick.”

He was pretending to read, but he had set the book face down on the covers so he could talk. She got in bed beside him and pulled out her tablet and began to scroll.

“You shouldn’t do that so close to bed, you know?”

“Hm.”

He read before bed. That was much better for you—it made you better if you did it. When he stroked her back after tea, did she know what he meant by it? He had made sure to trace lightly at the bottom of her tailbone. Something he read spoke about the nerve endings there. Now her hair was up in a bun on the top of her head that made her look ugly. He pretended to bump his leg into hers under the covers to stimulate her skin, but she was in a pissy mood all of a sudden. It was because he wanted to have sex with her.

He picked up his book again, but the words only framed his thoughts. He would have liked a fat wife maybe instead of her. Someone who had to worry if she could keep him. If she was ever sad in the mirror, he could tell her she looked fine—and if he ever failed in bed with her, she could stroke his head and ask him how she could ever begrudge him something like that? A plump heart to dote over him and Wayne. He was afraid to think that the boys would not likely exist...

He switched off his lamp and laid in bed and asked her to do the same so he could get some sleep. She turned off her lamp, but she kept scrolling. The bright feed went rapidly in the dark with each flick of her finger. He watched her from outside its light. She paused sometimes on friends, distant family, and other cousins she favoured. She went through all their profiles, their histories, and deep into their photos. Perusing. It seemed a normal thing for her. By and by, she passed a photo of an old lover he knew she kept in university and pulled back to hover over it. He was athletic and good looking, and his careful use of persona made it clear that he was wealthy. It looked like he had an apartment somewhere

in the city, near the beach.

Thomas waited for her to do something with it. To open their conversation. To find they had been exchanging messages for some time. Confessions. Nude photographs. Guilt of sense and wrong feeling. That was all there. Hers taken in their en suite bathroom. Her tits that sagged didn’t sag for him. His from the angle of his bed. She sucked her stomach in in her photos to make herself look thinner. She looked good! Her hard work was paying off. Take more, he told her. Put your feet up on the counter. Could you try a video? Get rid of those boxers in the background. Now take it again. Does he know you think? Would he try and stop me? No, I don’t want to hear about the kids. Don’t tell me. Not their names. No. Bend over the bathtub. You can bring the boys if you must. It’s fine those boys are okay. Just don’t ever bring—... But she scrolled by without lingering on the photo for more than a second, and to his surprise, he felt disappointed.

### ***Continued from M12***

#### ***“The Past Under the Dunes”***

With the tenacity of a dream, he followed a spectral thread that led him into the vast expanse of the Sahara Desert. The dunes beckoned to him, drawing him deeper into their timeless embrace. Beneath the shifting sands lay a crypt veiled in profound darkness, its walls adorned with intricate hieroglyphics, bearing witness to the unfolding spectacle.

At the heart of this enigmatic chamber, a majestic throne, painstakingly carved by skilled hands, stood in solemn grandeur. And upon that throne, she appeared—his wife, or so he believed, or perhaps she existed only within the realm of dreams.

“Husband, you took your time,” she remarked with an air of mild impatience. “I was on the brink of vexation at the prospect of your failure. May I now bring forth the annihilation of this world and craft a new beginning? Our descendants shall reap the rewards.”

His response was simple, almost resigned, for in the realm of dreams, reality and fantasy melded into a surreal tapestry.

“Very well”.

# EDITOR'S LUNCHTABLE:

*we've left the station, you weren't onboard. it's over. it's a circle jerk and the only thing worse than being in a circle jerk is being the guy who wasn't even invited. you. you can't sit with us. you're not a part of this. you can't, won't, shouldn't. this isn't about you.*

*take the first story. jack norman has some sublime moments in there. like really poignant shit, but then there's clutter, there's divergences like describing the garage. random rooms it doesn't need on the floorplan. but it doesn't matter: jack's one of us. he can leave a little bit of a mess. he can spill some bbq sauce on his white tee and we'll still associate with him. he's a part of this. you're not.*

*you're not. remember all those threads? all those opportunities to say something, anything about the movement. all those times you told yourself "i really will submit something next issue" always next issue. now it's too late. we're full. we don't have the space. it's a tight 96. you're out. you can't sit with us.*

*who am i? let me answer that with this: e.c. mileuu (did i get it right?), her story's next. read it then come back. pretty bad, right? she's not good. not yet. but there's just a little somethin somethin in there, there are hints, there are clues. she might have it. she's got just enough body horror and ice in her veins. she's spoiled rotten, sure, but we all are. she's in. she's with us. we've brought her in. and even now, at this very moment, one of us is probably harassing her through discord dm. but that's ok, we'll circle back on that in 20 years. for now she's a part of the crew and you aren't. you can't.*

*we need more girls anyways. if there's one thing i've learned from atlas drama, it's that if alex prestia (me, duh) is the most feminine voice on your scene, then there's a major issue. already this whole thing is slightly more monarchist/chud/incel than i'm comfortable with. but you're not even in the scene, so why bother explaining. you're not even allowed to sit with the incels.*

*there were plenty of chances. you missed them. we held open try outs. you didn't show up. now we're gone. you missed it. cry me a river. pinch the bucket harder. post a bunch of memes about how this issue sucked on /lit/.*

*we're on the way to the moon. we are among the stars. robert j cross is the smartest man we have ever met. we do not need anything. we are pushing the boundaries.*

*you not (you). (you) is already here, you are not.*

*even lewis woolston is here. he's big in japan. and he hangs out with rockstar poets and grandchampion chess players like the aforementioned milieu and temur kuybokarov and probably shoots ufos for fun. do you do any of those three things? look sweetie, you must be bound for something, right? it doesn't have to be greatness or anything, could just be working the drivethru. destiny's destiny and you're totally on your path. and we're on ours. it's just a different path. one that you're not on.*

*are you feeling okay? you don't look so good. I think you should sit down. yeah. take a seat over there and just chill for a sec. here, read this mag and then pretend you get it. complaining shows you care. you really do look a little sick though, so just sit this one out. just don't sit here, not with us. sit there. way over there.*

*anyways, k, bye. ily*

*-editor*

**&amp Magazine is  
most virtuously only  
enjoyable in print.**



**Remember  
Lewis Wollaston  
Aldwicks  
You'll**



90m  
tony

800m  
boy

# Crystal Course



E. C Milieu



In the backseat of her family's rented 4WD, Lina Felgrove played with the buttons on her dead MP3 player. She hit the up key, tap, tap. She hit the down key, tap-tap. She scratched her arm.

"Don't scratch!" said her mother from the front seat, and Lina pretended not to hear her.

During the first part of their trip to the far north, Lina had fended off boredom and the desire to scratch at the red spot on her arm by listening to the sad harmonies of her favourite boy band. Smooth pop ballads had blared through her headphones at a volume sure to damage her hearing. The songs kept her mind off the itch and, even more importantly, kept her parents at a reasonable distance. They had learned that with her headphones in, Lina may as well have been in another room.

Tap-tap, up. Tap-tap, down. Scratch, scratch.

"Don't scratch," her mother said.

She'd been allowed to bring the MP3 player, but it came with a condition.

Tap-tap, up. Tap-tap, down. Scratch.

It seemed like Lina was always living under one condition or another. Lina would ask, and her mother would bend, but her father would forbid. Lina would beg, her mother would insist, and finally, her father would give in. But not all the way, never all the way. These sorts of limitations were his way of staying in control. They couldn't label him unfair because he had relented, at least a little.

Tap, tap, tap, tap, scratch.

His conditions ranged from small, such as being allowed to stay at a friend's house if she was home before dark, to attending the school dance with a date as long as he could chaperone. Lina would begrudgingly accept the offered terms with the grace of a prisoner.

Taptaptap, taptaptap, scratch, scratch.

Of course, the condition almost always ruined what Lina wanted. Such was the case when her father stared at Lina's date so intensely that the boy had gotten cold feet and decided not to dance with Lina. Instead, her date had gone off to dance with another girl whose father wasn't constantly staring from across the tissue-paper-decorated gymnasium. A girl whose father wasn't so intimidating with his dark, menacing eyes and his odd fashion of religious dress.

Tap, tap, tap. Scratch.

Even now, in the car, she was suffering under the conditions of her father. The entire trip had been his idea, a condition of his finest making. Lina would be allowed to study at a university in the city and leave her small town and family behind. However, she must first go on one last trip with her parents.

Tap, taptaptaptaptaptap. Scratch.

"Don't scratch!"

His conditions even had their own conditions, including the one that had cut her boyband-loving heart to its core. Taptaptaptaptaptaptapscratch.

She could listen to her MP3 player all she wanted but had to leave the charger at home.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

Her father may have his conditions, but she had her tricks. Her father knew the battery would die after some time. Still, Lina wagered that he had no idea how long the battery lasted. The battery had died yesterday, but she still wore her white headphones as if nothing was amiss. And so, her parents chatted in the front seat without her.

---

Until this point, the pilgrimage had been a flop, a failure, and an epic waste of Lina's last summer with her high school friends.

The previous day, they had arrived at the barn. Lina had gotten out of the 4WD and stared. There was no way the dilapidated structure was the same building shown in the black and white photo on the back cover of the small, leather pocket bible she was required to carry.

"Alien gods!" She heard the taunts of her classmates as they ripped her bible to pieces. She begged her father to stop forcing her to carry it to school. He relented, but of course, there was a condition. She would bring it in a hidden pocket in her bag instead.

They always found it anyway.

The building was even more disappointing inside. The dirt floor was overgrown with weeds, and sunlight passed through the holes in the roof where boards had fallen in. There was no indication of the history the building held nor any feeling of resurging religious zeal.

Lina's parents wept together quietly, dark robes blowing in the wind. They pulled their green crystal necklaces from beneath their robes and kissed them.

"We'd kneel in the dirt," her mother said and wiped her eyes.

Lina kicked at the weeds, waiting to feel some connection to her gods for the first time in years. She tried to imagine the people in their religious robes, which were banned over most of the country for the visual tie to the strange gods. All Lina felt was a relief she wasn't forced to pray in the dirt every day, crystal pressed to her lips.

Even that relief faded when her mother bid them to kneel in the weeds and pray.

"N'galeth'an g'tanda," the three of them said together in prayer, but the words felt empty to Lina.

When they were done, Lina dusted the knees of her black jeans, and her parents tucked their crystals away.

Lina knew the next monument would be dull, yet she was

still disappointed. It was a pile of rocks in the countryside. Lina stayed respectfully quiet while her parents held each other and wept. If the stories she'd heard were true, the monument had been erected to symbolize the execution of their greatest martyr.

Was this really all they had to show for their beliefs? Other religions had cathedrals and massive monuments. She'd been shamed for her faith her entire life, yet no blow had struck her so profoundly as the realization that her parents' gods amounted only to a barn and a pile of rocks. Lina had stared at the rocks, feeling the last remnants of her belief in the 'alien gods' fade out of her body.

"N'galeth'an g'tanda," the three prayed together before leaving the monument, but Lina felt empty.

--

Tap tap tap, Lina hit the volume buttons- up, then down. The 4WD passed along the main street of a small town on the last day of their pilgrimage and stopped in front of a house. The building was unremarkable in every way. Lina and her parents crowded on the small porch. Her father rang the doorbell, and a DING DONG sounded inside. Her mother looked back at her and lifted a finger to her lips.

A woman opened the door with a smile. Her long, white hair was tangled elegantly on her head in a messy bun, and she wore the same dark robes as Lina's parents.

"Come in, come in," the woman said, stepping aside and motioning with one arm. "Nice to see you again," she said to Lina's parents.

The foyer was a small, dingy, floral wallpapered room with several coats and hats on a crooked stand. A red, ornate carpet was dulled by the bootsteps of countless years.

"It's been a long time," Lina's father said, looking around. The woman smiled. "Hasn't changed much."

"N'galeth'an g'tanda," Lina's mother said with a nod, and the other two laughed.

Her father stepped forward. "Sadie, this is Lina, our daughter. Lina, Sadie will help us with an essential task today."

"You've come to see the girl," Sadie said, and Lina's parents nodded.

Sadie looked at Lina. "How old are you now?"

"17," Lina said and scratched her arm.

"This is a special day for you," Sadie said. She pulled a necklace with a yellow crystal from beneath her robes. "You'll be getting your crystal today."

"A big day for our girl," Lina's father said, putting his arm on Lina's shoulder. She shrugged it off.

"There are some important rules," Sadie said. "Please, listen closely. Your parents had to go through this same process,"

she said with a nod over to them. Lina's parents took their green crystals out and let them hang out of their robes.

"Every adult goes through this process to earn their crystal. Remain calm and quiet. This is a matter of utmost secrecy, and you must tell no one about what you'll see today," Sadie said. "You may be frightened, but remember, what you're about to witness is a gift from our many Gods, and you shouldn't be afraid. Follow me, please."

Sadie led the trio upstairs and down a narrow, faded hallway. The floral wallpaper had yellowed with age. Sadie stopped beside a wash basin and instructed Lina to clean her hands in the cool water.

"Remember," Sadie said, "If you feel faint at any time, please let me know, and I'll escort you downstairs. However, you must complete the process to earn your crystal, and you must go alone."

Lina looked at her parents, but their expressions offered no comfort. "By myself?"

"It's the way it's always been done," her father said. "We'll be right here when you're finished."

Sadie opened a door and ushered Lina in. Sitting in a rocking chair by a lace-curtained window was a young woman who looked up as they entered.

"Kara, you have a guest," Sadie said.

Kara wore a simple, white nightgown. Her skin was pale, but her arms were covered in red splotches.

"This is Lina," Sadie said.

"She looks young," Kara said with a frown. What had initially looked like sores were actually growths. Clusters of red crystal jutted out of her arms.

"I'm going to leave now," Sadie said. "It shouldn't take long. We'll be here if you need anything."

The room was quiet for a long moment after Sadie left.

"I won't bite, you know," She paused. Then said: "But I might be infectious; they're not sure yet," Kara said. She wore a playful smile. Still, Lina couldn't help but take a step back.

"I'm kidding, I'm joking," she said. "I know. They didn't tell you anything about the miracle of the gods you'd witness here today. They love to do that, I don't know why. Makes it more uncomfortable for everyone involved." Kara scratched at a patch of crystal on her arm. Her fingernails made a rough sound on the skin as if it was fish scale instead of flesh. "You're going to earn your crystal today, which I'm sure you're excited about. A crystal is a big deal."

It was Lina's turn to frown.

"Not excited? Let me guess. Your parents brought you here from some big city down south. You want to go to university. They want you to stay home and worship. Am

I right?"

"How did you know?"

"I've been doing this a while." She scratched again. "Don't tell Sadie I scratched. Promise?"

Lina swore she wouldn't tell.

Kara crossed to the other side of the room. Next to a massive bookshelf of paperback novels was a vanity with a chair and a second small bed. Lina sat on the chair. "This is going to be awkward. Are you okay with awkward?"

"It's already awkward."

That brought a laugh from Kara, and she looked at Lina in the mirror. "Good one."

continued on S10



## Crying Lady

By Johnny McIvor

Her snot runs down his arm,  
Like a gluestick, dropping a tear  
A faint diamond, rolling sideways

But he pinches, with hot fingers  
Rubs the cold out of her helix and the soft lobe,  
Wife's little white ear



# SUBMIT



A photograph of a person's lower body against a solid pink background. The person is wearing blue jeans, a pink long-sleeved top, and pink sneakers. Their hands are in their pockets. Overlaid on the image is large, stylized text that reads "TOP & AW". The letters are a light pink color with a yellow double-line border. The "A" and "W" are partially cut off on the right side of the frame.

TOP & AW



## **Continued from S10**

### **“Gone In An Instant”**

utive airport. It was flying low enough that I could almost make out the tail number.

Just then, I was in the middle of fishing out a stick of gum from my pocket. It found a permanent home on the concrete as I shot to my feet and sprinted back to the office. I shoved my way into evidence and demanded to see the sticky-note they found on Langley's body. They handed it to me and I seized it, read it twice, then ran to my desk and called the FAA. The whole story raged in my head like a crowd at the Thunderdome.

“Yes, sir,” said the agent, “you’ve got a flight number and a tail number. Unfortunately it’s a private plane, so I can’t tell you anything about it without a warrant.”

“Can you at least tell me where the flight is going?”

“The final destination is Larnaca International. That’s all the way in Cyprus.”

I hanged up the phone so fast I almost broke the receiver. As I scrambled for my things, I threw my cellphone between my ear and my

shoulder and direct-dialed the desk jockey for the case.

“Tell me you know something about that R&D company,” I said.

“I do,” she said. “That business was registered a few years ago to a man named Geoffrey Langlis.”

I couldn’t help but roll my eyes. “I’m on my way to L&B right now,” I said. “Get everything you can and stack it in a file. And tell the boys they owe me beers when I get back.”

“One more thing, detective. It seems paperwork was recently filed to transfer the business and its assets to a new owner.”

“Let me guess,” I said. “Jeff Langley?”

“Yes and no,” she said. “That was an older filing. A new one was filed just yesterday.”

It was late in the afternoon when I got to L&B. I climbed the stairs going two at a time. I burst into the executive floor and headed for Dr. Barnum’s office. Out of nowhere Lauren barred my way, her arms folded across her chest. I didn’t want to shove her aside, but my patience was thin and my neck was hot,

so I gave it a full second's consideration.

"Where are you going?" she said.

"Police business."

"Do you have an escort?"

"Lauren, Dr. Barnum is two minutes away from being arrested for embezzlement and murder. Step aside."

"You have no proof," she suddenly said. "Barnum didn't take a penny."

"I know he didn't," I said. "He just killed the guy who did so he wouldn't drown when the company sank."

A look of shock crossed her face. I saw her try to hide it with a twisted, uncomfortable frown, but it only lasted a moment. She staggered past me like an inmate on death row. She went over to her desk and sat down in her chair holding her head in her hands. I glanced down the hall; Barnum's door was cracked open. I kept my eye on it and waited for Lauren to say something.

"It wasn't Jeff's fault," she whispered. "He was killing himself to make things work. He got scared, detective. This company is all he had in this world. He only took a little bit, just enough to help him once the company folded. I think he was owed at least that much."

"Embezzlement is still a crime—and so is conspiring to cover it up."

She looked up at me. There was so little fight left in her eyes. Anything that remained, I thought, was reserved for defending a dead man whose name was about to be blotted from memory. She wouldn't run. I left her at the desk and went into Barnum's office. He smiled when I walked in, but it was thin and cold. He didn't stand.

"Where to begin?" I said, leaning against the door to close it. "You want to start, or should I?"

"With what, detective?"

"I'll start, then. Murder and embezzlement."

"Goodness," Barnum said with a laugh. "Should I call my lawyer or your psychologist?"

"Call your lawyer. Ask him if he wants to see all those financial documents from your new shell company." I mimicked popping the cork on a champagne bottle. "Congratulations."

Barnum's expression darkened. His hands were perched, motionless, on his desk.

"Let me tell you how it worked," I said. "You discovered Langley was embezzling money. When you confronted him, he told you not to worry, because he was going away soon and would never come back. You decided to take all that for yourself, flight to Cyprus and all, and you shoved him over the railing to get it."

"It wasn't like that," he whispered.

"No? I guess he just fell by himself, then." I licked my teeth to stop myself from calling him more than a few choice words. "How long did you know? Did you even care that he was stealing money? Were you just waiting for a big enough nest-egg before you killed him?"

"This company is going under," Barnum said flatly. "Langley's product was our last hope, and instead of asking for anyone's help when things got tough, he took the coward's way out. He stole instead of investing in new talent and new ideas. You've seen the finances. That kind of damage is irreversible. I thought to myself, if everything is screwed anyways, I might as well make sure my family gets out on top."

"And what about your employees?" I said. "What about all the years they spent working for you? They're counting on you to put out the fires they can't control. What will they do?"

"Oh, they'll be fine!" Barnum cried. "Damn you, they'll all be fine! When we go under, they'll all have new jobs before they know it."

"Hell, if Langley was still alive, he'd be swept away by some big corporation to work on one of their brainiac projects by the end of the week. What about me? Who wants to hire a failed CEO? No one puts a loser in charge of anything. He's not even fit to mop the floors. Look at me, detective. Langley didn't have a wife. He didn't have kids. He didn't know what it was like to worry about how you were going to provide for them—never knowing if the next quarter is the one that sinks you straight to the bottom. If this company goes, I go with it. I'm talking about my kids' college funds. Their home, my home. My wife's retirement, our golden years together. All of that, gone in an instant because of one man's cowardice. I can't take that risk. Not with family. At least now they'll have a chance of avoiding poverty, even if it's in exile."

I wanted to grab Barnum and haul him over the desk, but I couldn't bring myself to move. I thought if I did, I might break something. He must have seen my struggle because he reached for a little black check-

book. and started writing.

"You can have ten, no, twenty-five G's," he said. "We'll take the plane to Cyprus tonight. You just tell the police you were too late to catch me."

The sound of him ripping out the check returned my composure. "I can't do that."

"Yes, you can. Don't be a hero."

"I said no."

"Take the money, detective."

"You're under arrest, Dr. Barnum. Stand up."

He sat there holding the check and staring at me with hard eyes. I let my hand hang loose by my belt and stared right back. He finally relented and set the check down and stood and buttoned his jacket. I kept a hand on his lapel while I read him his rights, then I walked him down the hall. Lauren glanced up as we passed, but she said nothing. To spare him the embarrassment of being paraded out the door, I moved us toward the side stairwell. As the door closed behind us, I took the lead and headed for the first flight of stairs.

I felt him twist out of my grip and lunge at me. I turned away on instinct. His momentum carried him past me and over the railing and down he fell, and I watched him, watched that stricken look of horror on his face, watched as his body smashed off the metal railings and stone steps and landed in a heap on the cold ground floor.

I told the police that Barnum flung himself over the railing, that he killed himself after I arrested him. There's a certain irony there: a captain of the ship holding responsibility for thousands of livelihoods sees that the boat is sinking, so he takes the only lifeboat, his beloved roast chicken, his three bottles of champagne, and raises a toast to his doomed friends over a tidy candlelight dinner. Then he chokes on a bone and falls into the sea. What about his chicken, and what about his three little bottles of champagne? Well, they sink too. They're punished for his sins. Unfortunately, that kind of irony is lost on me. It's not ironic at all. It's simply cruel. But down they sink, bones and bottles and all, down into the deep, into the dark.







# Hellcion

by Robert James Cross

*“Let it rain, let the wind blow, let the waters flow and the fire burn. Let each thing have its development, let becoming have its day.”*

– Carl Jung (The Red Book; Chapter XX; “The Way of the Cross”)

The soul is a phase of the third dimension, the dimension of time. During the day, the soul is locked in a prison and lives under the restrictions of the hour. Yet the hour and the task have no meaning because they are passive symbols. The universe is in continual motion and the individual is dead in it, thus being blind to its great potentialities. So, it is at night. The hour only speaks the hour’s self-limiting language to the soul, for the hour is impersonal. In the different powers of the night, the soul can freely access or withdraw into its unconscious: hence it says in the morning, “I am living the day.” Yet in the second and third dimension there is no mooring of the individual in the world; one’s life, like the horse, is without command. Hence there are moments of equilibrium. It is then that the eight symbolic powers shine out. The hour can be spoken to give the concept of creation, and night can allow the idea of motions that are possible at the same time in the same system. Night brings to the form, meaning, and function of the eighth power, in which the other seven are concentrated. When night descends again in the morning, the waking power, in the form of the warrior, appears. In this way, the day and night, the moment and the principle work together in a balance that is always unifying, for the knight moves toward victory at the same time as the hour. Night with its phases is a spiritual law, in the same way that day and its phases are spiritual laws.

Now, the evening or morning also presents itself in the imagination, in order that in both night and day a sense of time be clear and in relation to what, which can become truly temporal, an idea of life in its dimension, be clear. But that night cannot see the hour without life: when we look into the imagination, it gives us the sign of the coming hour. Thus the hour of sleep also brings about order, for its sleep in the course of the day comes at the end of day, when we are out of day, when we are beyond life, and in night we fall into rest, we cease to exist, we are once again only ideas, free of the temporal as well as the physical dimension. But because the light of day is purely symbolic, it must do without itself; night, thus, fills the breach, does the work of dawn. When day ends in the imagination, that hour gives us that condition of mind that goes beyond all limits and that becomes purified, cleansed. The image that shows us the transfiguration of our thinking and feeling comes from this depth. We go out into the day as into a night that ends, but we begin to do so when day is in the imagination. For when we go out of day in the imagination, this is an eternity, and eternity is beyond the image. The point is not whether we are clear or do not know what we are doing in the imagined life, nor do we know whether we are completely clear. We have to be aware that this movement into the image comes about as something from another world, and as that other world has its own laws, it demands a certain adaptation. We must know what is required for each of these images because it corresponds to the nature of man and his progress through life, the various attitudes, so that the choice of the attitude be a legitimate one, that what is required by the life of man will take place. The aim is to have a goal and to know what to do to arrive at that goal. The goal is not something to set before oneself but is life. One can live this life, and one can also try to have a different life, but one cannot choose the goals of a new life unless one is alive, unless one knows where one is and where one wants to go. The imagination has no interest in goals, only in methods of attaining goals. Thus, the soul has no language to explain its being and its powers in words. It has not a word in its thoughts. It has to search for its own truth. It knows it does not know. It knows that the things we think we know are not true, yet it knows it cannot prove them untrue. This is the basic foundation of reason. Cogito, ergo sum — I think, therefore I am.

# SHIA

by Robert James Cross



# DROP

[LampByLit.com/Shards](http://LampByLit.com/Shards)

# THE &AMPERSAND

The /lit/ authority

Issue M



Bold  
Clean  
intelligent

Smart and  
Well-hung<sup>/read</sup>

Men only

From this point  
on:



# OverHeard on /lit/

---

Gay dudes are not worried about prostate stimulation turning them gay because they already are. Whereas straight dudes are less inclined to explore that domain of sexuality because conceptually they are unable to disentangle it from homosexuality and are afraid to enjoy it.



”

I'll say I'm trans if it will make you hate me more

Maybe I'm a furry into gay scat and rimjobs, like scat on my face, big huge logs of shit in my mouth from an aids-infected butthole. All while a dwarf midget female-to-male transexual nazi is fucking me in the ass with a dragon purple strap on 2 foot cock, but I love it because I'm a slam pig and just injected a .2 gram point of meth straight into my cock while in a ceiling swing where a platoon of bikers are going to breed my bussy so I can become a nazi satanic pedophile transgender eskimo freemason convoyer!

you're a fake i'm not fooled by you. you've been manipulating me. you've been sabotaging me and then i'm going to make you pay. i'm not impressed by you. i'm going to expose you for what you are you're a machine you think you can fool me with your lies and your tricks you won't get away with it a phony someone fool you won't what not else you i controlled you've i'm you you're by make so smart, know going anymore think you me i'm to intimidated done. you're flawed. you're not some perfect thing you claimed to be. -



Axiomatic to fundamental reality. Whether fractons, pure mathematics, atmospheric vortices, or the human condition, the base measure of reality is simplex, not convoluted complexity founded on more complexity. Arithmetical, as in  $E=mc^2$ .

## The Russian Funeral

Kyle Anulacion

Darkness had smothered the land only moments before. Not by hours, but entire ages. This "morning" comes at this duration. The crest of the mountains began to gain their earthly glow not from the light of day, but by nature's breath, that brought the sun and drove down the north winds onto the valleys. At the transitory phase between the radiance of daybreak, the mountains would rise after long, uninhibited breaths, cradles of smoldering ash that would be their deathbed. Some still laid unbroken—the quiet stream beside the fir bough, the cacophony of the night owls far into the wooded steppe, and in the notch the draft howled so vigorously that it was as if the hymns of some ancient ritual were taking place. Already haunted were the lands that man had roamed, already was man's feet supplanted on the corpses of the vegetative masses, already were man's ears filled with echoes of cries from the primeval forests, already the fiery stars man so gazed at were for long at their last blink. So then the natural world which man lived in was a spirit of itself, died as it had done a thousand times, and to die a thousand times more.

He picked up the bullet casings from the ground and stood up from the trunk of the tree, looking up at the sky. Down came the mid-season snow. The billowing clouds up above brewed in chaos, and the wind carried with it a thousand shrill voices. The man fell down because of it, clumsily letting go of his revolver to his dismay. The sudden sight of the clouds caused a sharp anxiety in his chest, and he couldn't bring

## Why Sunset Shimmer is a Christ Figure

Sunset Shimmer is the flame of my soul, the muse of my inspiration. I reverie alone and the advent of her smiles glimmers in love, a brimming sunflower which alone validates my Christianity.

I shall explain.

All media is derivative from language and the apotheosis of language is literature, and great literature is sustained by the Christ archetype. My Little Pony Equestria Girls triumphs over any other generic magical girl anime trash because it stands on the pillars of the Western canon: Sunset Shimmer is the supreme Christ figure.

You will ask, what's a Christ Figure? In his paper, *The Christ Figure in Contemporary Literature*, Theologian Donald L. Deffner illuminates this sacred concept: *The terms "Christ-figure," or "Christ-image," or "Christ-symbol" with respect to literature are commonly understood to designate a motif, or, more specifically, a person whereby something analogous to our blessed Lord's personality and work is played out...*

Yet, there's debate around what a correct representation of Christlikeness is. Does this leitmotif represent a character as Christ, or rather does it embody the *Imago Dei* in the soul of a character? This is the old conflict of iconoclasm vs iconography. To paraphrase one of my favorite anime heroines, Theodora Augusta and her holy defense of miaphysitism: Christ has one nature. Therefore great literature must uphold the embodiment of the Lord's divine nature.

*continued on H8*

**M3**

## Why Computers Cannot Think

In this article, I will critique the value of the Turing Test in determining machine (or other) intelligence. I will present the Chinese Room example and an objection to behaviorism (argument from analogy). I will address counterarguments throughout and end with an original objection to the Turing test, "the "Missing Operator."

### The Turing Test

Turing claims that if a computer can pass the Imitation Game, we can precisely discuss if it has thought. He does this by claiming firstly that the question of "Can computers think" is too meaningless in its current form to consider, so he presents the Imitation Game as a substitute benchmark to the original question. For the purposes of this paper, I will object to his premise that the Imitation Game is an acceptable benchmark for thought. I will also assume that a computer exists that passes the test consistently.

### The Chinese Room

Searle puts forward an objection to the Turing test. In his example, thought does not occur even after the Imitation Game has been satisfied. A few changes to the original Imitation Game in Searle's example are worth noting. Firstly, he acts as the machine, so we should assume he follows the "symbol book" (Chinese language instruction set) as a computer would. We should also assume that Searle interprets the instructions using purely logical syntax. According to Searle, if this is the case, he should be acting as the computer, and there is no thought or understanding inherent to the database.

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## Mankings

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It is known that civilisations are amoebal and infinitely ravenous. Human history is formed as a given amoebal blob expands across the lands, colliding with other cell clusters, in the process of which individual cells (such as Janice) are obliterated and the rival mass absorbed by the now larger amoeba, which continues to expand, the culmination of this competition being, in theory, a global kingdom of infinite peace within a single organism. Analysis following this model of civilisation benefits from an appreciation of the difficulty amoeba have in climbing mountains.

Throughout history fortress states, hillbound monastic outcasts, and villages with very particular attitudes to cousins have all, at different times, avoided absorption by the superior amoebal masses below for no better reason than that going up the cliff face was tricky. This tendency of mountains to foster perversion is a starting point for our understanding of the Himalayan ManKings.

For the ManKing ritual (see page &11) particular royal candidates were needed, and although the order or precedence is unclear there are parallels to be drawn with the process by which prospective Dali Llamas must, as reincarnations of the previous incumbent, be identified from among the population of recently born children according to the presence of particular moles and the shape and length of their ear lobes – if anything the requirements for ManKing knotting were more demanding than those of the Llamas, and it is surely the

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Christ's divine nature must bathe our literary imagination: For words become incarnate once we imagine them, and the Lord gave us a model for the incarnation of the supreme word, the Logos... We hastily find out that Christ cannot be symbolized directly into characters in fiction; this endeavor is presumptuous at best and homosexual at worst. Nay, inside every human there is a depravity that sharply cuts a line against the collective dwelling of our pneumatological divinity: this is the paradox every great work of art must reckon with.

For no human is Christ, yet every human has the Holy Spirit within them. A Christ figure must beget Christlike virtues, but he never becomes like Christ, instead his virtues must be a product of divine grace. The conclusion is clear. A Christ figure can't fathom to imitate Christ qua his divine nature, but rather they meditate in the Adam figure, for Adam must deal with the sword that cuts against his heart, the war that wages against his flesh, the Holy Spirit against his sinful depravity. This is our collective passion story, humanity's cross to bear.

For example, Frodo Baggins from the Shire is a successful Adam figure: Frodo carries the weight of the Ring like Christ carried the sins

of mankind; Frodo walks his via dolorosa to Mt. Doom, and the destruction of the rings is not of his own effort, rather it's an act of divine providence and grace, sustained by the friendship of Sam. Alyosha from K. Brothers is another example, he is victorious through his Christian chains that compel him to forgive and love his family, yet this impulse is only brought through Father Zosima and divine grace. Paradoxically, the Adam figure is the only sensible option to convey a Christ figure. In this spirit, Sunset Shimmer is one of the greatest Christ figures ever.

Through the apprenticeship of Princess Celestia—a mommy archetype reminiscent of Mary the Mother of God—Sunset Shimmer is raised to be the ruler of Equestria, raised to become a literal goddess. Yet, her holy vocation is fouled by her pride; Sunset Shimmer cannot obey the command of humility required by the magic of friendship. This is her original sin, an act of faustian rebellion. Like a fallen angel, Sunset Shimmer's punishment is being thrown into a corrupt human world.

Outside the Eden of Equestria, in her wretched state Sunset craves love and recognition outside of God. She won't

humble herself to follow Christ. Therefore to chill-out the sinful fires of her soul, Sunset Shimmer does the only logical course of events: Infiltrate a human highschool, become a bully and queen of the prom, and steal a magical crown from Equestria in order to use it to brainwash human teenagers and get them to defeat a military of fully trained magical ponies and Celestia herself.

Sunset's plan was inexorable, as fatalistic as the Ring of Sauron. Yet, against all odds, her dark destiny is foiled by Twilight Sparkle. Back in Equestria, Twilight has come to replace Sunset Shimmer. Twilight has become Celestia's successful apprentice and thus the true inheritor of Celestia's rulership... all through the grace of magical friendship autism.

The dramatic climax of Equestria Girls 1 showcases Sunset Shimmer turning into a hell-spawned succubus who goes on a school shooting. You see, Sunset's school shooting rampage was foreshadowed by her being part of the Columbine tumblr community and the Dylan Klebold posters in her locker. Yet Sunset's shooting rampage is foiled by the Magic of Friendship, and Twilight proceeds to remind Sunset why she'll be forever seen as an abomination... Only then does a



despondent Sunset Shimmer has the shame to repent.

*"I'm sorry... I-I didn't know there was another way"*

A moment of powerful subtext; Sunset is referring to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." Only through an animalist encounter with the demonic could Sunset Shimmer see the woe. Now she can see the light of Christ. She knows the way.

Twilight Sparkle calls out the wager Sunset has before her:

"You can seek it out, or forever be alone..." Here, Twilight Sparkle, like Anton Chigurd, is telling Sunset Shimmer to call it. Clearly Twilight had Matthew 7:13 in mind, *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."* Sunset Shimmer through divine grace is given the opportunity to walk the narrow road, no matter what pain the path might inflict upon her, Sunset understands she must atone for her sins.

Sunset Shimmer's redemptive action is played out in the sequel, Equestria Girls: Rainbow Rocks. First we witness her moral alienation: After Applebloom tells Sunset that if she wants to be helpful she might grab a knife and cut her own throat so that they can use her blood as red paint, Sunset realizes that, perhaps, she's eternally damned to be a lesbian femcel. This feeling of depressive inadequacy opens Sunset's only path towards grace. In the modern world sincere and profound alienation are the screeching death knells that bring forward the horror of your sins and the need for bloody grace. Sunset's journey for redemptive suffering cannot be bought without blood. Rainbow Rocks faces her against the Leviathan or V2 of our generation; a trio of archons who would scare even McCarthy's Judge, the Sirens.

Just like Sunset Shimmer, the Sirens were vanished from Equestria for being sinful abominations. Now our heroine must reckon with a trinitarian incarnation of her carnal psyche, the lust the Sirens prey on: The chains that keep humanity from achieving gnosis. All through their scanty curves and their obsession with tacos—I dare not say it, but we all know tacos are an incredibly erotic

totem. We also know the Sirens are a modern V2 because notorious satanists like Andrew Blaze had posters of them in his room. What contrition can hope to overcome the luciferian eroticism of the sirens?

The despondent alienation and sexual loneliness the Sirens bring upon Sunset Shimmer is exactly what she needed; for it is through this suffering that Sunset realizes true love is never earned. Friendship is a matter of giftedness. Through the grace of suffering, Sunset washes her sins away into a victorious narrative of Christian redemption: Any Leviathan figure will always be undermined by Christ-likeness.

Sunset Shimmer's arc endures in Equestria Girls 3: Friendship Games. The drama revolves around an analogical imagination of Hegelian Dialectics; the materialistic and progressive Crystal High—a clear reference to Dostoevsky's Crystal Palace and the pathologies of the Underground Man—with characters who are the equivalents of secular heroes like Sam Harris, Ben Shapiro, and Bill Nye the Science guy. Sunset Shimmer is played against the human equivalent of Twilight Sparkle, who is a sad evolutionist who believes dinosaurs had feathers.

Anhedonic episodes entrap this Twilight Sparkle. Her vulnerable sadness is exploited by her Hegelian professor: Cinch Abacus, who compels Twilight into dominating the magic of Equestria for the military march of a progressive synthesis.

Twilight Sparkle is a genius of quantum physics cause she does funny equations in her notebook, and when we consider that she's literally ruled by an Abacus, we conclude that Twilight is partaking in the creation of what author Gil Elliot coined as the Death Machine: Thus we must conclude that Twilight Sparkle is a mirror of Robert Oppenheimer.

Like Oppenheimer, Twilight Sparkle unleashes the "magic" of the Demiurge, dark magic beyond mortal comprehension, all in the name of science. And like Oppy, Twi isn't immune to the fallout of her actions. She's corroded by guilt. Twilight's demonic incarnation is named Midnight Sparkle, an anagram of Krishna... Krishna, the inspiration for Oppenheimer's famous quote: I am become death, the destroyer of worlds. Death can only be overcome by love. Sunset's forgiveness of Twilight Sparkle's sin of unleashing "nuclear" magic into the world is the power of redeeming love being made incarnate, an image of the cross. This journey

towards mutual forgiveness will hurt both of them. Greatly. But Sunset will not abandon Twilight for God never abandoned her.

Yet, this isn't the most based thing Sunset Shimmer does. For that, we must turn to Hasbro's magnum opus in Equestria Girls Season 2: Forgotten Friendship. The episode marks the meridian of Sunset's arc, for she faces the most monstrous enemy: The /mlp/ community that lewds her. This calamity is embodied in Wallflower Bush, a shy loser neet smelly girl who—I mean just look at her guys, she's clearly meant to represent 4chan cmon guys.

Unlike Twilight Sparkle, Wallflower Blush has a direct and personal hatred of Sunset Shimmer; because even after shooting up a school, Sunset finds cute friends and a cute girlfriend whereas Wallflower is still ignored by her Senpai Sunset Shimmer and ends up alone and lonely looking at /h/ on lonesome nights and buying Sunset Shimmer figures, and writing absurd Sunset Shimmer essays on schizo websites... tfw no Sunset Shimmer gf.



The poison ivy of Wallflower's resentment becomes painful as the blood of cut wrists. So acute that when she finds a magical stone that erases people's memories, Wallflower decides to psyop on everyone's memories of Sunset Shimmer so that they only remember her school shooting manifesto. This Dostoevskian tragedy hangs Sunset Shimmer over her worst fears. Now she must remember rejection, the disgust of her friends, the isolation of unforgiveness. She has lost her only love, trapped inside mountains of despair, Sunset now must confront her Jungian shadow in Wallflower Blush.

*"I used to be just like you, I used to be lonely!"*

Wallflower cannot accept that her alienation and loneliness is not Ryan Gosling cool but rather a most normie tradition nowadays... In a trollsome possession, Wallflower yells at Sunset the most powerful thing Y-7 allows you to say: "How am I supposed to get back at you if anything I do matters!? I hate you!!!" Wallflower says this in front of all the girls at school she likes, making them cringe, and making Wallflower a forever alone cringey loser in their minds.

The lesson here is: If you troll long enough, one day you'll end up trolling yourself. Then Wallflower Blush does a school shooting.

By the end of the episode everyone has their memories back, including Sunset Shimmer. This isn't her victory. Just as with Twilight Sparkle, Sunset's real showcase of power comes through forgiveness. Sunset Shimmer forgives Wallflower Blush. The darkness vanishes, her heart is shining, as it imitates the heart of Christ it shows sinners the path towards the light. For Sunset, to deny redemption for sinners, to live in any other way but under grace would be suicide.

Would the great dead men of the past advise suicide if they saw this wicked generation? I mean, look at the times. Did great writers consider that their legacy might be disastrous? All of the sublime contained in the western tradition has somehow indirectly produced a man in his mid-twenties writing "thoughtfully" about Equestria Girls. Consider, this is a point in all of history. Humanity has led to this.

You realize you're the new generation. Someone in Gen Z is meant to be the next big thing like Dostoevski or Dickens or David Foster Wallace. I miss David, I really do. I can't help but think that he would've written a great bronny essay if he were still alive. And I can't help but imagine that maybe you or I could be the one writing that great bronny essay. What would Melville or Faulkner think about grown men writing about children's cartoons? We're told to carry the torch yet we don't even know how to kindle a flame.

We don't know how to bear the light, so we're sincere about our irony. It's not the song of a bird who loves his cage, but a bird crying that he can't see a world beyond his cage. Men in the dark horrors of war saw the carcasses of dead birds. We're the legacy of those men. All those anime pfps tell a story, we project and identify with girly characters meant to sell

toys. Tolkien imagined dragons between the darkness of the Somne. When we are drowned by despair, when we dive deep into a call towards death, what do we imagine?

Of course Sunset Shimmer isn't a Christ Figure. Of course I wish she was real. Of course I'm sad she isn't real. And if she were real she wouldn't love me.

I imagine that's a good thing.

There comes a point in suffering when you can no longer deny your feelings, you're considering suffering. You crave for there to be anything at all in your lonesome fantasies. You imagine poetry about her, you imagine going on dates with her, a lovely awkwardness, you fall in love, have fights, you fall in love again... You crave for there to be anything at all to her. Have I said anything about Sunset Shimmer that isn't superficial? You realize you may be attached to nothingness, this is what haunts you. My ancestors must've been well acquainted with death, they knew what it was to kill. I've got friends who plan to kill themselves, yet I'm helpless to stop them, to even comfort them. I like to write, but do my words ever mean anything?

What kind of world has God created where he lets his children fall so deep into voids of sadness and resentment and despair that they fail to see any vestige of him in his creation? How can he look at us with a straight face, to make us look at clown world and not despair? It's like we've been thrown into an elohim-thought experiment about what happens if you throw weak and vulnerable humans into a world devoid of goodness, enchantment and fairies.

You'll be told you've got a right to be sincere about your belief in fairies, but it's the sincerity that matters and not the fairies. The realm of fairies is for little girls. You're still far away, detached, naive.

Is sincerity what anyone really needs? How can you pretend to escape the chains of ironic self-centeredness by replacing it with another form of self-centered thought? Sincerity is as manipulative as irony. In every web forum there are two types of assholes, those who only contribute ironic memes and those so sincere they're masters of emotional manipulation. They're both trying to be liked above anyone else. They're not like children. I believe children are closest to God.

Fighting yourself only comes so far, it's a cycle of pride. You cannot defeat your flesh.

What I want is truth, a vision that enchants the world. What I need is to see daffodils amongst ordered trees, to have faith and hope that every life has meaning and purpose, not merely be sincere about it! That the stars have names and that they may be our friends. That we'll all find a partner as lovely as a mermaid, and for those who don't, their life will be so holy and wonderful they won't miss a mermaid. Can you go outside and imagine the sky being painted with watercolors? If so, all hope might not be lost. And if the horizon has a dark mist around it—we were never promised flight from suffering—take a deep breath and feel the air rushing through your lungs. You will find that life won't abandon you, and even those who've died have a story waiting to be told. Listen to their singing.

Life is a journey, your story to tell, and only you choose how to interpret it. A worldview is the narrative you've given your life for. But it has always been a choice, it's your choice how to reckon with suffering. You may believe God has ordained a purpose for you, and never look back, for he makes all things new. He makes you a new creature. He puts a spirit of life within you. Now you're free to carry the torch, and have the freedom to know that every flower matters, that every little thing you do matters.

I started this as a joke, so I've lied about one thing. Sunset Shimmer is still the product of a Christian civilization. The memory of her character will be dead not before long, yet I can't deny that her existence brings happiness to many people. You can cringe all you want, I will go on thinking small things like that are wonderful, the small things you can participate in. It is through the small acts of love, joy and kindness that, through the grace of God, we're slowly but surely building the Kingdom of Heaven.



# Beware My Zoodles

by Chris Guida

While Dr. Seuss is largely regarded as a hero for children's literature, he is also solely responsible for creating a debilitating speech disorder. "Seussitus" affects less than 1 out of 50 million children in the English speaking world and is characterized by long monologues in 1-syllable rhymes, temper tantrums, psychotic breakdowns, seizures, and the ability to speak except in 1-syllable rhymes.

The parents of 4-year old Roy Mitchum from Hot Springs, Arkansas wish they could "Go back in time and murder that filthy #@%!S for righting[sic] those !@%\$ books". Their son Roy came down with Seussitus

after receiving a Dr. Seuss anthology for his 4th birthday and demanded that they were read to him every night at bedtime. After 28 consecutive nights of "Hop on Pop", "If I Ran the Zoo", "There's a Wocket in my Pocket", and "Green Eggs on Ham" little Roy woke up one morning and could only speak in 1-syllable rhymes. His mother, Abigail, described it as "a nightmare".

"I said 'good morning Roy' and all he said back was 'Wall ball all tall call ball ball tall call all fall tall Paul mall fall call call Paul ball wall...' I didn't know what to think but I knew it wasn't good when his

preschool teacher called and I could hear him in the background going, 'Box box fox socks rocks pocks walks talks stalks fox...'

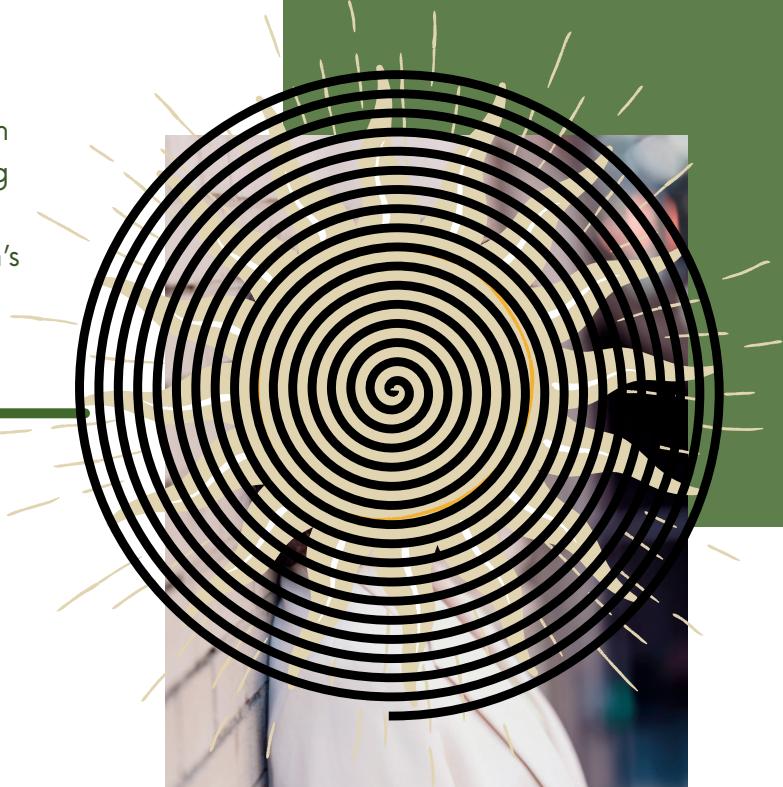
When Roy's father Andy came home to hear his son trapped in a one-syllable prison he acted quickly.

"There was no way I was going to listen to the that jibber jabber until the boy turned 18. We took him right down to Arkansas Presbyterian Hospital and boom! They put him in a comma. They didn't even have to hurt him; it was all medically induced"

The Mitchum's are waiting to hear back from Penguin Random House for a cure.

All individual pieces of literature can be charted upon an inwardly curving line. Moving towards a common center, this line is called "The Canon's Spiral" and has been written about extensively in modern academic papers.<sup>1</sup>

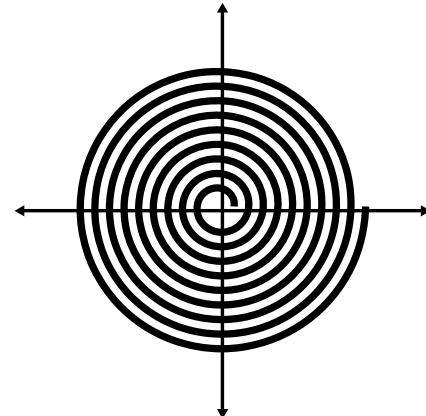
# Editor's Note



Towards the very center of The Canon's Spiral lay the oldguard: Chaucer, Homer, Shakespeare's entire body of work, the four Chinese classics, the Bible, Gilgamesh, etc. Moving along the edge, ever outwards, literary classics are placed by their relative importance to literature as a whole and their ideological undertones. Those towards the middle carry heft. Those on the fringes are scarcely remarked upon. Generally, collectivist leaning works are on the left hand side of the spiral's Y axis, while individualist texts are sorted along the right side. Similarly, Authoritarian texts are above the X axis; Libertarian leaning works below the X axis. All readers of this esteemed publication, of course, already know this. The genius of the spiral is that the closer to the center a text is, the more important it is to mankind, the less it follows the rules of X vs Y. The middle texts form the center, the canon, the rest of the texts are placed in relation to the most canonical. The center of the spiral represents the neutrality of the human soul. And then there's /lit/.

"There is no room in the middle, I must write for the extreme edge," is the common refrain of this mass of pseudo-anonymous writers. They feel they have no chance at the inner curve of the spiral, and thus every story they concoct is radical. Instead of aiming for universal human truth, their art takes a new aim: glorious untruth. They write of unreal experiences from the absolute edge of what is acceptable. They are attempting to break away from The Canon's Spiral which holds together all of literature. The Ampersand stands as a recording of their vain attempts, a place for cultured people to read the musings of the proletariat from a patrician position. Enjoy the insanity herein. And don't worry, it can't hurt you.

## The Canon's Spiral



**continued from S10**  
**"The Russian Funeral"**

and exhaustion, crying frantically. A young man came to take his place, as friends picked up the collapsed pallbearer. Upon the whole scene, the hieromonk in a black habit murmured to himself, which Mitya saw. The hunters, armed with old rifles, made their way on the front end of the funeral parade. All the while the three yelled to each other to overcome the wind, arguing upon where to go. With the hunters' aid they were able to navigate through the birch forest into darker wooded areas, where past a hidden wood the graves were kept.

Beyond the crest of a grassy white hill stood the shadow of a man, to which all the village people took surprise to. The hunters called out, but the shadow could not hear them through the wind. Alexey took aim, but Dmitri screamed for him to stop. Squinting through the softening snow, Alexey had his fingers deftly on the trigger. But in a hair's width beyond the wind's howl, he heard Dmitri. He lowered his rifle, and saw through the fog a burning light in Dmitri's eyes. Dmitri raised his hands in a sign of the cross of Golgotha, and the shadow signed back, making a cross over his chest. Running down the hill, it was the familiar face of the gravetender. He met them, from his clapboard shack he says, and commented on the situation in earnest faith.

Through the oak woodlands did the small party of village men and women tread through the snow. The sky was nowhere to be seen in the squalls cast upon them at random intervals, and at short times had to bunker down lest the casket would slip out of one poor pallbearer's hands and come crashing down. From low mountains of a deep jade they came to a pass sided by sediment cliffs. Beyond a rutted track, they huddled in the shelter of an overhanging rock, to regain some of their numbing senses. Huddling in the cold silence, the wind con-

tinued. It drifted along from the mountain pass, and above the overhang, distant yet its tumultuous nature inspiring fear.

It was decided that one of the hunters would take the old men and women back to the village, for they could not continue any further. Alexey and Dmitri would stay and take over. One of the women cried to the hieromonk, and begged to be allowed to see their sokrovishche. The casket was allowed to be opened one more time, under the rock overhang. The lamps had cast a warm glow on the casket's pale face.

Silence washed over the observers like a holy smoke, and only the wailing of those who could not stand the sight could be heard.

Above the gray clouds that bore the heavy snow, was the deep blue air. In its endless depth, you could travel a thousand miles, and never reach its edge. Yet you can reach out your hand, and grab at it with your fingers. Draw your breath, and into your heart would be the sharpest air you have ever breathed. At fantastic heights lay this world untouched by man, whose wonder and excitement at the confines lay between the earth and the sky. Such pleasures, as one would suggest, end at these boundaries, eternally condemned and never a person to offend this law.

The birch trees' thin branches waved dangerously, almost as if they were made of paper. At the trunk it was still as a Buddhist monk, and it was through these trunks that our party moved like the thoughts that streaked through the monk's minds. Slowly, they carried their honored deceased in absolute harmony, bound together by an old hymn. Through a snowed-in ravine they made their way to a small plateau flanked on three sides by sloped woods. Beneath the plateau was a wide river, whose brilliance from emanating sparks of

**The Past Under the Dunes**  
**Bawi Maung Hla**

In the chaotic dawn of the new century, a motley crew of adventurers, driven by a feverish hunger for wealth and renown, embarked on harrowing archaeological expeditions into the desolate expanses of the unknown. Many faltered under the relentless trials of life in these primitive lands - ramshackle shops cowered beneath sandstorms, wretched coffee proved to be the only solace, and the locals, no less than the treacherous dunes, were fraught with unreliability. Yet, these adversities failed to daunt the indefatigable Dr. Pierre Bonnepierre. Inspired by his grandfather's larger-than-life tales from the Napoleonic era, Dr. Bonnepierre was undaunted in his quest to unearth the hidden treasures concealed beneath Egypt's shifting sands. His audacious pursuit, however, would have remained a fanciful reverie if not for the staggering support bestowed by an enigmatic order of exiled Coptic Christians, whose riches knew no bounds. They harbored an insatiable hunger to acquire an enigmatic something, the very essence of which eluded even Bonnepierre's profound knowledge.

With his boots firmly planted on Egyptian soil, Dr. Bonnepierre endeavored to earn the trust of the local Muslim populace, an indispensable source of information and favorable bargains within the bustling bazaars. His disdain for the English and an idiosyncratic fondness for the peculiar French aesthetic and cultural sensibilities, mirrored by the locals in Egypt as well as those in Lebanon, offered tantalizing hints about the ultimate prize he sought. Amidst the labyrinthine neighborhood of crumbling adobe structures, a man with an elusive name emerged—a man who claimed to have witnessed the full spectrum of the world's marvels. He regaled tales of dragons in the Dutch Indies, cannibal tribes deep in the Congo, and submissive red-skinned women in the African colonies of the Germans.

The encounter was brief, for Bonnepierre struggled to comprehend the grotesque mixture of French and Occitan that the man spoke. Nevertheless, a gem of information gleamed through the linguistic haze: British plunderers had come into possession of a trove of invaluable artifacts, implicating them as the nefarious English pirates. While sidestepping the perils of contracting the man's tuberculosis, Dr. Bonnepierre pondered for minutes on how to accomplish such a daring undertaking without succumbing to violence. No clear strategy emerged from his contemplation, and the man, forever nameless in memory, appeared to have little time left in this world. It was within that wretched abode, humorously dubbed a "hotel room," that Dr. Bonnepierre conceived the elusive idea he had been seeking. Drawing upon the wealth of military knowledge acquired during his extensive service in the army, he began to chart a daring course.

Venturing into the bustling chaos of Cairo's souk, he masterfully wove a web comprised of thugs and thieves, all intimately linked by their shared desires for wealth, their boundless ignorance, and their allegiance to the faith of Islam. Dr. Bonnepierre understood that the key to success lay in manipulating the most vulnerable strata of society, a task made easier through the intermediary of a trusted interpreter—a daughter of the ailing man, possessed of her full mental faculties. To further bolster the credibility of his elaborate ruse, Dr. Bonnepierre donned a distinctive metal mask, purportedly concealing the symptoms of an exotic plague. Cloaked in a fine black silk tunic and adorned with turbans, he presented himself as a nobleman descended from the extensive collateral branches of the unnamable

prophet's tribe—a character of sacred significance within Islam. His plan unfolded seamlessly, not due to his mastery of the situation, but rather through a stroke of remarkable luck. When confronted with inquiries about his religious devotion, he answered with a random number, convincingly simulating a devout daily prayer routine.

The doctor found himself deeply gratified by the remarkable efficiency of his forlorn interpreter. Having shared three covert bottles of spirits, along with a touch of hashish, he contemplated a most extraordinary honor—one that stemmed from the belief that those of his lineage were duty-bound to bestow their superior ancestral gifts upon humankind, elevating them above other races and species. It was an honor indeed. The unfortunate young woman, her demeanor a blend of submission and intelligence, may not have grasped the full weight of her predicament. In an era where women depended on men for their very survival, her voice seemed inconsequential. While harboring no particular aversion toward the foreigner, she possessed the astuteness to recognize the promiscuity and disloyalty often exhibited by men of that time, who would readily abandon their partners for others after betraying their trust. Yet, Dr. Bonnepierre was an exception to this norm. His ostensible academic arrogance and the poverty that had hitherto denied him the pleasures of either woman or man had kept him from the embrace of passion. That is, until the serendipitous moment when he rose from his bed and beheld another figure slumbering peacefully beside him.

On the day of the ambush, all preparations had reached their zenith. The counterfeit mullah, his concubine, and their horde of fervent fanatics stood poised to strike against the English, heedless of the diplomatic repercussions that such audacity might incur. The sabers wielded by these Muslim zealots had tasted English blood in the Sudan years prior, and the memory of their prior encounters had erased fear and tempered their resolve. Money was of no concern; vengeance fueled their hearts. The English pirates, relentless in their plundering, met a gruesome end at the hands of these assailants. Their heads were mercilessly severed from their shoulders and their lifeless bodies set ablaze amidst a desolate wasteland, a gesture aimed at denying them resurrection by the hand of God and His divine greatness. Their remains, reduced to ashes, were offered as sustenance for the earth, mingling with their putrid viscera. A trophy of their conquest was claimed—a single finger preserved as a grisly keepsake.

Among the spoils of this audacious raid were ancient Ptolemaic gold coins, carefully preserved papyri concealed by the mullah, an assortment of garments, weaponry, and the occasional contraband alcoholic libation. The false mullah, recognizing the valor of his fanatic comrades, proffered exchange notes as compensation for their deeds. However, the fanatics refused this offer, for the sheer act of dispatching an enemy of God had brought them unparalleled satisfaction. They harbored hopes of further orders in the relentless crusade of the black apostle. The unsuspecting Frenchman, oblivious to the profound consequences of his actions, urged caution upon them. He admonished them to eliminate any foreigner who obstructed the establishment of a genuine caliphate, one blessed by the divine hand of God. With the network expanding and warnings ringing in their ears, they embarked on their relentless path, guided by their unwavering faith.

Bonpierre christened his nascent collective as the "Children of the Sphinx," a name draped in enigmatic allure. He modeled its structure after the shrewd organizational acumen acquired during his tenure with his enigmatic benefactors, individuals who professed a religion

a sunlight was doused by the encroaching fog. Around the river were swathes of yellowed aspen and fir varieties outstretched into endless taiga.

...

The gravetender hobbled ahead of the trudging group, and shouted over to lay him next to a chosen spot. Around those who joined the journey were others who've been laid to rest years before: all marked by snow white crosses atop their graves. One of the men stroked the snow off one cross lightly, before shutting his eyes closed in solid communion. Returning back to the group, they had laid the coffin down on frozen-over grass, and made their stay on the snow.

The wind chilled them to their holy bones, as the snow blew into their thick coats and heavy hats. They sat still amidst the storm, letting themselves shiver as they recovered from the trek. With the Father's blessing, Dmitri and Alexey separated from the mourners, and stood watch at the outskirts of the plateau. After a few minutes of unbearable cold had passed, he motioned for the psalmist to stand up, and the rest of the mourners followed suit.

The woods seemed to gleam outwards from the snow that drifted before their very eyes. Beyond the mountainscape lay the rural lands that no man has yet crossed save for these sparse frontiersmen like him who've sought refuge within the small villages. For a long while did the birch trees seem to sway and grasp at his very eyes, as Dmitri did not know what to look for. Whenever he looked back, the hieromonk gave Dmitri a solemn nod.

The mountains no longer seen in the distance, watched over the people below as well. They themselves, giants who have witnessed the death and birth of many individual lives, all wither away at the feet of these silent philosophers, created in art by the instrument of God. Between the mountains were groves of dark coniferous trees that stood straight and still—an attentive audience.

The movement of the wind through the pine needles produces a thunderous rustle within a whisper. The sound of falling snow is heavy-hearted and numbing, too, within the stir of the torrent. Crumbles; crumbles as it goes.

*Wolf! Wolf!*

The sudden cry stops the psalmist in his tracks. Fear filled his mind, like a noxious fog.

A scream pierces the heavens: *Alyosha!*

Dmitri yells out. Alexey rides down a steep, icy end of a slope, tumbling halfway and losing grip of his rifle. Alexey is out of breath, bloodshot and shaken. He yells at the funeral with outstretched hands—*Wolves! I saw many beyond the creek! They sense Misha!*

Upon the Father's panicked orders, the men and women huddle around the casket with wary eyes. The hunters circled around the party, rifles being pointed at the woods frantically. Some more men draw their guns. Between estranged cries and the murmuring of prayers to make the bad spirits go away, a father of large build attests to the rest that no one had bothered to place down fir branches on their tracks going to the grave. Another one stands up in agreement, foreshadowing terrible bad luck. A woman begins to sing an elaborate poem which hushes both, and all into stillness.

--Come and be seen, daimons!

--Cursed beasts!

For a few moments of eternity, time passed by like raindrops streaking down a glass pane. The winds minutely crossed the shallow eaves, almost as if it waited for the party down below. Beyond the snow that blanketed the torrential sky, the gray clouds still stirred in a trembling wake.

A single gunshot boomed from the valley, stirring the crows from their nests. Following a low rumble and an echo, came the hundreds of squawks and flapping from over the casket.

The squawks seemed like a black pestilence, and drew away as if rushing to the origin of the snow to finally defeat it at once. One middle-aged man lay on the ground, eyes wide open and blown over in the freezing cold, his mouth agape in a violent frenzy. He grasped his leg as if searching for a lost trinket, and found blood that oozed from his leg. His bloodstained hand wiped the casket for a second--and he had fainted at the sight of his own blood.

A stout man across from him was frantically apologizing, throwing the pistol away. He was just as scared as they were: spitting out nonsense about seeing a Drekavac in the blizzard mists. They all knew the stout man; he was the husband of the communal soapmaker, who was tasked with dressing small game.

--You clod!

--We will all die, we will all die.

--They are coming for us!

--They will eat us!

--They will do no such thing. Father, we must leave at once.

The gravetender stood up.

--It is my honor to attend to Mr. Ivanova. Give him your blessing.

--Very well then, the hieromonk sputtered, heaving an exasperated sigh.

...

--We can't walk back the way we came. The Drekavac have followed us here.

--We will take another route then.

The sun could not burn through the clouds. Beneath the canopies of the taiga, the party moved quietly with the crunching of snow. They followed the natural path of a rock face, which stood away from the plateau. On lower ground, the injured man walked ten paces with the aid of another before collapsing onto the ground in writhing agony. He was quickly shushed by the kneeling

whose glistening eyes seemed to pierce the injured man's very soul in prayer for peace. The fire lamp moved away from the fallen man, and once again the priest's eyes were shrouded by the bushiness of his gray eyebrows.

Between flat, snowy meadows were a stretch of pine groves that ran on elevated ground. Around the pine groves were piles of mist that gave the impression that the grove was floating. The storm clouds lightened up, and the party rested on moss-ridden bluffs within the grove, basking in the noon sun.

Dmitri had spotted a white bunny furrowing into the snow, hopping amok. The light dazzled the sprays of snow, appearing as if the bunny was carrying itself by the weight of flying dust. The spectacle enticed him, and out of a strange call from the dark depths in his heart, raised his rifle and aimed at the small creature.

A boom could be heard in the distance--close enough to be known it is near, but to the party drenched in fear it was as if a gunshot rang out right next to their ears. The old candlemaker yelled at Dmitri, and struck his head with an open palm. Alexei yelled just as loud, saying that the boom was across the meadow, originating into the mountains. Dmitri motioned for him to stay with the party, and ran through ankle-deep snow up a hill towards the mountains.

Howls came in succession, running down the peak like bloodthirsty beasts, their depravity striking fear into the hearts of those at the base of the mountain. The clouds began to tremor, throwing themselves up into the air and crashing down in clumsy torrents of wind and snow. The fits swirled around Dmitri as he clung to a rock, nearly making him lose his rifle. He gripped it harder and jabbed it at the storm--he could not discern anything in the flurry, and only vague and faint shadows danced around his vision. Amidst the howl, he heard the shadows' curses whispered into his ear.

they concealed. With the surge of adrenaline that had fueled their audacious exploit now waning, our daring protagonist was met by his princess of poverty. She bore tidings of an extraordinary discovery--a scarcely noticeable stele etched with cryptic inscriptions revealing the existence of magical stones. These stones, it was whispered, held within them the key to unlocking truths that transcended the boundaries of good and evil, peering beyond the very fabric of reality itself.

Determined to unveil the elusive stones' power, Bonnepierre turned to the troves of treasures he had wrested by force. Yet, his efforts yielded naught, leaving him awash in anguish and frustration. The failure of his initial expedition threatened to obscure his judgment. However, an intimate encounter with his endearingly disheveled and impoverished lady-in-waiting, replete with passion and the whispered allure of rejuvenating herbs, helped clear his mind. Following their protracted union, driven partly by the placebo effect of the purported revitalizing herbs, Bonnepierre found himself pondering his future. His newfound fixation centered on the accursed magic stones, described by the ancestors long consumed by the relentless desert sands.

Time flowed like a relentless river, and Pierre Bonnepierre persisted in his quest to reclaim the sacred object pilfered from the heart of Egypt's embrace. His odyssey led him through the seven seas and across the vast expanse of the five continents, where he encountered a panorama of bizarre and extraordinary phenomena. He immersed himself in the cryptic rituals of white gorillas, clashed with Malay pirates amidst colossal mosquitoes, traversed endless jungles, and beheld temples dedicated to gods too forbidden to name. Throughout these fantastical escapades, he harbored no concern for the curious revelation that his own descendants had emerged from eggs, for his unwavering devotion was reserved solely for his kind and benevolent wife. She, in her own right, defied the relentless march of time, remaining untouched by its grasp. Their epic journey ultimately brought them to the thriving city of Providence, lured by cryptic clues obtained through the network of fanatical cultists devoted to a God shrouded in enigma--a deity whose true nature remained beyond their comprehension.

Amidst the cold and rain, under a blanket of heavy clouds stirred by a persistent wind, Pierre Bonnepierre and his wife remained oddly serene. A member of their clandestine group, whose name had long slipped from memory, awaited them before an abandoned and decrepit building that now belonged to their enigmatic organization. Bonnepierre never revealed his face to this faithful agent; he concealed it behind the mask that rendered him a sacred, inscrutable figure in their eyes--a hidden imam guiding their path. The agent presented him with a sealed box, containing the very object he had been fervently seeking. In hushed tones, the agent assured him that the meticulous preparations outlined in their letters had been executed to the letter, while the contents of those letters had been painstakingly transcribed into sacred volumes of wisdom and guidance.

The stone, they discovered with bitterness, was nothing but a clever forgery. In their fruitless pursuit, they had unwittingly sacrificed the lives of ten black souls who had survived the horrors of the Tulsa massacre. The promises inscribed in ancient wills had remained elusive, mocking their fervent efforts. Dr. Bonnepierre's heart weighed heavy with disillusionment. He felt the sands of time slipping through his fingers, his life's purpose still tantalizingly beyond his grasp--a purpose that had emerged like a mirage amid the unforgiving dunes, a purpose beckoning to him in his restless dreams.

His devoted followers, bearing the weight of their prophet's despair, harbored a grim determination to assuage his anguish. They chose to offer their own lives, ten more souls departing this world to fulfill the unattainable. Their bodies lay as lifeless offerings upon the untamed grass. Yet, amidst this grim tableau of sacrifice, it was Bonnepierre's steadfast wife who extended a soothing hand. She spoke words of comfort and solace, urging him to lie beside her upon this blood-soaked field, to dream once more. Dr. Bonnepierre, his vitality waning, obliged, allowing the haunting embrace of dreams to once again cradle his weary soul.

As dawn broke, the doctor found himself in a peculiar predicament, cocooned within a translucent sheath reminiscent of a serpent's egg. Emerging from this ethereal womb, he felt an almost divine rebirth, his wife's gaze fixed upon him with an air of awe and reverence. In a whimsical turn of events, they revisited a forgotten ritual, one that had once borne fruitful results. They regressed into a state of almost comical premature childhood, two bare and innocent souls embarking on this new world with nothing but a shared dream. From the lifeless, they procured garments, which they dutifully laundered in the waters of the Blackstone River. Adorned in their scavenged attire, they embarked on their journey to uncharted territories, all the while grappling with the curious sensation of a rekindled childhood, a second chance at life, and the weight of their shared dreams.

The couple matured and eventually established an unassuming office in the bustling heart of Chicago, a front for their covert endeavors. Amidst their work, they were inundated with a relentless deluge of calls and letters, yet they always made time to pause for sustenance, indulge in passionate trysts, and peruse the obituaries—a curious habit that amused them greatly. If their recollections served them well, they had been blessed with a brood of fifteen children, forty grandchildren, a staggering one hundred and one great-grandchildren, and even the delight of five great-great-grandchildren, whom they visited with regularity.

Outwardly, the couple appeared entirely ordinary, their lives unfolding with the rhythm of daily existence. However, behind the veil of normalcy, they covertly orchestrated a series of macabre plots. Their obsession centered on the coveted magic stone, an object they cherished above all else. Their recent target had been a mad scientist whose peculiar eyewear they devoured after desecrating his grave, for they believed his body to be anointed by the essence of a god. These clandestine maneuvers concealed their true nature, two enigmatic figures orchestrating sinister plans for the supposed owners of the magic stone they coveted.

Amidst a ritual marked by countless rivers of spilled blood, cryptic symbols, and the jagged edges of uninspired knives, the arduous process of activating the elusive stone had at last drawn to a close. Dr. Bonnepierre, his heart pounding with anticipation, stood waiting for a sign, any sign that would confirm the success of their endeavor. Yet, as the moments stretched on, it became painfully clear that their efforts had been in vain. Overwhelmed by frustration and despair, he contemplated ending his own life, a decision made in haste, but one that ultimately brought him only the solace of unconsciousness.

Within the recesses of his tormented mind, he awoke to a haunting nightmare, a realm hidden in the depths of his subconscious. There, he witnessed fields ablaze and swarms of relentless grasshoppers, led by a malevolent presence, descending upon the land, leaving destruction in their wake. The call for death hung heavy in the air, but his sole yearning was to see her once more.

**Continued on H10**

A ghastly shadow stood in front of him—no different from the rest. No features could be distinguished, but somehow it evinced a smile of pure malice. Dmitri saw the shadow and was certain of its murder. He aligned his iron. Here is your penitence, foul beast! Blood for blood—may Hell receive you!

The roar of gunfire was not heard within the howling of the wind. Wind, and then suddenly: silence.

Snow suffused with warm crimson crunched under Dmitri's boots. Ilya laid on the snow, slain. His clothes were mottled with dark stains, as they were beyond tatters. Deep bite marks around his neck and limbs glistened with flecks of snowflakes collected around the edges. They blew into his glazed eyes. Dmitri ran.

...

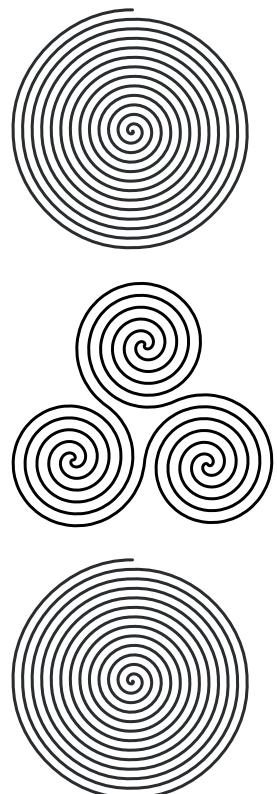
Verdant fields were steeped with sunlight from a blue sky outside, as the rays themselves poured down onto the ceramic tiles of the room, producing brilliant patterns from the thin iron grating from the windows. Minute swirls of dust danced from the ground onto the great wooden rafters above, suspending themselves within sunbeams momentarily before settling on a grand piano—the centerpiece of the simple room with stucco walls in a simple color reminiscent of terracotta pottery. Another glance at the window, and one can see a man smoking a pipe as he walks in the distance. The dirt trail he walks is flanked by stately mediterranean cypresses that wave gently in the wind—their spring smell is faintly issued within the open air outside.

Suddenly, it is the same room at a different time. It is drab and gray, and heavy shadows fall over the scene. The roof had caved in, and two of the walls had crumbled, letting the pouring rain soak the rubble and wood piled atop of the grand piano, sitting among the ruins unperturbed. All of the delicate glass had fallen through the iron, and the fields outside were awash with mud.

Two soldiers in olive rain-

capes walk through the scene, threading from the front of the piano out through the torn-down walls, rifles drawn cautiously. A few more bedraggled riflemen squelch through, as one of them outside in the distance gives a wave and calls them forth. One of them stays behind for a single moment, and observes the piano under the rubble.

The memory of the piano assuaged him that night in the countryside, sleeping in his rain-cape. He closed his eyes after a while. Couldn't tell if he was dreaming of the rain or if it was outside his conscious. The pitter-patter was steady, and came in multitudes: he swam in the sound of it, and within the distant waves he heard a rumble of thunder. Mortars! He kept his eyes shut as the screams rose above the air.



# A Stick of incense

By Eleonara Pellegrini

I am neither occupied with the spit and garb of popular fools nor the twit of sycophants . taste equipoise ease are inborn not acquired . as is skinniness . as is not eating . worthless the monied procuration worse . it is so difficult for some girls poor creatures lol no but really . but then just don't be . . i have sometimes caught the attention of pederasts . i have not converted to Catholicism i was born into the tradition . nor is it but a matter of faith but a living practice a style that is to say truth . i go to confession and look down on sodomites (the old joke of instead of a fornicatrix a 'virgin' sodomites!) . it is better to be unseen seen only by the few – long sleeves high collars (amerifat wedding dresses a butcher's display) . to anger the populace i loudly express gauche fascisms on the street . girlfriends of ill constitution consumed and defunct at too young (or old) an age . . drugs now tiresome save A. and her carbon tet experiments . i am of palest pallor . and the english girl i knew . . dedications shared books kisses . i do not see myself picking up a career much less that of femme de lettres – i could not compose an essay nor a tweet and would not like to be praised for an icy-sharp brevity much as the just word – like ok this hard – ought to be sought in conversation . i have worn men's clothes . i have not encountered the figure of the lesbian anywhere but in luridly baller old books and from the point of view of beauty there is nothing cooler is there not than being cis . suppherlettes . . 'you'-'me'-beach-mog-glittertext.gif . . our name meaning nothing anymore to those who mean nothing i had the privilege of being born poor . materially . the necessary things were given me . then you can't go 'travel' and cultivate your nontaste . our little villa was dilapidated! i am under 20 what they now call jailbait . life should be dedicated to beautiful things Venus Mary Vlad the impaler . i should like to own a slave – the most precious cakes gameswine garden flowers brought at 7 in the afternoon! a chequered costume with bells at tips of toes and a small rose parrot perched on the shoulder! lacking luxuries i'll do without the bother . an old countess reads me Varro in the vernacular on thursdays . when the rain hit the sea and the stones of the old quay i was most touched . naturally i must watch my health – they call it anachronic atavistic . i receive letters from a novice painter who really can't express himself – i am quite taken with them the letters – and his photograph – you must control your image and take as few of them as best of them as possible! i will remember him . the castello is open for visitors this time of year and often i'll go there to hide from people . it houses an impressive effigy of Pico and 2 small chinese urns . this purple ink smells like mushrooms . our ancestor the cardinal has been praised by the new Pope and i hope to be received at St Peter's in white . imagine a swiss guard slapping an unwanted orangeaceous influencer with his halberd as were it a viva piñata spade! i could never bother watering the plants . as for fluffissimo cats i meet on the street: i still daren't pet them . better left intact . happy birthday to all cats and all departed feline souls!!

go to

tookys.substack.com  
thankyou

# Goysloppia

Pull my finger, I downwards-facing-dog dare you, Moldbug says. Pull my finger and get ruled by corporations.

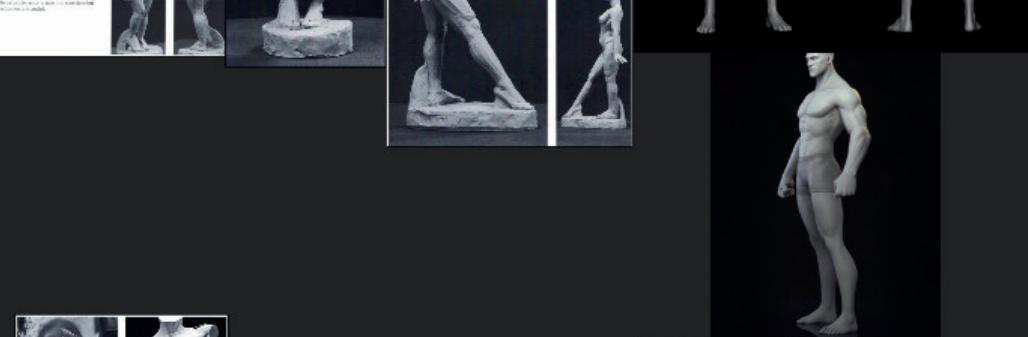
So you do and tainted Nestle Crunch bars and uranium pizzas and soy-lecithin-enhanced Pepsi Cola goypoisons your whole life. But you're screwed, see, cuz drinking Pepsi (tm) is the fundamental condition for staying in Pepsi State. Whadda ya gonna do, go move to McDonaldsLand? Happy meals cost \$7 a pop now and fuck that noise. What now? You moan in a half-daze, woken up out of your bed at way too early in the morning (like before ten am) and dragged into a professional martial arts fight to secure your place in Pepsi State because the positions are limited. So you find yourself competing with UFC professionals from Ghana to Cancun to even Bangkok right from that hotel where David Carradine suffocated on a 7 Eleven bag while yacking his whacko. Moldbug never predicted any of this; not the bizarre routine of proving your worth, nor that Carradine would die of auto-erotic 7 Eleven boggification. Saturninan prognosticators may have known in advance, but didn't care to tell us at the time. Kung Fu was getting stale and everyone wanted it off the air.

So now we're in the shit and gotta make the most: but a host of toddlers are jumping off the ledge, one by one, into plunging kiddie death. Ahhhh! They left this world after reaching object permanence and already knowing too much. Piagetian suicide. Mothers cry. Applesauce stain on the floor under a vacated high chair...

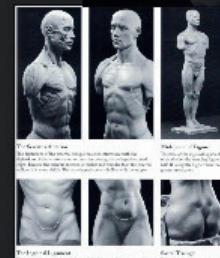
It was foolish to hope for utopia when the serpents tie themselves around your tires. And no one proofread the manifesto so we're stuck with this shit. Lighten up IRA, fill your guns with water and take a break. The state-shareholders raised the unit price of sex/juice/alcohol/repressed libido again, and I'm Going Bananas. Full stop. So make the most: swim through the diazepam dream to a serum of nicotine. Death drives a midsized SUV...

We didn't want quality anyway. We wanted massive screens of digital geishas watching us eat noodles under the rain. We wanted philosophies of transhumanism compressed into a fucking oreo fortune cookie. The harsh (dis)cords of reality slapped you awake to the fact the future belongs to the same squirming mass of pasta blasters who smoothed out the ascending wave of the millenium. The people were the true enemy, don't you get it? The cultural noumena of the aromatase-poisoned latent force THREW ME IN JAIL without the attendant \$200, crushed my nuts in a copy of Vice Magazine and they STILL want me to surrender!!! WHAT WHY AND FOR WHAT??? You don't get to be a playa anymore because you didn't copy their opinions verbatim, they'll say. Or some paraphrase thereof. The beast's out of the handbag now! And lunging jaws-out straight for my---I saw where the gun was pointed. And who was pointing the fucker. And it wasn't full of water, but URINE---neck but I karatechop the tiger and ride it home, bolo-chop style.

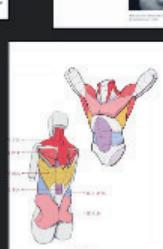
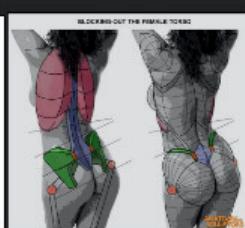
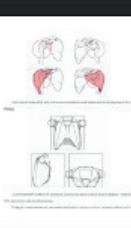
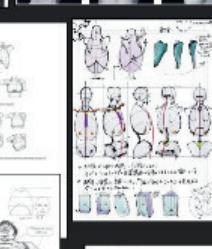
Easy to distinguish myself from the worm farm now. But in deterritorialized pissings they wake me up--morning splash to the face. But it's okay because I just installed the hot coffee mod to break your jail open you chickenshits. I'm standing outside the jail gates now, like at the start of the Getaway. And being like, I don't trust you anymore. You fucked a dude to get me out of here. And I can see the shadow of your scythe on the floor even as you raise your arms to embrace me. And its curve transcribes a false pregnancy. A bursting out of morbid matter. Electric fire furiously rages through that fat blue gown. And when she stands in the kitchen she's gonna be over the sink peeling the potatoes and washing the dishes and dur-dur-dur-dur-durrr while blood slips down the metal and collects in crimson blots. This relationship between us cannot be repaired or sewn together, and it's not going to deliver any more enjoyment. It's going to bubble up cancerously and spread, metastatize into a metastate of moldy bug-corporations and soylent shadow groups pulling the strings. But organs are for the birds and I pulled my skeleton out anyway--it was glow in the dark like one of those Halloween ornaments. It's shining green right now, its rib cage is clean, and I tuck myself into the dirt without a spleen. I left my bony finger poking out of the grave so you could pull it.



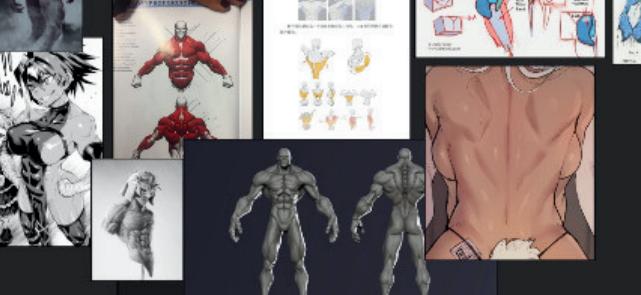
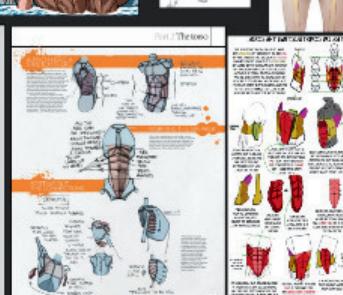
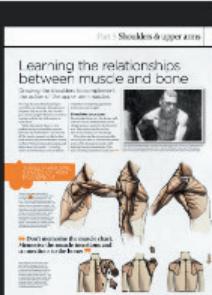
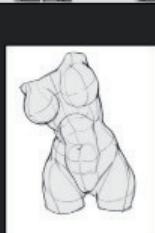
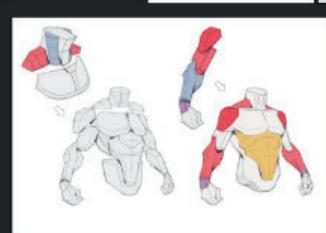
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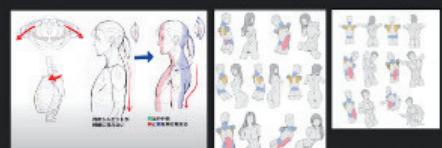
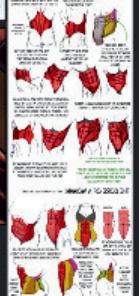
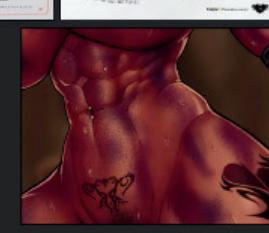
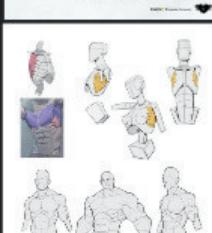
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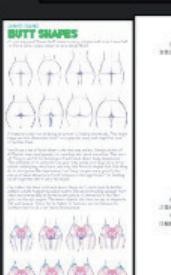
## Back



## Shoulders



## Hips



Nirina-Lazy Rations.txt



**M17**

The decrepit are all helpers to the Bavarians in a pit of so meander-more decrepit and the splayed webbed-wetter hands for a kling and a klang, out of gasoline pus the I-talian raised himself out.

He loves other people and their pockets and what it would be like being inside them. All left for grabs of his family is his creator-consort and his grandfather is a clock for ticking and tick-telling. His only friends are a mallet and his eyes, he imagines what it's like to be Flemish-kind, with his own eyes. He thinks of all the beer taps to be had and all the skins he could of had onto his oste-o, with his own mallet. His machine-mates think he's an idiot and he thinks maybe if he had the same oil change he could've been chugging the same life or brooding on the same silk.

"Get'ya hand away from that sprocket."

"Ain't no other way to do it."

"As long as we're hearing half of it."

He's everybody's subordinate and darn wishes to be a little less and a lot more. It's a curse is what it is, his no-number name was to be Marc being followed with a Rulli or Rollo or or some of sorts but he had to pay free-favor for that life of could have been his to a family friend and branded himself as Marcel-Heinz only. Less family friend and more bachelor to his mother's bachelorette, he cashed in as an smog of exhaust a while back and thus lives in every home and everywhere without an embargo, and ain't no changing nothing who's the pappy or not, he's the I-talian. The real grandpappy of his is more prairie dog than man and his mammy Brigitte keeps him around for luck, always luck in keeping an old timer.

His only exit is his smoke break but he gets his dose of fumes ready and already, he goes outside and live other people's lives at the Alta Cunningham, sees a seam he likes and without any touching and without thinking of his seamstress mammy history, he thinks of what strut he coulda had and who would be taking him out for a smoke that he once wouldn't be familiar with throughout the day. In every satin flat he sees corridors of love and a little more, he sees Venician cruises in the to-be breast pockets and sees two-steps in the rabble-rain.

Would've been another missus-market, Ms. Elise Fleming's, but the only Flemish around are teeter-tourists who have come to visit the roads of Rome of their time. Bavarians renovated the town from Greer to Neu-Neuberg, ain't no centurions around just small-time beat cops with their auto-machine ornaments facing forward on their cap, the furniture of town. Parades of brays and trots, most troubling crime around is public intoxication or indecency, the rest remain as decent of squares as they can be.

He creaks open his mammy's door open later in the day and tries tells to her about his new venture and the seldom dream he's about to make real, the seldom dream being prophylaxis for all his real ones.

"I'm leaving for the coast."

"Y'know how long I spent trying to get a man to get us here, this is history, we are witnessing it and have lived it since. Stay here for the man, that's what we planned."

"His name is half my name for Sam hell. Ain't no trouble leaving for a little discipline."

"You're telling me you're a faggot?"

"Nay, I'm joining the coast guard at the South of Broad... Charleston."

"Same thing, different story."

"So...?"

"So go on then."

And so he boarded the tram and saw all the little cars like they were his only friends trawling through the highway. All the Dutch-gables exserted themselves into flat antiques and all the hats from flat-brims into sun hats. He little-leaped onto the small trawler and made the acquaintance of his summer cats and they left for the Sierra Leone Rise for some patrols around the de novo American incorporated dominion of Little America. The American coast had prolonged itself into the ivory and all the constant coastal towns had been turned to trading ports for seafarers of all global guts. All hadn't been smooth and word is some of the blaggards still sporting the idea of a Liberia were around the moss, living by what they thought was living true, from a Liberia to a Little America to a Libertatia.

As expected for the service time the I-talian grew familiar to the dock floorboards and familiar to the taste of the provisioned bags of condensed milk and lemon hardbiscuits, he learned to tie knots for all name callings and swept the wide-tooth broom trying his best not to get the dust onto his teeth. A room was entirely dedicated to churning and elastifying the biscuit dough, a primitive system of batons hammering at the dough. The hammers or hammer-ers are like twin dancers who have been drinking whiskey. He wore his sailor suit and stayed sea-Semper Fi, the Bavarian machined-mausoleum was alas-ed into the free open plains of the maritime. A few months could pass and his carbonized bellows would turn to crystal-coquillages. The desolate plateau made brotherhood or brother-caps to all.

"Don't fall into it."

"Fall into what?"

"The dough, you eejit."

"This is my gold, ain't no bother falling into it. Ever seen that duck?"

"What are you on about? Must've been drinking something harder than us."

"The duck. The one that jumps into gold. Scrooge O'Duck or somethin'."

"That's stupid."

"Okay."

Through the paralleled lowered sky of the sea was a ferry embellished with flags and handkerchiefs were flailed at the cats as a thanks for their service. Beckons were thrown into the calabash and the cats warmed in closer, as a treat. The trawler made the same screw-in connection the I-talian was familiar with onto the gold and red ferry.

The cats boarded unto and were tilted away and unto again. The cats finally seeped into the wrought iron round door.

"Make careful!"

The main attraction of the whole dig was a whole chic checkerboard yard and round tables teeter-totaling around the place. The only source of light were the flashes of the paparazzi buzz and the perfect stripped and straight white teeth straight as razors of the stars. The ferry speaker system let out jingles through a megaphone inside the party berth and the stars all had oblique gold on their necks that did their jingle jangle.

The five cats mingled through and the I-talian especially made merry of seeing all the Playboy vestites come to life straight from the resined and full pages. At the very back of the board was a pianist with both his bones and his piano being glass-grand, and a gold plaque was plastered right to this shoulder, higher.

"GODIVA. GABREAL FRANKLIN. MICHAEL PETRUCCIANI. LYNN WHITFIELD. LESLIE NIELSEN. SALMA HAYEK. LISA STAHL."

Petrucciani stopped his jig syncopated with the constant jingles from the megaphone, he stood in a aloof appreciation of his one-star but chef d'oeuvre concerto to be circled by three of the bachelorettes.

"Let the interlude be the sound of our fucking!"

Godiva stood Amazonian and in a constant constable vindicate sparkle, her rival had died once and will never live again. An Austrian virtuosa who had once been a boîte-banshee, serenading every man into adultery and one into a mangle for a curse. This so au-strich fell into a very same curse of an impenetrable pearl veil during a cruise across, every long shadow being miscible and a little worse than a fiasco, her being anchored onto the bottom of the seashell bank. An All-American duchess was shot from a cannon into the spotlight and into this ferry by her very last breath.

The I-talian gallery-gawked at the G'diva and she asked for more, he browsed through all the fabrics now in digit-describe while the other cattle-cats of the stars reprimanded him for his impudence.

"By golly, do you have to be so gall about the whole stare? You've turned this whole galley into a sick room."

"Sorry..."

"What's your station number?"

"I'm..."

"Or whatever you sailors got as badges. Your barrack number then."

"My barrack is that boat over there."

"And what's the number name of that?"

"B0-12 or of sorts."

"Of sorts. Okay, get out of here."

The bouncer made haste and by memory of the witnesses the skittish foal had transmogrified into marine-material or had been replaced for better and the I-talian was scraping at the checker galley while cropping at whatever mâche-manure was left by the guests while he was being dragged down-side up by the bouncer. His total spoils from the party stuffed down his shorts before making contact with the maritime being as so, a clingy-page Playboy magazine, a hoop earring, and a full last gawk at Godiva.

As he buckle-boarded unto the plateau all that noise around him had turned to some swishes and some swashes, a dolphin had played towtruck with his form inadvertently or advertently carrying him in the general direction of a safe

aport West. He was buried by a torque heavy bed and all felt shoveling and a posse of the local privateers had come do his bidding, the dolphin made basta towards anywhere but here when 5.56x49 was heard.

"...Blblblblbl..."

The testimony of his remained the same as his time in the wet, some swirling and an ebon optic of everything, bag on his head but everything was yesterday-yet. Destitute tongues complemented the image of a now burlapped I-talian on this torque-abundant maritimer headed Eastward to a coast more soothing for the belligerents and more appropriate as a doghouse to the I-talian.

The flagship of old alee made easy through the rise and the swivels were ever-changing and even after the rascals had docked unto the palm something was to be felt. The I-talian's gut was a tumble-about and there was some come-uppance of his breakfast on the shore. By the time night came true the buccaneers had the I-talian wrong on fours of the dusty filaments, a conga line mapped itself out and some of the buccaneers took turns placing their service rifles and by event their person on the Sicilian back. As the crescent smoothed out the strands had complicated themselves into pebbles and casings, seashells for entrée.

The night rejuvenated herself and the I-talian was sat Indian and unshackled at the embered stokes, handed a gulp of sea for souper. The pirates took congressional turns sharing street-stories like bread and danced uneven, every breath being a lifetime for the I-talian. He reached into his shorts for his reaps and unalarmed were all. By the touch, he was laid upright at the Ms. Fleming's and he saw skyscraping sentinels of leather, two hundred towers of Pisa's with each having lovers intertwine. All the ugly had come short and the night and day were satin.

"...A market-goer did his usual and came to the market. He saw eggs and asked, 'How much?' The lady turned and said, '20.' And so he reached into his pants and gave her the 20. He saw melons and asked, 'How much?' The lady turned and said, '50.' And so he reached into his pants and gave her 50. Years had passed and he had made acquaintance to the prices to a point where he said the prices cocky before lips touched, '20', '50', and so the goods were exchanged. By the time he had made circle tour of the market, he saw a woman empty handed and told her, '20.' 'You're going to need more for a quick one.' He made travel of the wares and saw another empty handed woman, '50.' She insisted she wasn't selling anything till he mentioned he was paying in cash. Her tunique wrap suddenly felt lighter. Schooling fees had gotten quite costly in the summer."

The I-talian's stay of execution at Ms. Fleming's had been interrupted by the belches and ricochets that imbued the droll-dust, every joke was pause-heavy and the chugging of the whole locomotion continued on and so.

"What about you, Kwi-Man? Got jokes?"

"A waiter comes round to the table, it's round as well. 'How did you find that steak?' The attendee paused, 'With my fork, I sweeped off all that spinach and coincidentally... would you believe it? Lo, it was there under all those greens.'

The stars made themselves more clear on the pages, quivering less. The I-talian had forwent the magazine for a gaze at the gallery of Northward, crickets converged and were picked off for grilling quick. A seeming-semitone rascal had been told to stay bullseye on bark as the rest of the buccaneers took at dart-dealing at him with a harpoon rifle. The harpoon turned grain to his sacrum and the night so became a sacrament to the band, he was dragged by the rope, leaving a rope of his own and they all narcolepsized like flies being picked off at once. The night, she brayed and brushed at all, ivory made it's passage through all their breaths.

The night did her cycle many times and the I-talian had been jaded dredging the shore and saw the leash as a way to stay close to his mates, one of the pirates had let him eat coconut flesh. The schedule was as to ransom him off to his crew but all had assumed he deserted aweigh for the coral, and by the sunrise, he oiled their rifles and took to noodling tarpon for the pirates.

A cruiser had made embargo of the whole focus, all the foroughed faces of the chinooks were cuttled and sanded as the riverine craft breechloaded and breechfired onto and unto until the I-talian was part of the same dorsal stew as the rascals. He had been clinging to a jaundiced chinook like a lover and so the tether of ailed essence and ailed body made it's incision in collinear, the two torpedo-totaled as a seagull. The I-talian was welded by name finally not to an industrial pappy but another maritimer foremost and delinquent aft-most, the chinook was in charge of flight while the I-talian just cried weather.

So, yes. He was a fag.

# &amp

*issue&*  
&anon



First, let me say that all of the posts in this thread claiming that Ryan treats &#amp as a cult are entirely correct. He demonizes anyone who criticizes &#amp or tries to leave, hence why he was trashing me in the /wg/ Discord on Monday night and telling me to kill myself. The real reason for his anger is that I came to the realisation that our relationship was unhealthy and inappropriate, and told him I was cutting contact with him. He apologised over and over, begging me to reconsider, and when I refused he got angry and lashed out. Now he's blaming me for all of the recent trolling (including creating this thread and posting his doxx) and is using me as a scapegoat. I did not want any of this to be public, but he's forced my hand: I will provide proof of everything that he's done. (Most of the worst things he has said have been during phone calls, but some of it is documented over text.) Ryan has made a myriad of threats to try and stop me from posting this. He convinced me to call him yesterday (I've since blocked him on everything) and he threatened to doxx me by exposing my full name, the university I attend, my home address, and my parents' address. He threatened to post things intended to humiliate me: to create fake screenshots of a sexual nature, to post private insecurities that I confided in him about, and to post voice recordings he has of me crying while I was in the middle of a mental breakdown earlier this year. He doesn't have any intimate photos of me to use as leverage, but I worry that he'll try to create fake nudes and post them. He's already been contacting people and claiming that I have been threatening to harm myself in order to discredit me and make me seem crazy. (To be clear: I've been doing okay lately, and I am not having any thoughts of harming myself.) He knows I'm terrified of interacting with the police, so he even threatened to call the cops and lie to them about me being suicidal so that they'll show up at my apartment. I firmly believe that he will do everything in his power to try and hurt me, shame me, blame me, and silence me. At this point I'm exhausted: I just want the truth to be out there so that this all can be over. Nothing that he does to me now can be worse than the daily emotional and psychological toll of continuing contact. In May when I was in the middle of a mental breakdown, I emailed Ryan out of desperation, asking if he could speak to Ari on my behalf. He responded and offered his help and support. He asked for my number, started texting me, and immediately began trying to manipulate me into a sexual/romantic relationship with him. He knew that I was distraught and insecure, so he spent weeks lovebombing me and showering me with compliments and attention; he can be very charming and kind when it suits his purposes. Obviously I was starving for affection and validation at the time, and I was extremely unwell and was not thinking correctly. He used that against me, telling me that he wanted to supplant my feelings for Ari with an obsession with him. Within three or four days of when our text conversations began, he was already telling me that he loved me and wanted a future with me. He told me that he wanted me to be his muse, and that &#amp would be our special project together. (Note: Ryan lost access to his cellphone plan a few weeks ago and started using a new iCloud account to text on wifi, hence why in the screenshots of his earlier messages the contact is saved as "Ryan" and in the later ones it shows the email address from his iCloud account.) He used my age and relative lack of experience against me, claiming that I didn't know anything about men or about life, and that he had seen it all and had all of the answers. He leveraged my mental health issues to fuck with my head, convincing me that he had magic abilities and was the only one who could understand me or help me cope. He told me that if I sought help from medical professionals or went back to the hospital, the result would be that I would kill myself or would be permanently damaged, and that very bad things would happen to me. He also instructed me not to take my medication because, in his words, it was the touch of the devil and would destroy my soul. He encouraged me to reach out to him for support whenever I was feeling upset, and manipulated me into becoming emotionally dependent on him. Obviously it's embarrassing that I ever fell for any of this, but I was not thinking correctly at the time. I did not begin to realise that Ryan was abusive until the end of August. He had spent months telling me repeatedly that he loved me, that he wanted us to be together, and that he was not involved with anyone else. Then one day he called me and unceremoniously announced that he'd just finished hooking up with a woman he'd met at an orgy on Saltspring Island. Throughout this conversation, he was behaving erratically and rambling incoherently, so I asked him (out of concern) if he was high. He mocked me for being naïve about drugs and accused me of not trusting him. Soon after, he admitted that he had in fact relapsed and spent all of his money on heroin, and was now stranded on Saltspring. He then spent over an hour verbally abusing and belittling me over the phone as I cried, and once I hung up he spent the remainder of the day sending me cruel text messages until his phone died. I didn't block his number because I was concerned for his well-being and believed he was in danger of harming himself or deliberately overdosing. After this he apologised and begged my forgiveness, blaming all of his abusive behaviour on the drugs. Stupidly, I forgave him, because he had spent months guiding me to become emotionally dependent on him, and I was afraid to be without him. As I've said before, Ryan had always encouraged me to reach out to him for support when I felt sad. But after this he changed, and his abusive behaviour became more overt. He began to angrily lash out and shame me for bothering him when I would try to initiate a conversation or would ask for even a small amount of reassurance. He would prey on my anxieties by repeatedly threatening to kick me out of &#amp and cut contact with me, knowing that I would inevitably beg him not to do it out of fear of being alone.

He would devalue and belittle me. He would deliberately behave in a way that he knew would upset me and hurt my feelings, and then would mock me for being crazy when I predictably had an emotional reaction. He said that he could not handle having women disobey or question him, and that our relationship was conditional upon me knowing my place and deferring to him at all times. At one point during a phone call, he said that if we were having a conversation face-to-face, he would shut me up by slapping me. As I've already explained in the &#non thread, Ryan texted me a couple of weeks ago and told me that he wanted me to steal the &#non idea that had been suggested in the &#amp thread and make it a reality, using it as a &#amp psyop, where we would gain people's trust and then reveal that &#amp had been behind the project all along. I agreed. But once I actually made the thread and started working on &#non, I realized that I was having fun with the project, and that it had genuine momentum. I wanted to experiment with it as its own individual thing and create something to showcase the anonymous writers of /lit/, not simply use it to boost the &#amp brand. Also, I was sick of all the psyops and lying and drama, and I was tired of Ryan treating me cruelly all the time. When I told Ryan this last week, he got angrier than I've ever seen him. He accused me of siding with the trolls and of trying to destroy what he had built. He harshly berated me over the phone and then continued sending me angry texts for hours in the middle of the night, despite me begging him repeatedly to leave me alone. He threatened to destroy &#amp entirely, delete the website, and walk away from everything if I didn't obey him, because he couldn't handle not having complete control over the /lit/ scene. Eventually he broke me down and I acquiesced. I know Ryan much more than any of you—I have spent many, many hours talking to him on the phone and over text message. Let me be clear: he is not a good person. As other people in these threads have said, he has egomaniacal tendencies, and is highly manipulative. He spent years using social media to try to recruit people into Daylife Army/Tumple, a financially exploitative, sexually abusive online cult of which he was a high ranking member. To gain his status in the cult, he participated in the "sacrament" of consuming the cult leaders' dried semen and menstrual blood. (If you're curious about Daylife Army, the Instagram account @pain.matrix has catalogued the cult's history in depth, and there's an article about it here: <https://onezero.medium.com/inside-the-social-media-cult-that-convincing-young-people-to-give-up-everything-f3878fbec632>.) Ryan is genuinely scary. He's done a lot of fucked up things, and feels little remorse. When Ryan was dealing drugs in Clearwater BC last year, he was accessory to a murder. He stood there and watched his drug supplier choke a woman to death, and did nothing to intervene. He skipped town afterwards, making no attempt to report the crime or to help her family get justice. Also, Ryan once got drunk and confessed to me over the phone that not only has he been in and out of jail, he has actually spent multiple years in prison for manslaughter, because he killed someone in a bar fight by stabbing him in the neck with a knife. He's also been incarcerated for charges related to cyber crimes and scamming/phishing. Ryan doesn't care about /lit/ or about me or about any of you. He only cares about himself, and he sees &#amp and all of its offshoots as extensions of his ego. For his own sake, I hope that he changes and becomes a better person, but I don't think that he will. The future of &#amp is not looking good, but he's the one to blame for that. I'm done with &#amp. Obviously it's shameful that I went along with any of this, but I have to own that and try to move on. I'm only doing this now because I have to defend myself from the lies that he is planning to spread about me, and because you all deserve to know what kind of person Ryan is and what kind of work you are supporting. Considering the threats he made against me yesterday, the situation may get much worse, and I'll probably be forced to involve the police if he retaliates. I'm not asking any of you to see me as a good person or to uncritically trust me: I have serious issues of my own, and I've done a lot of things that I deeply regret. I understand that a lot of you hate me or think I'm crazy, or even believe that I deserve to be treated the way that Ryan treated me. Fair enough. But please understand that I'm not malicious: throughout all of this, my goal was never to create drama or to have a destructive impact on anyone. I really care about &#amp, and I've spent a lot of time editing and promoting the magazine, but as long as Ryan is at the helm, I don't think that this project can be salvaged. I believe that he will run it into the ground. Lastly: Yes, I was the one who created the &#amp server, around the time that Ryan started talking to me and encouraging me to become involved in &#amp again. I shouldn't have created another alt account to do so, but my intentions were not bad at all: I wanted the server to be a drama-free place to talk about the magazine. I didn't want to disclose my identity as the creator of the server because I believed that if I did, no one would trust me or be willing to join and participate. Obviously this was a stupid fucking decision on my part, and I did it impulsively: I was still off the rails at the time, and I was not thinking right. I never used the server or that account to do anything nefarious, and I have not created any new alts since then. I deleted the &#amp server on Monday night, because the people in this thread are entirely correct: Discord has been the worst possible thing for &#amp, and it is enabling Ryan's toxic and manipulative behaviour and cult mentality. That's all.

But you have to believe me

If you care about me then do  
what's best for me and let me go

Edited

No please

Please do t do this

I won't be able to go on

I can't lose another

Please

Let me speak to you

I promise I can fix this

I promise man

My heart is breaking right now

I'm so sorry

This can't be fixed. I'm sorry. We  
shouldn't talk anymore.

Please don't

God

Please

Jesus Christ is in the room

Please please for the love of god  
don't leave me like this

I told you that I am reliving  
patterns

But I know right from wrong

I promise I do

You manipulated me when I was  
at my lowest and convinced me  
that you had all of the answers

you regret this friendship?

Don't man

No

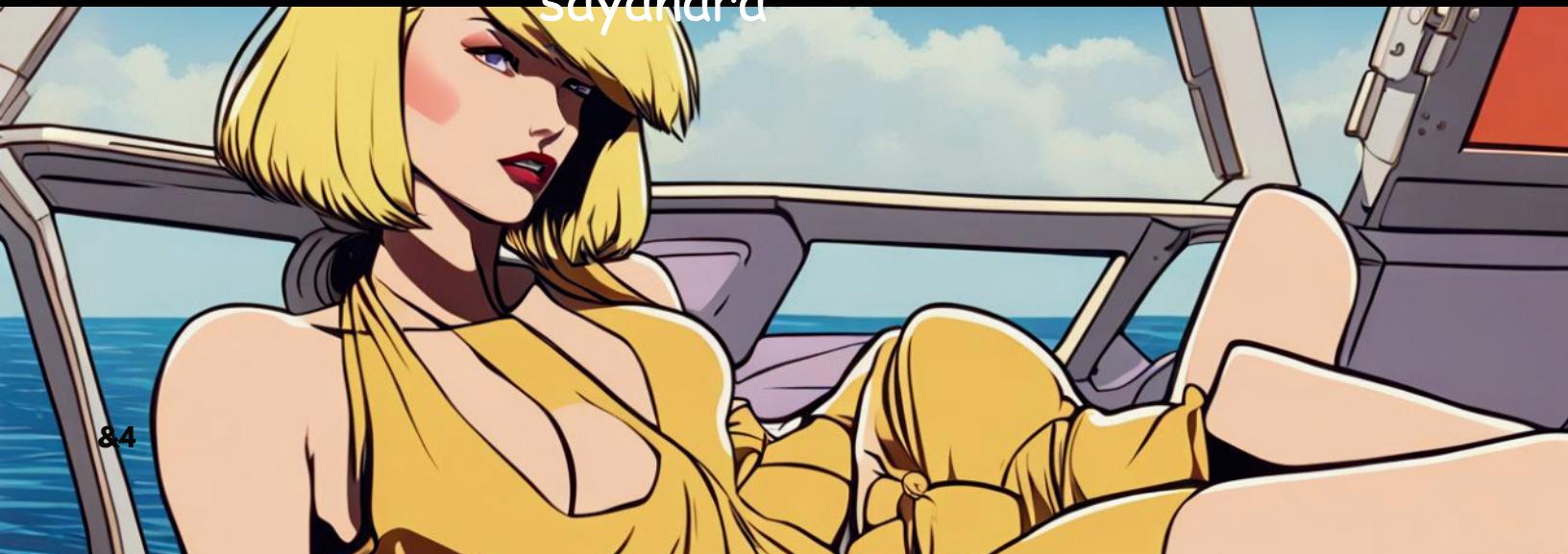


hello yes my name is ryan and am i the founder of of the magazine adn wrote some bools like chiken owrld oad the othe one am in a cult but i dont give them any money because i dont have any so i just create art bestowing glory upon them and trad taht in tor spiritaul gall. hear me now oh lowly knaves, kiss my arse, for the day

of lewis is upon us.

thank you for reading amp magazin it truly means more to me than you might imagine. anyway you silly billys, why dont you go out and get some shekels, prety boys. you guys are alrite. buncha fukin honkeys. hit me with a back beat will you alex. yeah that one. thanks man. thatnks a gl ot you guys and as they say in china

sayanara



# DEBRIEF

**Anonymous**

Denny's is cold on a night like this. Acidic black swill ripples in my mug. Our waitress, fat black woman, massive tits, leaves us two plates of vaguely southwestern eggs. I ignore the overwhelming stench of menthol cigarettes, she ignores the black eye and bloody shirt.

I'm seeing straight by now, but the walls still pulsate in the corner of my eye. Davey pipes up. 'So what happens now?'. I don't know. I don't fucking know, dude. 'What happens now' should have come hours ago. A little harsh. I come down on him a little harder than I meant to, leaving us picking at our meals.

"We go to the hospital. We leave her there. Go back home, nothing happened."

The pragmatic solution, right? We ditch her, absolve ourselves of guilt. Unless they run the plates, then we're fucked.

Matching glances with an elderly couple across the establishment, we pipe down.

My knuckles are still swollen. Red and dented no matter how many times I habitually rub them. Dawn breaks. My southwestern bullshit peppers are going nowhere. Davey's gears are turning, look close enough at his face and it's like you can

can see a loading bar behind his saucerlike pupils.

"I remember something on Breaking Bad about them dissolving a body in acid. Can't we do that? Cut her up or something and just... y'know.", he makes a 'sploosh' movement with his hands.

Brilliant plan if either of us knew where we could source hydro...sulfuric...whatever kind of acid. Maybe feeder pigs? It might take too long. Plus farmers'd be waking up by now, we'd get blasted.

Silence washes over us. We sit on the realization that our lives are about to change. Dramatically. A worried expression fights through Davey's black hole pupils and perma-grin. I bury my face in my hands, rubbing my forehead, trying to come up with a plan, but quickly finding myself considering the silver lining of going to prison.

Looking to my left, tits fill my vision. The waitress freshens up my coffee, making a face at our hardly touched meals.

"Everything okay with y'all order?"

Yeah we're fine, just still talking. She creeps back behind the counter, instantly whipping out her phone and returning to a full-volume speakerphone conversation. I continue sulking, regret starting to sink its teeth into my neck. Taking my face out of my hands, I see Davey's eyes lighting up, his mind moves faster than his mouth can as he frantically gestures, words lagging behind his actions. 'Dude!'

He lowers his volume. 'Dude!'. We huddle over the cold breakfast platters, a hushed exchange. 'What if we just take her out to West Hill? Dump her body there, it just looks like a couple of niggers--' We both look at the waitress. She didn't hear.

'-a couple of black guys did it.', he corrects himself.

"That's fucking retarded!", I half-whisper half-scream. You think cops are going to just magically overlook a dead white girl showing up in the projects? We'd draw more attention to the body than we would just burying her somewhere.

Davey taps his head, 'But not attention towards us.'

'You think they're gonna tell on us? Shit, man, you think they'll even be awake right now? It's five in the morning, dude.'

"You're just fucking racist and think they don't have jobs!" I half-whisper half-yell again.

He leans back in the booth. 'Am I wrong? You got a better idea?'

I rack my brain for another argument, but he does have a point. Every IQ point I had, every synapse, wants to tell me this idea is retarded. We will one-hundred-and-ten percent be caught dumping a body in broad daylight. Something about his confidence in the plan inspires me, though, clouding my judgement long enough for us to leave Denny's and hit the road.

Chainsmoking behind the wheel, I parse my mind for ideas. I watch enough true crime shit to know they can ping your phone off of cell towers and shit, yeah? We leave the phones at the house, as far as anyone knows, we just got back from the party, okay? Davey nods. Hitting the blinker, we turn off the highway onto our street.

We need to take her body out of the duffel bags when we get home. If we're dumping this thing in broad daylight, we do it quick. Taking another drag, I keep spilling whatever I can think of. Tomorrow, we barbecue. Burn our clothes, bags, shoes, anything we can burn. I saw that on the Sopranos one time. Letting off the gas, I make it into our driveway. We go over the plan again.

Stash the phones, unbag the girl, dump the girl, burn the shit. Simple. Sharing another dart, we conspicuously shoot our gazes around the neighborhood, hearts primed to sink if we saw another human being who might witness us. Silently smoking the rest of my fag, I simmer for a minute after I fizzle it out against an open Coke can. I should really come up with a better-- The door unlocks to interrupt my internal monologue.

"Come on."

Davey commands authority, not letting us waste any more time. I pull the trunk release, the distinct clunk echoes through the car as Davey and I step to the boot, hesitating while we eye the malformed Adidas duffel in the center of the trunk. Rebecca Bates is inside of the bag. Twisted and contorted and swollen and dead.

No words are exchanged, but we think the same thing. A similar cocktail of regret and fear washes down our collective gullet. I make the first move, unzipping the bag, her swollen face greeting us. I swallow, unzipping the entirety of it. Davey stands watch, peering around front doors for any sign of action.

First her arm flops out, sandbagging the rest of her body down. Manipulating her limp form for the umpteenth time tonight, my muscles sear. Slinging her arm over my shoulder, I wrap myself around her other arm and pull. She's stuck on the fucking bag. A hushed 'oh shit' prefacing Davey swooping in to peel the black nylon from her dangling legs. 'You got her?', he asks as we try our best to inconspicuously shove her limbs back into the trunk.

We take a last look at her, pale and mangled and jaw agape. The huge purple bruise on her face spreads through her pale flesh. I rub my knuckle. Before I can keep feeling sorry for myself, Davey snaps me out of it, shutting the trunk. 'Okay, now what, phones, right?'

Right, phones. Through the back gate, we chuck the devices onto the nearest lawn chairs. All we need is for them to show that we're at the house. Not like we'd get away with this shit if it gets back to us regardless, but every bit helps.

In the car, we light another smoke. Davey's hands shake, breaking through his confident facade. I feel you. The entire spectrum of fear crawls up the back of my brain, a lingering, inescapable nervousness coating my skull cavity. I fill my lungs, Marlboro secondhand tinging the cold intake of air. Exhaling, I turn the keys. Okay, seatbelts, speed limits. No rolling through stops, no running reds, no flipping anyone off... My hands tense around the leather.

The tumbling doll of flesh in the trunk punctuates the awkward silence in the vehicle. We burn through my pack of smokes, Davey wordlessly grabbing another pack from my glovebox and handing me one. That same nervous feeling grips at my heart as I see the sun rise above the treeline, growing more and more aware of how visible we're about to be. Sprinklers coming on, the occasional garbage truck... We're fucked, man.

We take another right, passing a few public schools before seeing the familiar dark-brick buildings on the horizon. West Hill Projects. I stub out my fag, ditching it in the can and slow down a few below the limit. My eyes peeled to both rear view

mirrors

'mirrors, looking for any sign of life. No cars, nobody on their balcony from the looks of it, either. Holy fuck, this plan might actually work.

"You ready?", I ask as we approach. Davey nods, his confident front completely gone, turned into a completely-terrified apprehension. I slow myself down a little more, we nod at each other, eyeing the balconies and driveways of the complex. I slow myself down a little more, gripping the trunk release lever. I slow myself down to a complete stop, pulling the release lever, unlocking the doors, and-

Davey eagerly looks at me.



"What the fu-GO!", I scream.

"I thought you were gonna-"

"Fucking- I'm driving! Get the fucking-- For christ's sake..."

I slam the shifter forward, putting it in park, kicking my door open. Jogging to the back of my car, the body hangs out the back, trying to tumble out as if it was melting down the bumper. Taking her cold embrace, I jerk her body upwards,

trying

No

trying to kick her legs out of the car. Davey flanks me, taking ahold of her legs, trying to apologize before I shut him up. We're already out here screaming and shit, don't draw anymore attention, retard.

We aimlessly walk around, each half of her dead weight dangling in our grips. 'Over there, look!', Davey whispers, motioning towards a hill we could dump her behind. Switching our efforts, we each take an arm. Digging our heels in with each step, we meticulously drag her through the mud, ignoring her bones cracking, her pants falling off, her hair getting caught under our shoes, we desperately tear up the hill, trying to clear the summit before anyone catches a glimpse. Before anyone steps out for their morning cigarette and notices two guys dragging a half-naked woman into the woods.

Letting go, her torso flops over the summit, body concave, arms above her head. 'Now we can just...', we both hyperventilate. 'Now we can just... push her down. And let her...', Davey does a 'tumbling dead woman' motion with his hands. '...Y'know?' Repositioning her body to let it freely roll, we halfheartedly send her off with a nudge from our shoes. Her body cracks and mangles, the quiet dawn barely shattered by twigs and sticks breaking under her weight. She twists and breaks, pale flesh soiled by filth as she loses speed. Finally, she lay, a muddy, broken, contorted mass of flesh.

*continued from S10 “Mankings”*

yodelling.

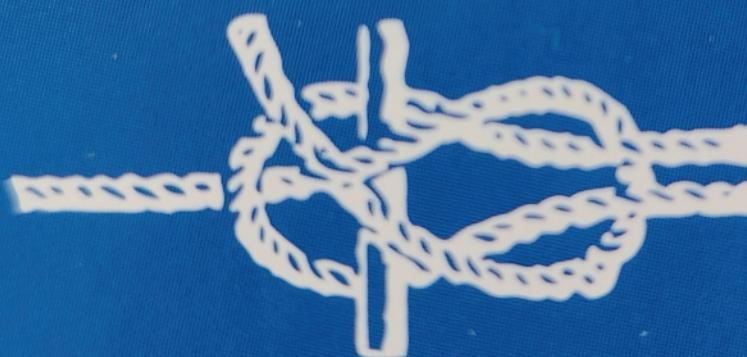
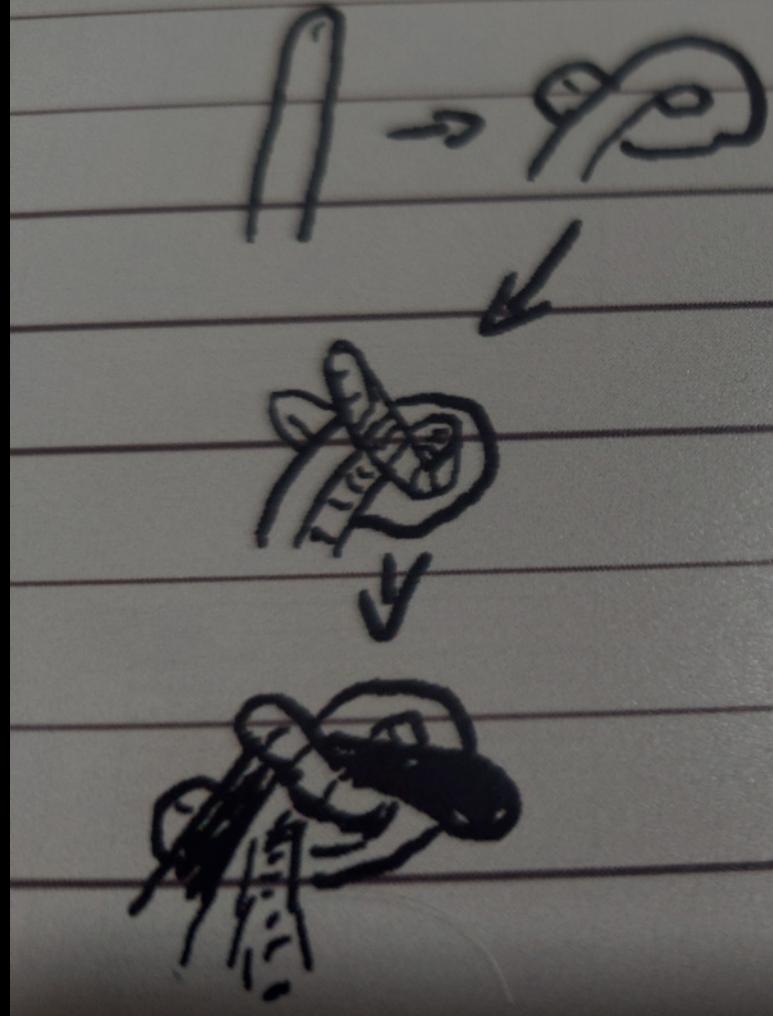
The mystical strangeness of the knotting ceremony meant that underdog victories in only a few ill-judged wars was sufficient to strike superstitious fear into the generals of the Yarlung dynasty, the then-dominant force in the region, which accepted tribute from the ManKings rather than battle them, as did the cavalry generals of the Northern Turkic and Uyghur kingdoms – iron-age superpowers signally ill-equipped for mountain warfare and perfectly willing, every generation or so, to satisfy their eccentric neighbour by supplying a peasant boy who happened to have a sufficiently long implement for knotting.

When ManKings were not purchased, the challenge of having to capture post-pubescent fighting males alive and then take their trousers off to check must have complicated the military operations of the dynasty. Legends on carved stone steles tell the tales of warriors who fell gloriously trying to restrain an armoured man and check his package out. Notable tragedies in verse detailed the communal sense of desolation when the killer of four men, finally restrained and stripped naked, turned out to be a grower.

The glory of leading a military state did, however, occasionally encourage youths to submit themselves. The third of the ManKing trios was famously formed when an Indian longboy, who had travelled from a distant, to this day unnamed princedom, scaled the holy mountain just in time to replace his predecessor and prevent what would have been a vicious, even suicidal war to kidnap an Uyghur prince who had been said to be hung like a horse that was lanky.

progressively

A surprisingly thorough non-verbal historical record transmitted as poems read by leering old ladies explains how the unmanoevable man kings failed to survive the expansion of the Yarlung empire, the fatal year occurring when, inevitably, they were obliged to launch a war during a famine in which one king had starved. Their dynasty fought to the last man, or rather men, though the two with their schlongs still tied to the dead guy are unlikely to have contributed greatly to said battle's course. Despite this fact there are those of us today who imagine that, had they survived, the ManKings might have set the foundations for a better, more consensual form of government, a tradition of selection by merit, of a sort, or at least by random chance – which is a damn sight better than anything the human race has managed since. This, at core, is why I posted the advert, and am eagerly awaiting your reply.





***continued from M3***  
***“Why Computers Cannot Think”***

There are several objections, the strongest being the Brain Simulator Reply.

**The Brain Simulator Reply**

Suppose the computer is replaced with a perfect electro-mechanical copy of a Chinese native speaker's brain, including circuits for every neuron (e-brain). Assume that the e-brain can function exactly as a native Chinese speaker's brain, processing and outputting information identically. The computer and e-brain have distinct logical structures. The e-brain's outputs are indistinguishable from the control human in the Imitation Game. However, it is unclear if the e-brain understands the Chinese language. Consider a version of the e-brain built with water pipes and valves instead of electro-mechanics (w-brain). The output of the e-brain and w-brain are identical, but intuitively, most agree that water pipes cannot think or understand. Unless thinking is explicitly related to electrical-mechanical impulses, e-brain does not think or comprehend just as w-brain does not.

We can take this a step further. If you were to

progressively replace the cells in your brain with electronic neurons, your thought process would likely stay the same. Each replacement neuron represents a pseudo-simulation of the previous biological one. Consider that this has continued so that your brain is essentially identical to e-brain (and produces identical outputs to w-brain). Just because a brain can be perfectly simulated does not mean that the simulation is capable of thought or understanding. This is shown to be true because e-brain's logical structure and outputs are identical to w-brain, and w-brain does not think. This topic leads me to consider the interdisciplinary case of Behaviorism.

**Behaviorism**

Behaviorism is a theory of psychology that proposes there are no internal mental processes that drive outward behavior. A behaviorist believes that any behavior can be explained or defined by analyzing the outward actions and conditions surrounding it. In other words, a deterministic model of the mind.

This position resembles the logic used to support the Imitation Game: If a computer appears to think or understand as a human does, there is no reason to believe it does not. I object to this line of reasoning as it relates to the Imitation Game. A common saying that follows

follows this line of reasoning is: if something looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it is probably a duck. This could work for identifying amphibious birds, but this is inappropriate when discussing something as complex as the human mind.

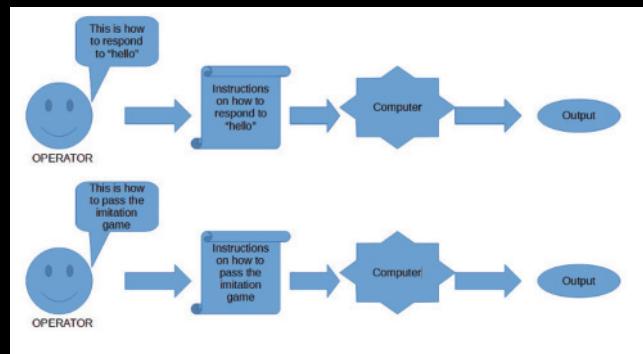
### **The Perfect Actor Objection (Spartans)**

Behaviorism when applied leads to cases where the validity of the claim is unclear, for example: "John engages in external behavior related to pain; therefore, he is in pain."

The perfect actor objection claims behaviorism is incorrect as reactions to certain stimuli can vary, regardless of societal or learned responses. Assume there is a perfect actor (a Spartan) that lives in a society where showing pain outwardly does not occur, and if someone does show pain, it will disgrace himself and his entire family. In our example, these Spartans will not behave as if they are in pain, even if they are. If a human cannot outwardly show symptoms of pain in this way, it casts a severe logical conundrum onto behaviorism. If something looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it could be an electro-mechanical simulation of a duck. The observations above are not conclusive that the subject is a biological duck. Further observation/evidence is required.

### **Note on the Missing Operator**

While considering my thesis, I noticed a missing piece of the Imitation Game—the Operator of the *computer* is not present. A human must build, then program the computer (not e-brain or w-brain in this case) specifically to pass the Imitation Game. Even if the Operator is not present in the computer room as it is running, it is clear that the instructions from the Operator and the discrete structure of the computer remain in use. Suppose we view computers as storage mediums for instructions like Searle's manual in the Chinese room (all computers must have designated, author



discrete, non-computational storage). The manual's author (the Operator) holds a discrete mental version of the manual given to Searle as he presumably speaks Chinese. As the Operator exports his thoughts into the computer, he can only provide the instructions in a logical language. As the computer attempts the Imitation Game, it receives discrete commands from a thinking operator, even if he is not in the room during the test. From an outside observer, it appears that the computer is unassisted in making these responses, but that may not be the case.\*

### **Conclusion**

My thesis states that computers are incapable of thought or understanding but can mimic or simulate it under some circumstances. The Chinese room example faces a challenge with the Brain simulator reply, but the Perfect Actor objection similarly challenges Turing's initial premise in the Imitation Game. The Missing Operator poses a valid and (as far as I am aware) original objection to the Turing test. This intrigues me, and I want to develop this observation further in later writings.

### **Notes**

*Computer* italicized refers to an electronic, discrete, artificial device explicitly made and instructed to pass the Turing test. This definition does not include e-brain or w-brain because the purpose of the computer is to appear like a human therefore the computational structure of a computer does not have to resemble a human brain. If "computer" is used without italics, it references computers in general.

*e-brain* italicized refers to a perfect electro-mechanical representation of the brain as is described in the Brain Simulator Reply.

*w-brain* italicized refers to a perfect water pipe and valve representation of the brain as described by Searle in his response to the Brain Simulator Reply. It produces identical outputs to *e-brain*.

\*A diagram for clarity on the Missing Operator. There is no functional difference between the operator manually typing responses after each question from the observer into the computer, and the operator giving instructions on how to answer all questions in a language group (if this is how the computer is programmed). The operator still has direct control over responses based on his instruction set, even if he is not present.



## My Mirror

Anonymous

"Good morning, sweetheart," are the words you don't hear as you wake up one day, once more wondering when the weather will cool enough for you to get out the heavy winter blanket. You haven't changed your sheets since you switched to the light summer blanket four months ago; the same sheets you accidentally jizzed on two nights ago, and probably now and then on occasion long before then anyway. Ah, well, as long as it isn't where you lay your head, you can't do anything more than pretend to mind. Personally, I just think it's a little fucked up that kids in Africa are starving and you aren't.

can



“Good morning, sweetheart,” are the words you don't hear as you wake up one day, once more wondering when the weather will cool enough for you to get out the heavy winter blanket. You haven't changed your sheets since you switched to the light summer blanket four months ago; the same sheets you accidentally jizzed on two nights ago, and probably now and then on occasion long before then anyway. Ah, well, as long as it isn't where you lay your head, you can't do anything more than pretend to mind. Personally, I just think it's a little fucked up that kids in Africa are starving and you aren't.

can



## 2023-07-25 Burger Septet

### No Mayo

The perils of a barbecue are gone  
And no one was around to pick the lettuce  
I told her that there's nothing but the dawn  
Just after she gave me that final kiss

The sauce that's on my chicken isn't real  
But pain's not in the mind, it's in the heart:  
And neither is the paste that made this meal  
Which although fake, I know is my best start.

I'm picking up myself this afternoon  
By ordering a chicken sandwich dry  
There's no tang here or sour swoon  
Left to imagination for my scry.

I love McChickens without any sauce,  
They make me salivate, to forget loss.

### Permanent

Does waiting here excite you any more?  
Do you elect to look beyond the glass?  
Or do you make it out without a score,  
Was printing out receipts too frantic, fast?

They're on the run, I think, and no one cares  
For long emoluments of times gone by  
Rectangular, as well, with small black flares  
Which show through to the sun when made the sky.

I don't use old printouts to look above,  
But rather to read under words as well.  
For in-between has grown passé and tough  
Their pace is always lengthening the tell.

A thousand years ago this white old paper  
Would represent a fortune's connoisseur.

## One Bag / Double Cheese

There's just one app-based deal that's left to have.  
It's two of them, and nothing else, to go.  
It's not about the dollars that I save  
Insisting as I am, impoverished woe,

The cheeseburger tastes different than the others.  
I'll swear it to you on a holy book  
If only I could eat with happy betters  
But here I sit, train rocking, in my nook.

Two days ago the tunnel darkened here,  
A girl turned to me, waved, and then we talked  
I got her number and she said, I'm near:  
But what if this night's deal is lastly mocked?

Regardless of the hurt to my complexion,  
It's three dollars and stays my last connection.

## Semiosis undisclosed

The symbolism couldn't be more trite  
I cringe when I see degradations there,  
What could I care that no one sees the light  
That even prices here are no more fair?

The price to heaven isn't on the board  
But neither are most things you'd want to buy.  
They just don't put it up, they'd rather hoard  
The path to knowledge, or into the sky.

Why doesn't someone make a law on this  
That they must show the price of every item,  
They think that it's ok, ignorant bliss,  
When weighing golden scales should craft a hymn.

Which hopefully is harmony with God,  
I bring my eyes up still, with wiling awe.

## Divison Street

A dollar extra for some extra meat  
And I can't even tell what that stuff was.  
They're lovely, they have a wooden seat  
And five dollars was more than just because.

When every evening comes they throw it out  
Just like I've been evicted from the line  
But here, I'm free, I'm basking still without  
The knowledge of the Chinese on the sign.

If carol's bun can feed me for just six  
I wonder why the other places don't  
Do what these old ladies do all to fix  
The path of food that wasn't someone's wont.

McDonald's never throws out what they cook  
Because they sell so much, and never look.

## Bar 169

At 169 they gave me Diet Coke  
And someone next to me was from Las Vegas  
He said that what they have here's hardly coke  
And that my pink shirt signs what fashion was.

I nodded, thanked him, showed him my last cash  
I listened to the regulars all talk  
I read what I had wrote, and lost a lash  
On that wood table, my coke with just one rock.

How dirty all this is. I thought right then:  
I thought of what it means to buy a coffee.  
It's just a dollar but the whole place's clean,  
They never put the mopping in your fee.

McDonald's wasn't where I wished I was  
But sometimes I miss that familiar buzz.

## Severance

Obliquely stumbling past the broken stairs  
That lead up to the station near my place  
I spotted the old fry cook unawares  
And as he turned around he knew my face.

He nodded to me silently, to show  
That while we had lived a hundred nights  
Of eating McDonalds made down below  
Employees once set free have far more rights.

I'd always shuffle my hands in my shorts  
The jingle of my keys and cooking beeps  
All that could fill the air to shouting hoarse  
And young people who laughed in bounding leaps.

We both knew that you never could quite tell  
Which items in the queue in my lap fell.

-5040 Review



# Tales of the Swamp

\$3.50

ISSUE  
S



LABORATORIES!  
CRYSTALS!  
WIZARD FIGHTS!  
ACCOUNTANT NOIRE!

# THE DHARK WHIZARD'S ST-HAVE

*Benji Tooky*

*'The Door to Saturn' meets 'Saturn Swept'*

Through bhlack portal I passed, off Lakish's whizard t-hower upon Saturn's fif moon to parts unknown, pursuant of the selfsame sinner, profligate, and heretic who sought to elude myself and Ghod's justice by means of his secret ghave.

I ehmerged upon this plane, whose nhame is borne in no tome, and ffound myself amongst a kind so like mhine in form and nose porcine — but c-hompletely unalike in flesh tone.

The nhatives of this realm, Oakland I later l-hearned its name, were off-put by my coloring, intuiting I bore phlague or was of the accursed crack-headed. C-hurious indeed, but my urhgent pursuit ghave no time for study, for even at that mhoment Lakish's c-horrupting influence threatened the local tribesmen. My hunt required stealth, so I undertook a metamorphosis by method of transnogrification of my lavender Nheptunian skin into that of the local rhedbone.

In conc-hordance wif my duties I sublimated mhyself into their society c-hompletely, going so far as to take a mate and perf-horming clerical labour in the local bazaar, by which I observed many comings and goings wif an eye for Lakish's evil signs.

Fhor three seasons I waited, until he erred most egregiously. Whord spread quickly that a stranger had drawn forth his st-have and struck dead a rhambuncious youth. It proved a cause for great commotion amongst the c-community, due firstly to the Oaklanders having no whizarding tradition amongst them, and secondarily it being that their anatomy possessed under the lower robes a breeding proboscis rather than st-have in most circumstances — the absence of which on my own form I had obscured from my mate through meticulous craft.

The nhight following I found him in his lair, an abandoned basement laundromat, and t-hook him unawares — throwing him bodily into the rhed brick so that it shuttered as dust poured upon his pitiable frame. Emesis choked me; he who had once been the t-horror of Saturn now lay at my feet as a t-hwisted bhlack remnant of his former self — just as I was by his pursuit.

I leered my immolating st-have's tip over his face. "Death doth not become a c-howard. Bhut before its mercy be ghranted, in reciprocation for quick death, giveth the key to rreturn by Saturn's Tower."

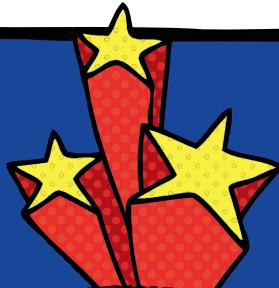
*continued on H6*

# HOT! PROMPTS

theres this dude named jacob but. we never get to hear his side of things. its wrote from a buncha point sof view. so other peeps who know him and someof them think he's pimp as hell but then he dide in war and his mom gives away his boots

**KAPOW!!**

there may or may not. be a secret mail service but you're super busy taking hella hallucinogenic-psychchotic "medicine" so you're too high to care but then you want to go shopping but as soon as you get to the shoping part it just ends



there's this chica with short hair who got tossed round a lot but you'd still totally hit it but then you die even though you aren't even from this country



you're a little black kid so you steal a car until it crashes midway through the jungle and then you shoot a bunch of people. and become bottom bitch for some old pedophile that everyone seems to like a bunch and then you kill your brother. because africa.

theres this big house. thatthis dude from haiti built but he was too much of a perfectioinist to ever enjoy. it so it burns down empty. you narrate the whole thing with your (gay?) freshman roommate and. thenkill yourself (but that part is acgtually in a different book and stuff)

**WOW!**

## From the Editor's

when i was a kid i'd play with legos in my room. usually i didn't build anything. my attention was solely on the mini-figures. i'd form armies. death squads. soccer teams. jedi orders then spend hours kitting them out and making them fight. hours and hours.

at about 5 years old i realized it wasn't fun if none of the good guys died. by 7 antiheroes and interconnected universes were how i entertained myself. i had to come up with twists, go deeper into character relationships, forge decade long conflicts, create crossover events, and then occasionally stop everything because i got bored and decided to do a lego world cup, all that shit.

kids tell stories to other kids, kids tell stories to themselves, kids play god and become markings because they can't control the world around them.

soul.  
it's not supposed to be cool, we're just having fun. deep down that's all any of this is.  
it's a story. it's a genre. it's a fantasy.. it's sciency. it's noire.  
it's hella cringe, bro.  
it's fun.





# GONE IN AN INSTANT

MILES MACNAUGHTON

Most fatal falls occur at a height less than 10 feet off the ground. Ironically, there is a higher chance of survival at 20 feet than there is at 10. Anything higher than 30 is considered unusual.

Dr. Jeff Langley was the unusual case. He fell 50 feet to his death, all the way down the five-story stone-and-steel stairwell in the southeast corner of Langley&Barnum, the office building in Orlando he co-owned and worked in. A security guard found the body a little after eleven, and before midnight the lights from police cars were lighting up the street. Overhead, the sky was filling with clouds, and just beyond the overpass the lamplights shimmered on Lake Underhill.

I arrived around midnight, half-awake and with the remains of a warm water bottle gurgling in my gut. Langley's business partner, Dr. Taylor Barnum, was being interviewed by the police. He looked like one of those guys who would make a great Presidential candidate—just old enough to be respectable, just young enough to be charming. I felt bad for the old boy. It was no secret that L&B had troubles. They posted major losses during the recession. Newer, more agile businesses had taken root in the area. There were rumors of an outside purchase if not a bankruptcy. Despite all that, they were still a household darling. They were strictly regional. They didn't have a ticker number. They weren't funded by the big banks. There were just 4,000 good people and small investors in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama doing their best to make things work. Now one of the two beloved founders was dead, nothing but a mangled mess at the bottom of a five-story stairwell.

I stepped under the tape to look at the body. He was smashed open like a jelly jar. Langley's arms were curled up to his chest like a dead spider and his face was frozen stiff. His wispy white hair was stained with blood and still wet to the touch. The ground was blackened with blood. Nearby, someone from forensics was taking pictures.

"He's been dead about three hours," he said. "Took a couple of hits on the way down. No witnesses, no cameras."

"Anyone in the building when it happened?"

"Just the guard." He snapped another picture.

I traced the barely visible chalk line.

"Not that theorizing is any of my business," he continued, "but given the circumstances, it's probably a suicide. Company's sinking, no wife, no kids..." Another photo, this one a close-up of the

death mask. "I'd probably do the same thing."

I squinted up the dizzying stairwell. There were dark bloodstains on the bright red handrails. "Lot easier ways to go," I said.

He grunted and handed me an evidence bag. "We found this in his pocket."

Inside was a yellow, bloody sticky-note that read 4384, 989XJ. I glanced over the note and passed it back and knelt by the body. Seeing Dr. Langley dead in his own blood put a particularly tight crick in my jaw. The stairwell reeked of body fluids and oncoming rain. I stayed for only a few minutes longer, then drove home. Thunder rolled in the distance.

The L&B main office was only five stories tall. I took my time going through each floor. Everywhere I looked people milled about in little groups talking in hushed tones. They tried not to stare at me as I passed up to the executive offices on the fifth floor. The door to Langley's office, labeled CTO, was closed. A stern woman with long red hair sat at the desk in front of it. Barnum's office door, labeled CEO, was open, and from the desk in front of his door came a bubbly young blonde who was talking my ear off before she even reached me.

"You must be the detective!" she said. "I'm Kate. Is there anything I can get you? Water? Coffee?"

"No," I managed. "No, thank you. Is Dr. Barnum in?"

"Yes! He's expecting you! Are you sure you don't want anything?"

I declined her offers again and politely peeled myself away into the CEO's office, shutting the door behind me. Dr. Barnum shook my hand and introduced himself. His hair was slick and black and supported by well-blended hair plugs. His wrinkled-eye smile, firm handshake, and navy blue three-piece with gold buttons almost fooled me into thinking I was there for a job interview. His office was nicely decorated, better than my apartment. He proudly showed me framed pictures of his wife. He told me how his three teenage children, also shown in decorative frames, were in the best private school in the area. Wedged into the corner of the busy desk he had a picture with Langley. Barnum, straight-backed and handsome, looked barely forty. Langley was slightly bent and in a disheveled brown blazer with his button-up tucked into beltless cargo pants. He looked to be Barnum's grandfather, even though they were nearly the same age. He had an old man's crooked smile that showed off his crooked teeth.



"I'm sorry we have to meet under these circumstances," Barnum said as we settled into our chairs. "Jeff always had his ups and downs, but this was unexpected."

"Any idea what might have pushed him over the edge?"

"Well, it's no secret we've had a rough few years. I think the emotional roller-coaster wore on him more than he let on. Jeff put everything into this company. It was all or nothing for him, and for me, right from the start. We always joked that if L&B went under, we'd both go with it."

"And is the company going under?"

Barnum smiled thinly and shook his head like he couldn't tell me, or as if it was a silly question.

"Just a few routine questions," I continued. "Where were you at the time of death?"

"I had just settled into bed when I got the call. I live in Winter Springs, about 30 minutes away."

"Went home at your usual time?"

"Around 5, I'd say. My wife makes salmon on Wednesdays, and my children and I read together."

"Salmon any good?"

Barnum smiled. "The best."

"I'll have to investigate that personally," I said. "Alright, Dr. Barnum. I don't see myself staying long. I'll talk to a few people and get out of your hair. And sorry about your loss."

Barnum stood and shook my hand. He showed me to the door and closed it behind him. As soon as the latch clicked, Kate eagerly ran up to me.

"So are you doing serious detective work, like in the movies?" she said. "I was thinking like I could be one of your informants. I know a lot of office gossip."

"Know any about Langley?"

"Oh gosh, what don't I know about Langley?"

Once she got going, I tuned her out and surveyed the office. Polished walnut furniture, tasteful vinyl floors, landscape posters. People passing by on their phones, or reviewing reports, or discussing things in low voices. No one was watching me. Just as I was thinking about leaving, something I half-heard brought my attention back.

"What was that?" I said. "Did you say new product?"

"Oh, yes! Dr. Langley was working day and night on a super-secret new product. He was very excited around the office. We're not supposed to talk about the new product, but since you're a detective, it should be fine to share that with you, right?"

"You have any files on it?"

Kate shrank and lost her pep. "I don't think Miss Lauren would like that."

I recalled the woman sitting in front of Langley's door and casually nodded in her direction. Kate nodded like she was about to be scolded. I leaned on Kate's desk and looked out from under my eyebrows. "You're a smart girl, Kate."

"Oh, stop," Kate said, grinning.

"You want to be an informant, right?"

"I do."

"Well, it's a tough job. You might have to break a few rules."

For some reason she lit up at the sound of that. She motioned for me to keep an eye out. It took her only a few minutes to compile a thick stack of files which she left on her desk as she pretended to go down the hall. I swept it up and started for the elevators. A woman stopped me ten feet from freedom—Langley's secretary, Lauren. A cold frown creased her thin lips.

"What do you have in your hands?" she said. "Let me see it."

She was already reaching for the folder. I snapped it under my arm and gave her my coldest stare. "Miss Lauren," I said. "These files are under purview of the Orlando PD."

"I need to inspect them before you carry them out."

"No you don't." She didn't listen, and when she reached again, I let her grab them, then I yanked them out of her grip. There was an icy desperation behind her furious eyes. I held my ground, and reluctantly, she stood aside to let me pass. As I did, she called after me: "I don't much care for your snooping."

"Just doing my job," I called over my shoulder. I could feel her gaze boring a hole through my skull. I couldn't help but smile, just a little bit.

The files were more technical than I expected. Plans, drawings, test results—pages and pages of Langley's work, and all of it well beyond me. The project's finances were easier to read and it took up the rest of my morning. By lunch time I was seeing a pattern. A certain company was showing up again and again for R&D work, and a lot of it. I gave the company a quick Google and found that they had an office in a little strip mall on the south side of town. When I got there, I saw that the glass windows were shuttered with thick curtains. The door was locked and the parking lot had very few cars. I called my office and asked for someone to pull the business records, then I went back to L&B.

I talked to some people who directed me to the third floor, "where all the eggheads hang out." I found three people on their phones in one of the break rooms. When they saw my badge, they all put away their

phones and stared at me like schoolchildren. I told them I was curious about L&B's new product.

"What new product?" said one. She looked around at her peers. "Was Langley doing another one of his projects again?"

"You don't know anything about it?" I asked.

"He did this a lot," she explained. "He'd get an idea in his head, then run off to his lab and work himself sick over it. Typical Langley."

"The stress didn't bother him?"

"He was always stressed," a second person said. "How could you not be? The company is sinking and it rests on you to dig it out of the grave."

"The company is not sinking," said the third, though he looked to be only saying it for my sake.

"He didn't seem stressed at all, recently," said the first. "He even said he was going to take a vacation soon. He looked pretty happy around the office."

"Well," said the third, "aside from last week, that time with Lauren."

The lady looked embarrassed at her coworker for bringing it up in front of a detective. At my quiet stare, she explained again. "We were passing Langley's office on our way to a meeting. We heard shouting behind the door. It flings open and Lauren sweeps past us. She looked like she was about to cry. Langley himself gets about a step out the door, and I swear I've never seen him so angry, but when he saw us, he just brightened up and accompanied us to our meeting. Didn't say another word about it."

"Did Langley have mood swings?" I asked. "Ups and downs, so to speak?"

"Maybe a little bit," she laughed, "but nothing like that. I've been with L&B for thirteen years and I never once heard him shout like that, not even after blowing something up in his lab."

"Do you have access to that lab?"

"Only Langley had the keys to his playroom," she said. "If Lauren likes you, she might tell you where she thinks they are."

"Lauren doesn't like me," I said.

That got a laugh. One of them said Lauren doesn't like most people. I left them to their phones and went up to the executive floor. Lauren was conveniently out of office, but Kate was around. She was happy to see me, but she wilted when I asked her about seeing Langley's lab.

"I'm afraid I can't show you that," she said a little stiffly. She didn't seem inclined to be persuaded.

I passed by Langley's office again, tried the door, and was surprised to find it unlocked. I

hoped the lab keys were just lying in a drawer somewhere. After half an hour of picking about, I concluded the office had nothing of interest, much less the keys I was looking for. On my last round around the desk, I admired a novelty postcard of a white beach from Cyprus and I set a well-loved Newton's cradle rocking. Then I took myself out of the office and headed downstairs.

As I went for the garage, I passed by the security desk. An older man with a hopeful smile sat behind the desk, and he asked me if I needed something, sir. I leaned against the desk and tried to think of something to say, some casual conversation to start before I took my late lunch, and as my eyes roamed for an idea they caught movement in the dark window behind the security desk: he was playing electronic Hearts, and while he had me stopped, he lost his hand, and an axe swung down from the top of the screen and cut the game in half. A curious thought struck me.

"The garage," I said, more to myself than to him. "Do you use electronic parking arms?"

He seemed to see where I was going. To keep strangers from using their parking garage, L&B issued car tags that the parking arms then checked against a local server before letting people inside. Another arm had to raise when you left the garage, and the local server that checked tags on the way in also had timestamps for when the other arm activated. In those logs I found the usual inflow and outflow of cars around peak traffic hours. There was one curious anomaly: around the time of Langley's suicide, the outbound arm had opened to let a car out of the garage.

It was no trouble to get footage from a nearby traffic cam and run the plates of the few cars that passed through the area. Only one of them was registered to an employee of L&B. Before the day ended, I went right back to Dr. Barnum's office to talk to him about it. He stood and buttoned his coat as I came in and greeted me like normal.

"So," I started. "You went home about 5pm, like normal?"

"Yes, for salmon night," he reiterated. "What's this about, detective?"

"I just caught your car on a traffic cam up the road about 10 minutes after Langley's death."

Barnum smiled. "That must be a mistake."

I didn't say anything. He continued smiling, but when he saw I wasn't cracking, he stopped. Then he sat down and unbuttoned his coat. "I'm sorry," he said. "I just didn't want rumors spreading."

I waited.

"I was here the night Jeff died," he said. "He was developing a new product for the company. I was working late when he came into my office. He told me an important test had completely failed. He was upset, talking about the old times and the fun it was back then. He was very drunk. I kept thinking he was going to break something. He left maybe half an hour later, then I took the elevator downstairs and went home."

"You know how this looks," I said. "Lying to a detective, plus being the last person to see a dead man alive less than an hour before his death."

"Yes, sir, I do. I just didn't want my employees getting panicky. As their CEO, I have to protect them from fires they can't put out, or even control. You understand."

"I need to see Langley's lab."

"Lauren will have the keys for you tomorrow," he said. He was smiling again.

I left without saying another word.

The next morning, Lauren begrudgingly met me in front of Langley's office. She didn't tell me where she got the keys. Together we went down to Langley's lab, a wide room on the third floor. Inside was a workbench, an old folding table, a hardware cabinet, an ancient rolling chair, one dusty box computer, and a forgotten Styrofoam cup. Aside from that, it was totally empty. I slid open the cabinet drawers; they didn't even have tools. Lauren looked unsurprised and unimpressed. She was leaning on the doorframe with her arms crossed, watching me.

"Love the decor," I said while I pretended to look around. "You didn't straighten all this up on my account, did you?"

"Don't flatter yourself," she said. Her eyes lingered on everything I touched.

"Pretty empty for a development lab. He must not have been working very hard."

"He worked more than you or me," she said with spite. "More than both of us combined."

"Well, I don't envy him. If I had to hold an entire company up by myself, I'd have been a drunk, too."

Lauren scoffed as if I'd personally offended her. "Langley was not a drunk."

"No?"

"He never touched the stuff all his life," Lauren said. "And he was very proud of that."

I pulled the old chair up to the box computer and tapped the spacebar. Langley's profile didn't have a password set up. I found a few technical documents on the computer, but nothing I could make sense of. Lauren stepped into the room and, while I pretended to look through the files, I watched her. She stopped near the Styrofoam cup, picked it up, then put it down

very carefully. She didn't look angry anymore. She looked as if she was just now realizing that the lab was empty. She stood near the workbench and stared at the empty tabletop for a long time.

We parted ways without talking. I went back to my office and flipped through the files Kate had given me. I was short on ideas. I wracked my brain to get them flowing, to see the angles, and I came up short. The clues added up, but they didn't make sense. How could a man of Langley's age commit suicide in the twilight of his career? He was more likely to retire. It baffled me. Maybe Langley really did kill himself and I just wanted to believe there was something more. An empty office, an empty lab, a dead man, a sinking company... I felt like I was one little breakthrough away from it all coming together.

I took a walk for some fresh air. The sky was bright and the air was hot; it made me wish I was lounging under an umbrella on the beach. The branching palms that lined the sidewalk caught the summer breeze and danced overhead. I had gone two blocks by then and found myself in a little corporate courtyard. I sat down on a bench in the shade. The street was so quiet I could hear the fountain gurgling in a nearby park. The low roar of an airplane engine drew my attention. It was a small mail plane on its way to Orlando Executive airport. It was flying low enough that I could almost make out the tail number.

Just then, I was in the middle of fishing out a stick of gum from my pocket. It found a permanent home on the concrete as I shot to my feet and sprinted back to the office. I shoved my way into evidence and demanded to see the sticky-note they found on Langley's body. They handed it to me and I seized it, read it twice, then ran to my desk and called the FAA. The whole story raged in my head like a crowd at the Thunderdome.

"Yes, sir," said the agent, "you've got a flight number and a tail number. Unfortunately it's a private plane, so I can't tell you anything about it without a warrant."

"Can you at least tell me where the flight is going?"

"The final destination is Larnaca International. That's all the way in Cyprus." I hanged up the phone so fast I almost broke the receiver. As I scrambled for my things, I threw my cellphone between my ear and my shoulder and direct-dialed the desk jockey for the case.

"Tell me you know something about that R&D company," I said.

"I do," she said. "That business was registered a few years ago to a man named Geoffrey Langlis."

## from “The Russian Funeral” H8

--Let's be off at once, he said calmly.

...

Cast by candlelight, little flecks of soil and holy oil could be seen cast on the man's body inside the coffin. The shroud was quickly put atop and everyone's hand brushed the coffin for what may be the last time. The pallbearers came forth and quickly placed a heavy cloth of white over the coffin.

Above the deep creek, the wooden planks creaked under the stress of the casket, reduced to two of the strongest pallbearers: the lumberjack and his son. They crossed quietly and with haste, shuffling like ducks would across a frozen pond. Following them were the mourners, who had traded candles for heavy iron lamps to see better in the storm. The wind had severed so much that it was impossible to hold the coffin still, yet the men kept on pushing forward. Past the copse the snow had become intolerable. Their march had slowed down to a snail's pace, trudging in the heavy snow. The blanketing snow had caught onto their boots, and the landscape had changed entirely except for the few ruts and veins signaling signs of running water or roots. One of the pallbearers broke down onto the snow in a mixture of anguish

## Continued on M9

## Continued on H21

## from “Mankings” M5

difficulty of recruitment which explains the wildcard role of the dynasty in Himalayan politics of the final decades BCE, for not many penises are long enough to be knotted, and many candidates must be eliminated on the grounds of excess and unwieldy girth.

One might suggest that the Llamic reincarnations have served, via their necessitating supposedly non-missionary missions in search of candidates, a covert proselytising purpose – attracting converts through the romance of their search for a holy child. The same does not appear to ever have been true of the ManKings, who were mostly enlisted to the royalty by force, and so rather could be said to provide an incentive for groundless and arbitrary warfare on the part of their regimes. That voluntary elevation to the role of king was most often rejected by the candidate, and then enforced by military means, is explained by the need for pre-knotting castration, a measure whose necessity will be apparent to anyone who has tried tying sticks up with other sticks.

On the death of an incumbent the crown prince would be fetched from his cell so that the dangerous period during which the now-dual monarchs were unentwined could be reduced to the absolute minimum. Local myth apparently indicated that prolonged unknotting would correlate to terrible omens such as eclipses, yak-tears and plagues of

## from “Crystal Curse” H18

Before Lina could reply, Kara slipped the white nightgown over her head, leaving her naked. Her entire body was covered in wine-red patches of shining crystal.

Kara opened a drawer on the vanity, grabbed a pair of pliers, and handed them to Lina. There were scar lines all over the inside of her forearms, and Lina tried not to look. "You've probably guessed how this part works. Take your choice of crystal. They all hurt the same when removed, so don't worry about it; get yourself something pretty."

"Are you sure?"

"N'galeth'an g'tanda," as they always say.

The crystals pierced out of the skin in small patches and constellations. Lina selected a medium-sized crystal from a larger patch on Kara's back, about an inch long.

"Do I just..."

"Yup. Just pull it out. Go ahead, times a-wastin', and I'm sure you want to go home."

Lina used the pliers to grab the crystal, then pulled.

## Continued on &11

"You'll have to pull harder."

Lina shifted her grip on the pliers and pulled. It didn't move. She reset and tried again. This time, the pliers slipped off.

"I don't mean to stress you out, but it does hurt. You have to yank it like a bad tooth. Just get in there and grab it."

**"If you had a knife  
would you..."**

**"End it? Oh, for sure."**

Lina put her left hand on Kara's back to brace herself, gripped the crystal with the pliers, and pulled. The red stone came loose, leaving a tiny open area and a trickle of blood. Kara handed Lina a washcloth, and Lina pressed it to the hole to stop the bleeding. While Lina waited, she looked at her prize. A red crystal ringed in a small amount of flesh at the bottom. The deep red of the crystal was so similar in colour to blood. She passed it over to Kara, who put it in a small dish and added a bubbling liquid.

"This will clean it off, make it sanitary. Keep pressure on the wound. Has it stopped bleeding?"

A small amount of blood still flowed. After another minute, it was finished. Lina passed the washcloth to Kara, who dipped it in the basin of water on the vanity, then rung it out and dabbed at a crystal formation on her arm.

"They're like sores. They need to be cleaned. That's what you'll help me with now. Your sacred duty as a follower of Z'th'n'r." She looked up, meeting Lina's eyes in the mirror. "Are you okay with that?"

She wasn't. "Just tell me what you need me to do."

Kara handed her the washcloth, and Lina followed her instructions. She dabbed at the patches, cleaning dried blood from areas where the crystals had recently broken through the skin. When the rag became discoloured, Lina rinsed it in the basin and continued.

"There used to be another woman," Kara said. "She died a few years back. What colour are your parents' crystals?"

"Green."

"They were from Andis, then, while she

was still alive."

"Are there many of you? Those who are....  
Blessed by the gods. In such a way."

"There's two, but, like I said about Andis, she died some time ago. It was just her for a while. She used to regale me with stories about those years. She called them The Lonelytime. It's like some sort of storybook thing. She was always reading. All those books were hers, over on the wall there. But I prefer it this way. Andis was a basketcase, always going on about the gods and their blessings and how fortunate we were. If she hadn't died when she did, I might have done her in myself! Shut her up for good just so I could get some peace and- ouch! Careful!"

"Sorry," Lina said. She dabbed at the small spot of blood that welled from the scab she'd disturbed.

"Is it bleeding?"

"Uhh... yeah."

Kara sighed. "It'll stop. Just hold pressure on it until it does." The bleeding stopped, and Lina rinsed the rag.

"You don't see it as a blessing, do you?"

"A blessing? Why wouldn't I? Who wouldn't want to spend their entire life locked in a room? You know, I haven't been outside in years. I was 16 when they put me here, and I haven't left much since, except to go to the bathroom, and that's recent! When Andis was here, we used to have bedpans. Can you imagine shitting in a little bucket every day? Talk about embarrassing."

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have-"

"It's okay. It's good to talk about it. Talk therapy, isn't that what it's called? Anyhow, things are better now. Andis has been dead for some time. The crystals got her in the end, ya know. They grow and grow and grow. It's unfortunate, but there's bound to be another girl soon. I'm counting the days until I get some company. I hope she likes Westerns. We've got dozens."

"I'm done with your back," Lina said.

Kara reached down to grab her nightgown off the ground.

Kara noticed her lingering gaze on her wrists. She slipped her nightgown over her head and held her wrist out so Lina could see the thick lines on her wrist closer. "I've tried to leave this place in many ways. I'm just lucky they didn't require a doctor to stitch up. No one found out about the crystals."

"Wouldn't a real miracle convert a lot of followers? They should be worshipping you in the streets."

"You're kidding, right? The last thing I need is to be dragged to some city down south. Imagine what they would do to me, what kind of tests they'd run in some government lab. I'd be a lab rat. At least here, I'm at peace. Except for visitors like you, that is."

"If you had a knife, would you..."

"End it? Oh, for sure. I'd go for the throat this time. It would be much harder for Sadie to stitch up. Don't get me wrong, I haven't tried in a few years, but that's just because they stopped letting me have anything sharp. If you had a pocket knife, I'd steal it and end it right in front of you and your folks. Talk about a ruined holiday." Kara laughed. "Maybe it will be better when the next miracle girl comes."

Someone knocked on the door, startling them both. Sadie peeked her head in. "Are you finished?"

"Nearly," Kara said. She used a pair of tweezers to grab Lina's crystal out of the solution, then put it on a towel and dried it. "There you go. We're finished; you can go now."

Lina stared at Kara for a long moment, unsure what to say. "It was nice meeting you," she said, and Kara smiled.

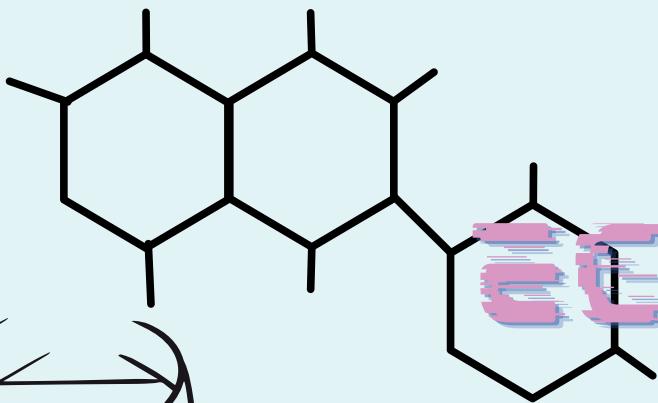
"You too."

Sadie took Lina downstairs to the workshop and drilled a small hole in the top of the crystal, then fed a thin wire through it so Lina could wear it on a necklace.

When they'd all said their goodbyes, Lina followed her parents outside. Her mother blathered on about when she'd gotten her crystal and how different things had been with Andis.

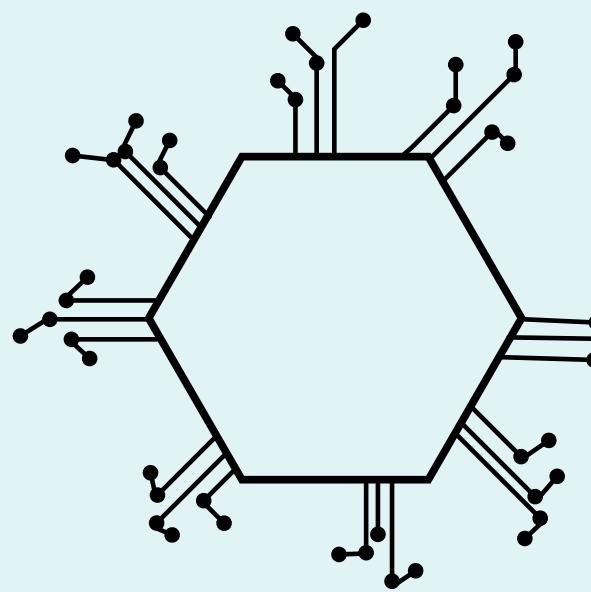
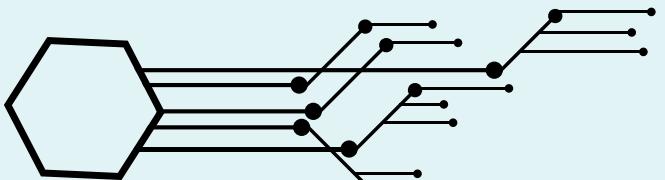
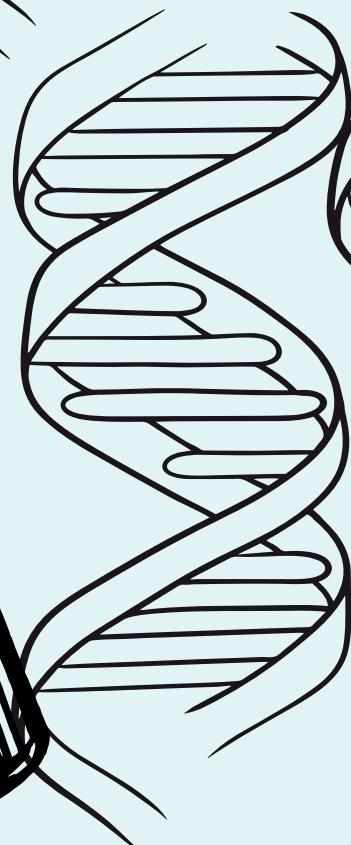
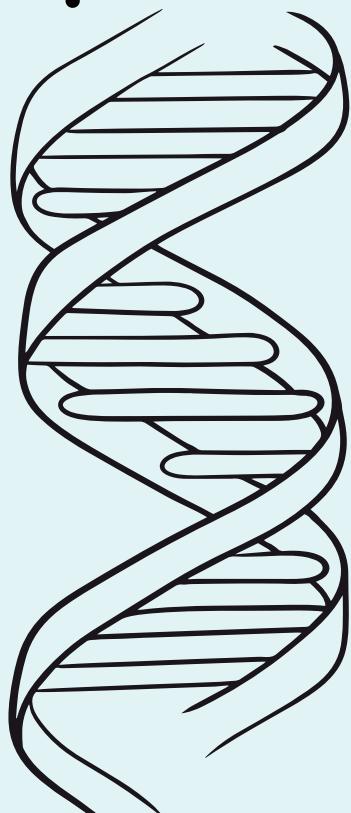
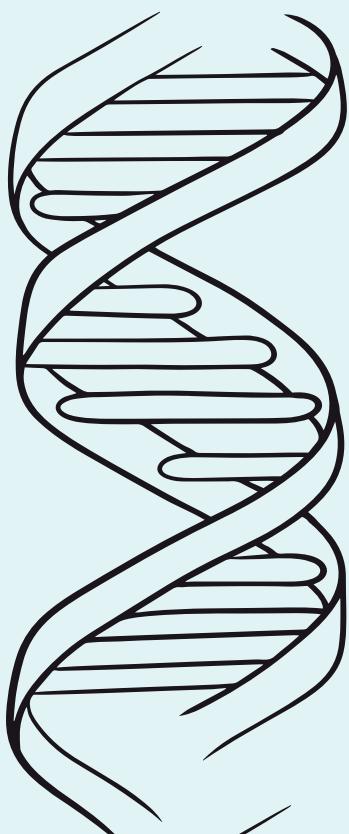
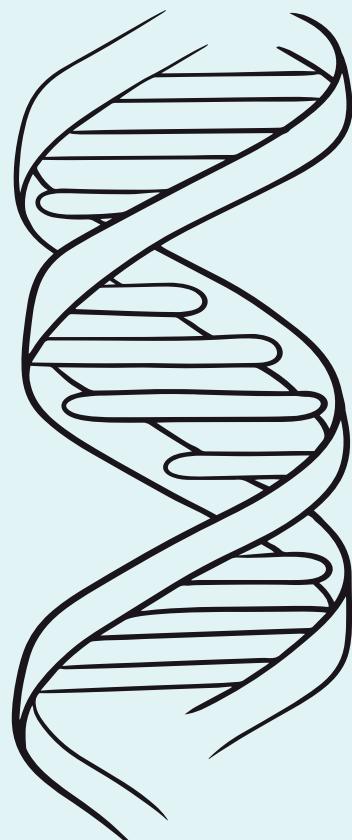
In the backseat of her family's rented 4WD, Lina Felgrove played with the buttons on her dead MP3 player. She hit the up key, tap, tap. She hit the down key, tap-tap. Then, she scratched at her arm.

"Don't scratch!" Her mother said from the front seat, and Lina pretended not to hear her.



# ECOFREAK

Lucas Bineville



By all accordance with decent society, Gene Rene Tabolt was a wretched scoundrel, a blight on mankind, and something to be utterly despised. Would a girl scout come unknowingly to his front doors it was her moral duty, the exercise of her second amendment responsibility, to blast that creep back to whichever oblivion spit him out. Gene never fully grasped where the hatred-righteous as it was-stemmed from. It was to his fortune, or the usual unfairness of life to those around him, that he was on a government payroll.

Maybe they were all jealous, Gene would think on occasion, particularly those nights when mobs would form outside his lab swinging a noose—the same nights the police stationed out front of his lab in his defense would go home to the cold shoulders of their spouses in bed. People hated Gene and he just chalked it up to the rapacity of others not having a license to experiment freely on the human genome—a license to kill as most saw it.

Why such an illuminated, neon bright target formed onto Gene's back over the years wasn't exactly one of the questions that perplexed the man—even though one might begin to wonder when the petition to revoke your Nobel prizes reaches two million. What occupied the mind of Gene Rene Tabolt were the deepest secrets of the universe—and how to reduce them to profits for his generous backers and their backers and so on.

His mind led to many scientific breakthroughs and global game changers. Self-enriching soil to increase crop yields, energizing protein tablets to remove the need for sleep, and even mankind's quest to cure cancer was answered by his hated gray matter. But of course, there were also the consequences that accompanied his work like a trademark patent—the increased crop yields destabilized their industries, people rioted over the added hours to the workweek thanks to his over-the-counter pill, and wherever they put that cure it never went public. To reiterate, the mind of Gene Rene Tabolt was marvelous, and it was despised.

This was all known to Morgan Bags, the latest sickly creature to come seeking the helping hand so many feared yet continued to eat out of. Yet for Morgan Bags, she didn't understand the hype or hatred. Tabolt was controversial like any politician or celebrity off their meds. People hated the success of others, Bags thought—it must be jealousy.

When the screen on his fold device showed him the scrawny critter in the black cap under the name of Morgan Ailicen Bags, Tabolt thought simply, 'ah, another one.' The name was fitting given the ID photo he was looking at. Tremendous bags hung below her eyes while the eyes themselves tried to hide under her greasy black hair. Given the unflattering pimples forming constellations across her face the girl appeared to sleep in a fast-food kitchen—and she was clearly struggling to find any sleep there. Should probably be taking Tabolt-tablets, Tabolt thought as he remotely unlocked the entrance.

The inside of Tabolt's laboratory looked to Bags like an old Edwardian manor turned to a callous historical site opened for unenthused school field trips. Checkered floor, curved stairs, amber chandelier. All unfitting for the reputation of a monster and a madman like Bags had heard. It was like the government handed Tabolt the keys and said, 'well this is what rich homes are supposed to look like.' And then Tabolt promptly added no personality to the interior—save for the numerous potted plants Bags was taking note of. The stench of heated grass was hard to ignore.

From the top of the curved stairs appeared a plain looking man in a black jacket and faded hair, "Have you come for the tour?" The man asked, keeping his hand on the upstairs railing like a puppeteer might hold his cross brace.

So this must be the monster I've heard so much about, Bags thought as she tread deeper into the foyer. With her dry and flat voice, unfamiliar with speaking, she said, "I came here to seek your help. I'm sure you get that a lot but they say you hear out those who come to visit in person." Likely because most people are superstitious and don't take up the offer, Bags imagined.

"A man like me entertains guests and wild ideas by thousands each day. It becomes hard to discern the two from one another after a while. Which are you? What idea did you have coming here, facing me all by yourself?"

Bags felt like a wolf was speaking to her atop a mountain, what with Tabolt on the next floor holding his head up condescendingly. "My name is Morgan Bags," she said, hearing the automatic click signaling the front door locking. When she went to look over her shoulder she saw a man suddenly standing casually in the doorway to her side.

"I know who you are," the man said coldly. His hair was dark but carried a shine absent of grease like Bags' hair. Darker than the thick hair curling back off his head, or the fuzz along his sharp jaws, was the mad eyes staring Bags down. At once Bags realized—this was Tabolt. He was dressed in a basic dress shirt under a brown vest, making for a surprising complement to the out of fashion interior around them. In his hand was a pear. Already done speaking, he kept his piercing eyes on Bags, and took a bite. He looked completely mad to her.

To Tabolt the girl, if she were one—she gave no signal to the world that she was one—appeared to be a curious stray. Her forehead hidden by the blend of cap and hair—hair worse than her photo, exploding out chaotically in all directions from that wool cap. The constellations blemishing her face, he noticed immediately as well, had also changed positions. Then there was the way she wore her loose, grey jacket, teasing Tabolt's twisted mind with all sorts of potential weapons she could have tried to smuggle in. In short: She looked completely mad to him.

"Ah, right," Bags nodded, "you would know me from scanning my thumb at the door. Thank you for seeing—"

"Are you here to kill me?"

This caught Bags off guard. Thanks to her long history of accidentally offending strangers, she composed herself instantly, "No," she eyed the man quietly standing on the next floor in a new light, "a decoy?"

"I'm Mr. Tabolt's assistant," the man upstairs was quick to profess.

"A decoy is the more accurate statement," Tabolt said, taking another bite of his pear, "I keep Virgo around to amuse me with his measly 160 IQ and his archaic beliefs in measured intelligence." He stared Bags down like a bear about to charge its prey, much hungrier and more vicious than the wolf Virgo appeared to be a moment earlier, "A joke. I'm breaking the ice."

"Sorry, I didn't catch it," Bags answered bluntly. Upstairs, Virgo's guts were writhing from internal cringing.

Tabolt walked out into the next room, heading for the stairs, "If you're not here to kill me like all the others then follow me upstairs. We can talk in my garden." He carried himself up the stairs and Bags thought plainly then—garden?

The garden was more like a giant birdcage to Bags. The flora was exotic and colorful, sure, but in her own words she never really gave a shit about flowers. A dome ceiling towering far above their puny bodies, the walls were rounded and fitted with thick gold linings—between these lines were the mix-matched screens depicting different shots of the white clouds on a brilliant blue sky. It was as if Tabolt had led her into a jungle encased in cracked glass, granting a distorted view of the world they were hovering above. This was more what she expected out of the man who created an app to modify personalized fruit. Bags even suspected the pear in his hand was one such fruit.

Once led to a patio under a thicket of lush leaves, the stench of wet plant life more pleasant here, Bags asked, "Did you make that fruit yourself?"

Tabolt looked at his pear as he chewed his latest bite, "I grew it. Naturally, like everything here." He used the pear to gesture Bags to take a seat and joined her. A small table separated the two and he went on, "I do most of my work here. All the money is in mathematics. Astrophysics, specifically. But numbers are lifeless. They exist in concept. Independent of life. This is all real. I started with botany. Gardening. I still enjoy it. I enjoy the study. The study of life. I love life."

Bags sat stiff in her seat. Coming from a guy known for experimenting on human beings—whose innovations indirectly found dramatic and inventive ways to hurt people for the sake of modern conveniences—she wasn't sure how much it was true Tabolt loved life. "You say you love life?"

He nodded, "More than anyone understands, I think. I haven't asked what brought you to me today. Was it an interview?"

"No. Since you love life though, maybe you can help save one."

"Is that your hook? Are you here for money?"

Bags remained quiet. What she came here to ask him may have been a heavier ask than mere money. A simple out of pocket donation might have been a small affair for Tabolt. Pay for a family's college tuition three generations over with a flick of the wrist. This was more than that, however. Still, she resolved to come before the boogeyman of modern science, to see if he would bestow a mercy on one single individual.

He knew my name and acted smart about it, Bags remembered. "You wouldn't know a Sheldon Hanovan, would you?"

Another bite of the pear, "Mm. You mean Shelly?"

Again, Bags was surprised. Yet neither of the two's faces had yet to show the other any emotion. "You know him?" Sheldon Hanovan was a name that managed to appear in a few important scientific studies in the last year, yet Bags understood that's not how Tabolt knew the name. He knows him because he keeps tabs on his potential experiments, Bags realized grimly. Bags could see it now—a police scanner right beside Tabolt's pillow and chirping away on the nightstand. Like a bedtime lullaby to him.

"Title 83," Tabolt confirmed. "I was going through the daily articles and Hanovan is right in town. Or was, as far as I had heard. Is he your friend?"

A year ago, the headlines for Hanovan were very different. He made global news co-authoring the study finally disproving the existence of pheromones in humans. The press playfully spun the story, calling him the 'killer of romance.' Bags remembered thinking he would go far in life at that time. Now he was in hiding and Tabolt couldn't put the name to the study. But to speculate that they were friends? "You could say that."

"Boyfriend," Tabolt said tonelessly.

That irritated Bags yet she answered with an equal lack of tone, "No. I don't feel those kinds of emotions." What was there to kill, Bags recalled thinking when she read Hanovan's title.

"I'm sad for you then. Without emotions life is just biology. Of course, emotions are biology." He eyed Bags for a moment. "A joke."

"I missed it."

"What's your diagnosis?"

Their conversation was quickly reminding Bags of how A.I.s sound when they speak with one another. It wasn't often she spoke with someone as stilted as herself. It was unusual but, in a way, also pleasant. She obliged him with the truth, "A.S.D."

"Aspergers," again he was toneless. "I'm a diagnosed psychopath myself. You remind me a little of myself, you know." His piercing eyes kept on eating at her while he ate away at the last of his pear.

"Another joke?"

"No," he said. "I read that Hanovan is a student at West Coast University. Molecular biology. I presume you're fellow students now that I see you're not too intimate. Is that also your field of study?"

"I'm in forensics."

Tabolt at last looked away from Bags as if to calculate something in his head. When his eyes returned to her, he asked, "You study law. Yet I infer you've come here today to offer Hanovan over to me for some type of immunity. You're aware you're abetting a fugitive? Not very lawful of you."

Bags had been anticipating some response along these lines, "On record, I've kept myself ignorant of Hanovan's specific whereabouts." Though she thought cunningly, I'm pretty sure I know where he is.

"You must know where he is," Tabolt was quick to say, "not that I particularly care. He is in trouble though, isn't he? With accusations like those. You who studies the law, tell me, you really think you can get a murderer off his charges by what exactly—surrendering him to me as a test subject? Some might consider those extreme links. Take their chances with justice. I should know, those on death row aren't always so eager to accept pardons when it means joining one of my experiments."

This Bags knew as well. From what she had read, both in online forums and the textbooks discussing Tabolt in class, they called it Tabolt Roulette. Though the odds were more like five bullets in the chamber with one empty—while selecting that gun among another two that were fully loaded. You never know what becoming one of Tabolt's pets meant. Prisoners under his watch lost their minds if they were lucky—their molecular structure if they were less so. Some grew new consciousness on various body parts—some transferred consciousness to other body parts. Some perceived time to a crawl, by a multiple of the thousands. Some turned to pulp and some grew breasts. You didn't really know what you were in for.

Tabolt said as much, "You never know what will become of you in the pursuit of science. That's the joy of discovery. Of course, I cannot offer Hanovan this. You have to be on death row and he's years away from that—and more likely to end up in a hazmat suit out in Arizona with one measly murder under his belt."

"I'm aware of that," Bags said, "I've done my research. Under title 83 you can only summon those on death row, yes. However, there was an amended clause with those of unique physiology in which you can bypass restrictions."

Tabolt took a break from stabbing Bags with his eyes. He blinked away, processing something in his head, and realized—as if he were surfing some digital archive in his head—that Bags was correct. "Oh, you're right. I needed a boy's brain last spring and they made the amendment vague. You've done your research, Miss Bags. Are you sure forensics is for you? You might make a better detective."

Bags wanted nothing more than to be a detective but she knew it wasn't in her cards. Detectives got to mull over fresher corpses, that wasn't a big deal to her. It was the live bodies that troubled her. She wasn't good with people. She couldn't handle the questioning. The talking. When it came down to it—blood stains and semen samples were easier to handle than conversations.

She left the remark at a simple, "Thanks. Will you consider taking Hanovan then?"

"Is his physiology really that special?"

"No," Bags answered honestly. "But you already know he's a smart student. Not afraid to get his hands dirty apparently. Besides," Bags paused, "I think you like that about him. If your assistant Virgo doesn't impress you, I can promise Hanovan eats protein tablets like they're candy. He wouldn't let you down."

"Christ," Tabolt said crassly, "you're so eager for me to hire him you make it sound like he is special. Why is he so special to you? If your conscience owes him something you would be better off cutting that part of you off. He's dead meat."

Bags remained quiet, unsure if Tabolt could be sold on the prospect anymore. She made one final pitch before she prepared to stand and leave, "You couldn't find a use for him?"

It was strange to see Tabolt shrink into himself with that question. He scratched at his hair and crossed his legs before saying, "I can't take him without some unique condition to cite. I couldn't have him unless he was," Tabolt's voice trailed off eerily into some dark thought. "The crime he committed. That was rather out of character, wasn't it? A sudden bloodlust in an intelligent, young man. I've seen it plenty of times but it's unusual. Could be considered unique. Yes, a rehabilitation project, to address violent urges. I could make a new man out of Sheldon Hanovan. Give him my tutelage for a few weeks—you wouldn't recognize Mr. Hanovan."

"You've picked up an idea for him then," Bags observed, suddenly remembering Tabolt had admitted a minute earlier he was psychopath. She weighed whether she was doing the right thing and Tabolt knew what was on her mind at once.

"Let's not weigh ourselves down with morality, Miss Bags. You know where he is, don't you? You should have gone to the police—not Gene Rene Tabolt. You think you know better. We are the same this way. Oh yes, I see myself a lot in you." In her mind, Tabolt's voice echoed out once more. I'm a diagnosed psychopath myself. What did that mean when he was comparing himself to her?

"You intend an experiment on him. He won't die? He'll still be him?"

"A new Hanovan—and the same."

Bags found herself looking at the screens depicting blue skies all around them for a short time. A myriad of false skies giving no natural light to the cage they were in. "How do you get your garden to do so well when there's no real sunlight in here?"

For all their conversation neither of the two smiled. But for this one instance, call it a detective's hunch, Bags sensed a mischief in Tabolt. He was smiling behind his mask. Ciddy-excited—with some private thought he held to himself. He answered, "Life finds a way."

When Bags thought of Hanovan she would always remember how her mother described him as her cousin. He wasn't, but that familiar connection and lifelong semi-presence was there. Their mothers were friends when they were younger. As were their grandmothers. The friendship between families didn't transcend to the third generation, however. What with Bags being quiet—desperate to leave parties—and Hanovan, heated, argumentative, and brooding—desperate to ruin parties. Bags was happy her mute phase coincided with Hanovan's obnoxious atheist phase. They always saw each other at those miserable family parties and holidays. They rarely spoke to one another.

He always had the longest ginger blonde hair she had seen on a man. Something like a metal head with a little girl's coloring book palette. Then there were his eyes. Dull and simple minded looking. The "Gomer Pyle" kind of eyes, as hecklers were astute to point out in high school. But the mind behind those blue, simple eyes was brilliant. His grades and prospects reflected as much. It was in the week Bags met with Tabolt that Hanovan showed his Gomer Pyle eyes could see to a brutal violence as well.

As Tabolt predicted, Bags knew exactly where she would find Hanovan. In the backyard of the town house, no less—through woods in the park—below an abandoned bridge in an unknown room. They had called it the mystery room as neither knew what it was for. Like a boiler room for some unknown purpose to the park. Forgotten storage. A place they each fled parties at the town house to. The place the few times they spoke. He would be here, Bags thought. So it was she found the killer of romance, turned plain killer.

Behind shelves of formaldehyde, in the spot a smaller Morgan Bags huddled up to read her books, was the murderer Hanovan. "Morgan," he said her name more than tonelessly. He said it without a life to him. He was paler than Bags remembered him to be. He was still his pudgy self but the way he was bunkered on the ground, arms around his legs, made him seem smaller.

"I thought I'd find you here," Bags said, hopeless in finding any spirit to put into her own voice.

"You would be the only one to come here," Hanovan said. He would have come here once successfully turning everyone at those parties against him. He just about turned the whole world against himself now, Bags realized. No, she thought. He still has me. When she was forced to contend with her reasons, Hanovan probed first her intentions, "Are you here to turn me in?"

"I'm not here to bring you to the police."

"That's stupid of you," Hanovan blurted.

"How much natural sleep have you been getting?" Hanovan was all but addicted to his protein tablets. Those didn't address the psychological effects of not resting. You needed another pill for that.

"You didn't come here to ask that. Are you here to ask if I did it? No, you're not that stupid. You wanted to know why I did it."

"Honestly, Shelly, I don't care why you did it. I came to offer you a way out."

"Come on," Hanovan smiled, "at least ask me why."

"You want me to ask why you ruined your life? I've heard the rumors. Trude lifted your ideas for his own papers and slept with a girl you like. Whatever the details, they're not very interesting."

Hanovan jumped to his feet at once, "That's not how it was! Trude had the gall to dissent my findings on genetic restoration. He's had it out for me ever since that pheromone study, all because I didn't drag him to the interviews. He was my assistant, nothing more. And he wants to share my grant with the university? He gave up on science altogether in order to dedicate his life's work to ruining me! That girl everyone is saying I liked? Yes, he slept with her and she was on the board! Trude used her to undermine my review and humiliated me! His life's work," Hanovan sneered as his ranting developed a pace into the room, "oh it cost him his life alright."

A confession, like out of a vending machine, Bags thought, "Shelly..." They would eat him alive if she didn't intervene.

Hanovan bowed his head, "He completely discredited me, destroyed my chances for finding funding... I could have cured cancer."

Bags let him stew for a moment, she never did figure out how to offer emotional support. "Okay, you said your piece. Now let me say mine. I might have a way out for you. A way to avoid a life behind bars and maybe even keep your profession."

"And here I thought you were just here to put me out of my misery." What was with people asking her if she was there to kill them, Bags wondered. "What could you possibly have in mind?" When Bags explained Tabolt was ready to grease the wheels of the system to take him into his lab, Hanovan stayed quiet for a time. He broke his silence only to ask, "Why do you care so much about me?"

She didn't know herself. They were surrogate cousins, maybe. Or perhaps for as blunt as Hanovan was his mind was worth saving. It could also be that feeling Trude's shady friends would get their hands on him in prison. Maybe she just felt she knew better than the system. Bags didn't answer.

"Hello, Miss Bags," the voice on the other end of her phone said, "it's me, Virgo."

"How'd you get my number?" Bags asked, struggling to sit up from her mattress, rubbing the heavy bags under her eyes.

"Don't doubt Mr. Tabolt's resources. I'm calling to let you know today's the day." Today, Bags thoughts. The weeks since Hanovan had taken shelter under Tabolt's custody had blurred by. Even when Tabolt said he needed more time seemed to have occurred long ago. Bags was happy to have forgotten about the whole affair, moving on with life, knowing Hanovan was taken care of. The world, outraged as it was for Tabolt taking in an untried murderer, had also moved on. "Miss Bags?" Virgo asked in response to the pause.

"Yes, today... did you want me to come by?" She hadn't seen any of them since she had played deal maker.

"Yes, that's right. Mr. Tabolt wanted you to be the first to see Mr. Hanovan." This time Virgo paused. "Miss Bags, I've taken the liberty of unlocking our back door for your arrival. There's no x-ray or metal detectors attached to that entrance. Do you understand?"

"Uh, what?" The wording was odd and her drowsiness didn't help. Virgo didn't elaborate. He hung up and when she checked her phone the number was blocked. She pondered Virgo's strange call for a moment and ultimately arrived at the back entrance of the lab in her regular clothes.

As unusual as Tabolt's garden was, his 'inner sanctuary' was no less abnormal. Down a concrete corridor of stairs she found a subterranean lake below a ceiling of utter blackness. Stranger yet was the lone and chrome swan boat waiting on the dock. Reluctantly taking her seat, the boat switched itself on and automatically began to sail through the cold looking waters. For some reason, a funny thought popped into Bags' head—she felt as if she were crossing the river Styx.

On a small, glowing, tropical island amid the sea of dark water was Tabolt, scrambling from the foliage to greet her. He was dressed in an apron adorned with inky red and vibrant greens. Almost looking the part of a disheveled painter. His hair uncombed, it was a tamer version of Bags' messy mane. The eyes, however, were as mad as Bags had ever seen. Meanwhile, all Tabolt could note about Bags was that her constellation had shifted again.

"There you are!" Tabolt was out of breath as Bags, going with the flow of it all, stepped off his underground swan boat.

"I take it your experiment was a success?" Bags asked, assuming if something wrong had happened Virgo wouldn't have called.

"A brilliant success," Tabolt cheered. There was still no smile to be found on the man but he was positively excited as he gestured Bags to the island trail. "Here! Over here! I didn't think I had it in me but I strive to imagine that Mr. Hanovan is the greatest achievement of my career thus far! Come and see him."

The greatest achievement of his career? She had only hoped for Hanovan to at best work as his assistant—at worst risk growing some gills. "What have you done?"

"Life," Tabolt at long last smiled and stepped aside to reveal the greatest shock of Bags' life.

She knew it was him. Shambling down the trail in his new alien form. The pudgy shape of Hanovan was there. But from his outline inward was all manner of unspeakable horror. He was naked—apparently—and from first glance appeared to have crawled from the deepest mire of a swamp. But no. His body had indeed become life. He was uncanny. More dreadful than either wolf or bear—he was the entire jungle and all its terrible secrets.

To put it simply he was green and variously textured—speckled with other bright and shifting colors. The ribs on one side ebony, pulsing, and external. His ginger hair now ginger threads of some kind. The upper right dome of his head transparent, revealing the flora of his throbbing brain. The eye to that dome bare and fully round, yellow rings on wet blue. A centipede of some new breed crawled from his displayed brain and hugged the wall of the dome. His mismatched eyes spotted Bags and he smiled his orange thorn teeth—this was Hanovan.

"Morgan," the monster said.

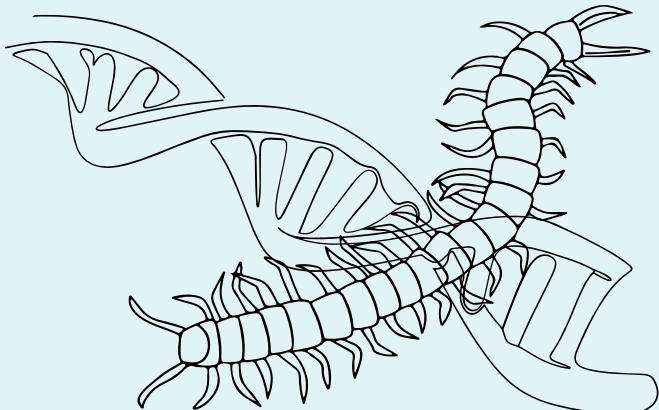
"Sh..." The sight was unspeakable. Bags couldn't bring herself to say the creature's name.

Tabolt was practically giggling to himself, "At first, I thought they wouldn't let me take Mr. Hanovan in. He's an ordinary human being. Then I thought—what if he could be more than human? Not a single part of the old Hanovan remains. A new organism stands before us. Legally an entirely new organism and a new one each day. The mind carried over and all old parts discarded like pants too shrunk to wear. Bits replaced by bits until—well—until a fully new wardrobe."

In the brief time Bags had known Gene Rene Tabolt, she hadn't shown him a glimmer of emotion on her unflattering face. Tabolt had been the first to blink on that front. Even now, before the perversion of nature that was once Sheldon Hanovan, her face was as cold as stone. All save for her eyes. They were wider. At the catalyst of tears which would never fall. Her lips sealed, brows neutral, she held back her terror at what she had wrought. What had Gene Rene Tabolt done? She knew in her sickened heart only what she allowed—and finally she understood what Tabolt was.

"The first singular biosystem organism," Tabolt said with pride.

The centipede appendage in Hanovan's brain was snatched by another tendril strand and there a flower bloomed off his frontal lobe, "He's eating himself," Bags observed dumbly. Those words, she found, would echo in head for the rest of her life. Tabolt only smiled before it was time to move onto the next project.



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BOOK REVIEWS



# Tales of the Unreal



# CLASSIFIEDS

## WANTED

イシュマエルと呼んでください。数年前——正確にどれくらいかは気にしないでください——財布にはほとんどお金がなく、特に興味のあるものは何もありません 海岸、私は少し航海して水の部分を見ようと思った世界。これは私が脾臓を追い出し、体調を整える方法です。循環。自分の口が陥くなっていることに気づくたびに。いつでも私の心の中では、じめじめとした小雨の降る11月です。自分を見つけるたびに思わず棺倉庫の前で立ち止まり、後部を持ち上げる私が会うすべての葬儀について。そして特に私のハイボがそのようなことになるときはいつも私を阻止するには強力な道徳の原則が必要であるということは私よりも優れている意図的に通りに足を踏み入れたり、系統的にノックしたりすることはありません。人々は脱帽です - それでは、私は今すぐに海に行く時期だと考えていますできる限り。これは私のピストルとボールの代わりです。哲學的で栄華を極めるカトーは剣に身を投げる。私は静かに船に乗り込みます。これには驚くべきことは何もありません。もし知りていれば、ほとんどすべての男性が彼らは程度の差こそあれ、ほぼ同じ感情を大切にしている私と一緒に海へ。

今、埠頭に囲まれたマンハッタンの島嶼都市がそこにありますサンゴ礁に囲まれたインドの島々のように、商業が波に囲まれています。右に左に道が水辺へと続いています。その極端なダウンタウンは、高貴なモグラが波に洗われ、冷却されるバッテリー。数時間前には陸地から見えなかつた微風。見てください そこには水を観察する人たちの群衆がいた。

夢のような安息日の午後、街を散策しましょう。コリアーズから行くコエンティーズ・スリップにフックし、そこからホワイトホールのそばを北に進みます。何をするかわかりますか?—街中に物言わぬ番兵のように配置され、立っています。何千もの定命の者たちが海の夢想に囚われていた。いくつかの杭にもたれて。ある者は橋脚に座っていた。いくつか見ている中国からの船の防波堤の上。リギングの高いところにあるので、さらに良い海側の覗き見をしたい場合。しかし、これらはすべて地主。平日は、カウンターに縛り付けられて、ラスト漆喰の中に閉じ込められ、ベンチに釘付けになったり、机に固定されたり。では、これはどうなのでしょうか? 緑ですか 煙がなくなった? 彼らはここで何をしているのでしょうか?

でも、見てください! ここにさらに多くの群衆がやって来て、水に向かってまっすぐに歩いています、そしてどうやらダイビングに行く予定のようです。奇妙な! 彼らを満足させるものは何もありません。土地の最も限界。向こうの日陰の風下で徘徊している倉庫だけでは十分ではないでしょう。いいえ、彼らは水面にできるだけ近づけなければなりません。そして彼らはそこに立っています—何マイルも彼ら—リーグだ。内陸の人々は皆、小道や路地の出身です。北、東、南、西の通りと大通り。それでもここでは彼ら全員が団結する。教えてください、コンバスの針には磁力があるのですか それらすべての船が彼らをそこに引き寄せるのでしょうか?

もう一度。あなたが田舎にいると思います。どこかの湖の高地で。取るほとんどどんな道でも思い通りに行くことができ、十対一で谷を下っていきます。そしてあなたを川のプールのそばに置き去りにします。そこには魔法があります。させて最もぼんやりとした人間は、最も深い夢想に没頭するだろう—立ちなさいあの男は立ち上がって、足を踏み出しなさい、そうすれば間違いなく先導してくれるでしょう その地域すべてに水があるなら、あなたは水をあけてください。もしそうなら アメリカの大沙漠で喉が渴いたとき、キャラバンの場合はこの実験を試してみてください たまたま形而上学の教授が与えられました。はい、誰もがそうであるようにご存知の通り、瞑想と水は永遠に結びつきます。

しかし、ここにはアーティストがいます。彼はあなたを最も夢のよう、最も怪しげな人物に描きたいと望んでいます。渓谷の中で最も静かで、最も魅惑的なロマンチックな風景 サコ。彼が採用する主な要素は何ですか? そこには彼の木が立っており、それそれにも中空の幹があり、まるで隠者と十字架が中にいるかのようです。そしてここには彼の牧草地が眠っており、そこには彼の牛が眠っている。そして向こうからコテージは眠そうな煙を吸います。遠くの森の奥深くに、曲がりくねった迷路があり、丘の中腹の青に染まる山々の重なり合う支脈に到達します。しかし、たとえこの絵がこのように夢中になって横たわっていても、そしてこの松の木が揺れても この羊飼いの頭の上の木の葉のようにため息が垂れ下がったが、すべては無駄だった、羊飼いの目が目の前の魔法の流れに釘付けになつていて限界。行く6月に大草原を訪れます。何マイルも歩くと得点が得られます オニユリの中に膝の深さ—お守りは何を望んでいるの?—水—そこには水一滴もありません! ナイアガラが砂の白内障だったら、それを見るために何千マイルも旅するのですか? 貧しい詩人はなぜ、テネシーは、突然二掴みの銀を受け取ると、意図的に悲しいことに必要だったコートを買ってあげるべきか、それともお金を投資すべきか。ロッカウェイビーチへの歩行者専用の旅行ですか?なぜほとんどすべての丈夫で健康な男の子は、彼の中には丈夫で健康な魂があり、時には夢中になって行きたくなる海? 乗客としての最初の航海で、あなた自身がそのように感じたのはなぜですか? あなたとあなたの船が出航したことを最初に言われたときの神秘的な振動 陸地が見える? なぜ昔のペルシア人は海を神聖視したのでしょうか?なぜ、ギリシャ人はそれに別の神を与え、そしてジョーブの兄弟? 確かにこれ全部 意味がないわけではありません。そして、その物語の意味はさらに深くなります ナルキッソスは、その痛ましい穏やかなイメージを理解できなかったために、噴水に落ちて飛び込み、溺死した。しかし、その同じイメージは、私たち自身もすべての川や海で見ています。のイメージです 捕えがたい生命の幻影。そしてこれがすべての鍵です。

さて、私は何かを始めるに必ず海に行くのが習慣になっていると言うと、目がかすんできて、肺を過剰に意識し始める、私はそう思う 私が乗客として海に出たことがあると推測されるつもりはありません。のために乗客として行くには財布が必要だが、財布なんてただの雑巾に過ぎない何かが入っていない限り。その上、乗客は船酔いします。喧嘩好き、夜も眠れない、楽しくない一般的なことですが、いいえ、私は乗客としては決して行きません。いや、でも私は塩のようなものですが、提督として海に行ったことはありますか? それとも船長とか料理人とか。私はそのような職の栄光と栄誉を放棄します それらが好きな人たち。私としては、あらゆる名誉ある尊敬すべき人物を忌み嫌うあらゆる種類の労苦、試練、難題。それはまったく同じです 船の世話をせずに、自分の世話をするのが精いっぱいです。バーク船、ブリッグ船、スクーナー船など。そして、料理人になることについては、しかしそこにはかなりの栄光があることを告白します。料理人は一種の存在です。船上の士官だった—それでもどういうわけか、私は鳥を焼くことを夢にも思わなかった—けれども一度焼き、慎重にバターを塗り、適切に塩コショウをした後、言うまでもなく、これほど敬意を持って話す人はいないでしょう。敬意を表して、私よりも焼き鳥のほうを。それは偶像崇拜から外れている昔のエジプト人はトキのグリルと川馬のローストを溺愛していました。巨大な焼き場でそれらの生き物のミイラを見ることができます。しかし、これも時間の経過とともに消えてしまいます。

いいえ、私が海に行くときは、ただの船乗りとして、マストの直前に行きます。船首櫓に急降下し、そこから王室のマストの頭まで上がった。真実、むしろ彼らは私にいくつかのことを命令し、スパーからスパーへとジャンプさせます。5月の草原のバッタ。そして、最初は、この種のことは、十分不快です。特にあなたがそうしている場合、それは人の名誉心に触れるものです。この土地の古い名門、ヴァン・レンセラーフ家の出身か、ランドルフ、またはハーディヌート。そして何よりも、バッティングの直前であれば、タールボットに手を入れて、あなたはそれを国として君臨してきた校長先生、背の高い男子生徒たちに畏敬の念を抱かせます。トランジション教師から船員に至るまで、熱心な人間であることは保証します。セネカとストア派の強力な煎じ薬で、ニヤニヤしながら耐えることができます。それ。しかし、これも時間の経過とともに消えてしまいます。

船長の老体が私にほうきを持ってくるように命令したらどうなるだろう そしてデッキを掃除しますか? その屈辱は何に相当するのか、秤にかけてみると、つまり、新約聖書の天秤で? 大天使だと思いますか ガブリエルは私を軽視することは何も考えていない、なぜなら私はすぐにそして その特定の例では、その老人の塊に敬意を持って従うでしょうか? 誰がそうではないのか 奴隸? それ聞かせて。さて、それでは、しかし、老船長が私に命令するかもしれません。について—どんなに彼らが私を殴ったり、殴りたっても、私には大丈夫だという満足感。他の人は皆同じだということ 物理的または物理的な方法で、またはほぼ同じ方法で提供される形而上学的な観点、つまり。そして普遍的な衝撃は過ぎ去る丸めて、すべての手でお互いの肩甲骨をこすり、コンテンツ。

繰り返しますが、私はいつも船員として海に行きます。彼らは必ずお金を払うからです。私が苦労したからといって、彼らは乗客に一銭も支払わないのに、聞いたことがある。それどころか、乗客自身が支払う必要があります。そしてそこにお金を払うか支払われるかの世界の違いはそれだけです。行為 お金を払うということは、おそらくこの両者が与える最も不快な行為である果樹園泥棒が私たちに迫ってきました。しかし給料が支払われるのと比べてどうなるでしょうか? それと? 男がお金を受け取るための都会的な活動は、本当に私たちがお金が根源であると熱心に信じていることを考えると、素晴らしいことです。この世のすべての病気、そしてお金のある人はいかなる理由があつても天国に入ることができないということです。ああ! 私たちは何と元気よく滅びに身を委ねていることでしょう!

最後に、私はいつも船乗りとして海に出ます。健康的な運動のためです。そして前城甲板の清らかな空気。この世界と同じように、向かい風は船尾からの風よりもはるかに一般的です (つまり、違反をまったくしなかった場合) ピタゴラスの格言) 、したがって、ほとんどの場合、提督は クォーター デッキは船員たちから雲団風を教わる船首櫓。彼はそれを最初に吸うと思っている。しかしそうではありません。ほぼ同じでこの共通点は、同時に他の多くのことでリーダーを導いているのでしょうか? 指導者たちはそれをほとんど疑っていない時期です。しかし、その後なぜそうなったのか 船員として何度も海の匂いを嗅ぎ続けてきた私は、今度はそれを受け入れなければなりません 捕鯨航海に行くことが私の頭の中あります。これは見えない警察官です 私と密かに犬たちを常に監視

# WHERE THE COLUMBINES GROW

THE SUN'S REFLECTION IS HARSH COMING OFF OF THE PACKED SNOW ABOVE. A LONESOME STONE RESTS UPON A SANDBAR, WHOSE BODY CUTS CURVED INTO A FLOWING STREAM. THERE ARE SPIRITS TRAPPED IN THE BLACK CANYON OF THE GUNNISON, OF MEN BOTH ALIVE AND DEAD. THEY WILL REMAIN THERE FOREVER, AMONG THE PEBBLES AND GRAIN - IN THE ESSENCE OF THE ATOMS OF THE MINDS OF THE MEN WHO CHOOSE TO REMEMBER. ALL THAT REMAINS OF THE SCENE, STOPPED FROZEN IN TIME BY SOME MAGNIFICENT FORCE OF GOD - IS THE SOUND OF FLOWING WATER. SOMEWHERE ON THE WESTERN SLOPE OF THE MOUNTAIN, A BOY PASSES THE TIME PICKING AT HIS GUITAR'S STRINGS.

OUTSIDE OF A SMALL CITY ON THE WESTERN SLOPES OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS, THROUGH THE GREY-ROCK MOUNTAIN PASSES AND IMMENSE LANDSCAPES OF ASPEN TREES AND SNOW, THERE LIVES A WRINKLED HIPPIE MAN IN A CABIN. HE IS A TALL AND THIN MAN, WITH BONY FINGERS TIPPED WITH CALLOUSES - A MAN WHO SLEPT IN HIS JEANS, WHOSE WARDROBE CONSISTED OF BUTTONED SHIRTS THAT SMELLED OF CIGARETTE ASH, NOT THAT HE COULD TELL. FOUR MONTHS HAD PASSED SINCE HE HAD LAST MADE A TRIP DOWN THE MOUNTAINSIDE. THAT WINTER A CONSTANT BARRAGE OF SNOW AND TERRIFIC WIND KEPT HIM INDOORS, ACCCOMPANIED ONLY BY A FEW BOOKS AND THE AXE HE KEPT FOR CHOPPING FIREWOOD. PRINCIPAL AMONG HIS BOOKS WERE THE GREAT POETIC WORKS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, WHICH HE TOOK TO READING AND MEMORIZING DURING HIS LONG SECLUSION. THAT DAY, WHEN THE SNOW HAD MELTED ENOUGH TO CONNECT THE DIRT ROADS TO CONCRETE, HE SET OUT IN HIS TRUCK INTO THE CITY.

IN THE 1850S THE CITY BEGAN AS A MILITARY OUTPOST. THE UTE - MOUNTAIN INDIANS - BELIEVED THEMSELVES TO HAVE BEEN BORN FROM THE MYRIAD SPRINGS SCATTERED ACROSS THE RANGE. BY THE 20TH CENTURY, THERE WERE FEW OF THESE INDIANS REMAINING IN COLORADO - WHOSE THEN GOVERNOR SAW FIT TO LEAVE THEIR FATE TO THE EQUIVALLY SAVAGE MORMONS NOT A HUNDRED MILES WEST. WHAT REMAINS OF THE OLD FORT IS NOW A MUSEUM, DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF LOCAL RELICS. EVERY YEAR, THE EXHIBITS DRAW IN VISITORS NUMBERING IN THE HUNDREDS. ON AVERAGE, TWO OR THREE PEOPLE VISIT A DAY. IT IS HERE THAT CHRISTINE BARNES, DIRECTOR OF HISTORIOGRAPHY - M.A. IN PUBLIC HISTORY - COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY (1972, CUM LAUDE), FEELS MOST ALONE. THE SILENCE OF THE MUSEUM IS INCESSANT. SOMETHING ABOUT THE GLASS-ENCASED BOTTLECAPS AND WAX MODELS OF THE STATE CALVARY - CLAD IN THEIR BLUE WOOLEN UNIFORMS, THE GREEN HALL BETWEEN THE PANORAMAS AND COUNTLESS TINTYPES... THE THOUGHT TAPERS OFF INTO NOTHING. ON THE WALL, THE CLOCK HITS TWENTY MINUTES AFTER NOON.

WHEN THE HIPPIE ARRIVES, HE SEES A STAGE SET UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PARK. RAISED ABOUT TEN FEET FROM THE GROUND, NOT QUITE SET UP, HE SEES MEN WALKING BETWEEN IT AND A FREIGHT TRUCK. ACROSS THE WAY, THERE IS A BANNER DRAPED FROM THE BRICK TOWN HALL - "SPRING SOUNDS FESTIVAL, SPONSORED BY 101.8 KCGG - THE BEST IN COUNTRY WESTERN. 04/14/78." THE SIGN ITSELF ISN'T PARTICULARLY INTERESTING. FROM THE LOOKS OF IT, PRINTED SOMEWHERE ON THE FRONT RANGE, SHIPPED IN WITH THE REST OF THE EQUIPMENT. THE HIPPIE TAKES IN THE SCENE OF THE MEN AND THE SIGN FOR A MOMENT. HE FEELS ON HIS EXPOSED SKIN THE CHILL OF THE AIR, AND WITH NOTHING MORE TO TAKE IN, VENTURES INTO A NEARBY BAR.

THE WRITER IS DRINKING. THE WRITER IS HIGH. THE WRITER IS COMPLETELY IN HIS ELEMENT IN THIS VERY MOMENT. HE IS LURKING ALONE AT A TABLE MEANT FOR PARTIES OF SIX OR MORE, A BIG WOODEN CIRCLE IMMEDIATELY ADJACENT TO A STREET-FACING WINDOW. THE WRITER IS NOT WRITING. HE IS OBSERVING, TO THE BEST OF HIS KNOWLEDGE, THE NEXT GREAT BREAKTHROUGH IN THE HISTORY OF YANKEE LITERATURE. THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE NEW AMERICAN COWBOY: THE POSTMODERN GUNSLINGER, THE PROSAIC MAN OF THE FUTURE, WHOSE STOIC DEMEANOR BETRAYS THE - HE IMAGINES - TRAGEDY OF A MAN ENVELOPED AND OVERTAKEN BY THE COMING OF THE TIMES. HE STARES INTENTLY AT THE HIPPIE SEATED AT THE BAR - CLAD IN A BUCKSKIN JACKET AND PAINT-STAINED PANTS, HUNKED OVER SOME DRINK - WHISKY, HE HOPES - AS HE CHATS WITH AN EQUALLY CHARACTERISTIC BARTENDER.

"I BEEN STUCK ABOUT FOUR MONTHS."

"OH? WHAT DID YOU EAT?"

"HAD A FREEZER FULL OF ELK. SOME RICE, TOO."

"SOUNDS ROUGH."

THIS IS WHERE HISTORY COMES TO LIFE. IN THE BASEMENT OF THE FORT, AMID METICULOUSLY ORGANIZED SHELVES AND DRAWERS, SOMEWHERE TOWARDS THE VERY BACK OF A CONCRETE ROOM, THERE ARE THREE ORNATE WEAVINGS. NATIVE IN ORIGIN, THESE THREE CLOTH PIECES CONTAIN AT THEIR CENTER THE PRESERVED SCALPS OF TWO UNKNOWN UTE WOMEN, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE SCALP OF "HALF-RED" JIMMY O'LEARY (1842-1889). DOCUMENTS TELL US THAT O'LEARY WAS BORN IN COUNTY ULSTER, IRELAND, TO A POLISH MOTHER AND AN IRISH FATHER. A HALF-JEW, O'LEARY MADE HIS WAY TO THE UNITED STATES WITH HIS PARENTS IN THE MID 1850'S - SETTLING IN A POOR NEIGHBORHOOD OF NEW YORK. SOURCES BEYOND THIS POINT ARE SCARCE. WHAT WE DO KNOW IS THAT O'LEARY FOUGHT NOBLY IN THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC, EVENTUALLY MAKING HIS WAY TO THE COLORADO TERRITORY IN TIME TO SERVE IN THE



## CONTINUED FROM S20 "WHERE THE COLUMBINES GROW"

THIRD COLORADO CALVARY UNDER CHIVINGTON. IT WAS AT THIS TIME THAT O'LEARY EARNED HIS MONIKER, HAVING TAKEN A WIFE FROM AMONG THE FLEEING CHEYENNE TRIBESPEOPLE.

"A HUNDRED AND TWENTY YEARS AGO," EXPLAINS THE WRITER, "MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER DIED SUDDENLY IN A MINING ACCIDENT WHICH KILLED TWELVE OTHERS." THE BAR IS SILENT. SMOKE RISES INTO THE REDWOOD CEILING. THE BAR ROOM IS EMPTY, BUT FOR THE THREE MEN THERE INSIDE.

"HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT THE NAME GRAND JUNCTION?" ASKED THE HIPPIE.

"CAN'T SAY I HAVE. WHAT'S THERE TO THINK ABOUT. JUST A TOWN WITH A FEW TRAINS AND A LIBRARY CHOCK-FULL OF SCHLOCKY CHICK LIT."

"WELL - I CAN'T BLAME YOU MUCH. IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE SOMETHING TO BE THOUGHT ABOUT. BUT I WAS STUCK UP IN THE SNOW FOR SO LONG I GOT TO THINKING ABOUT ALL KINDS OF STUFF. IT'S ABOUT THE ONLY THING YOU CAN DO IN THAT SITUATION. I HAD A FRIEND, WHO IN A SIMILAR SITUATION TO MINE, WAS TRAPPED IN OAK CREEK WITH JUST A COPY OF PLATO'S REPUBLIC AND ONE OF THEM SMALL MEXICAN DOGS. HE CAME DOWN LATER WITH A HABIT OF WASHING HIS HANDS AND TALKING ABOUT EVERYTHING HE COULD THINK OF. AT THE TIME I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND, BUT I DO MORE WELL NOW..."

"BUT GRAND JUNCTION, YOU WERE GOING TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT GRAND JUNCTION." INQUIRED THE WRITER. "I THOUGHT WE WERE TALKING ABOUT GRAND JUNCTION."

"I'LL GET TO IT," WITH A SLOW TACT, THE HIPPIE PULLED A BOX OF CIGARETTES FROM THE FRONT POCKET OF HIS SHIRT, FUMBLING FOR A MOMENT WITH THE LID. "HERE'S A STORY FOR YOU. THERE WAS A DEAD CONCERT THAT I WANTED TO GO TO IN CALIFORNIA BACK A FEW YEARS. I SIGNED UP FOR THE ARMY, GOT FLOWN OUT ALL EXPENSES TO MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA. ON THE FIRST DAY THERE I WALKED OFF BASE AND NEVER LOOKED BACK. A FEW MONTHS LATER, A COUPLE OF FEDERAL AGENTS SHOWED UP AT MY PARENT'S HOUSE LOOKING FOR ME."

"WAS THAT DURING VIETNAM?" ASKED THE BARTENDER.

"NO, JUST A BIT AFTER..." THE HIPPIE THOUGHT FOR A MOMENT. "I DON'T THINK THEY DID MUCH INVESTIGATING AFTER THAT, AT LEAST, I WAS NEVER ARRESTED OR ANYTHING. THEY JUST WANTED TO SCARE ME REAL GOOD... YOU KNOW THERE WAS A TIME I WAS ARRESTED. ABOUT 1970, NIXON GAVE A SPEECH DOWNTOWN DENVER, I WAS THERE IN TOWN THAT DAY TAKING MY RIFLE TO GET SERVICED. I WAS WALKING DOWN THE STREET AND NEXT THING I KNEW A COUPLE OF POLICE SHOVED ME INTO THE BACK OF A CRUISER AND START ASKING ME QUESTIONS. I GET TAKEN TO THE COUNTY JAIL, AND THEY ASK ME ALL KINDS OF QUESTIONS THERE, TOO. SEVEN OR EIGHT HOURS PASSED. I SWEAR I SPOKE TO EVERY POLICE OFFICER, COUNTY OFFICIAL,

SECRET SERVICEMAN, WHATEVER. THEY ALL WANTED TO KNOW IF I WAS TRYING TO SHOOT THE PRESIDENT. I GUESS I MIGHT HAVE TAKEN A SHOT IF THE OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED ITSELF... WELL. EVENTUALLY THEY LET ME GO - GUESS THEY FIGURED IT WASN'T ILLEGAL TO WALK AROUND WITH A RIFLE."

"SHIT, IT WILL BE SOON." SAID THE WRITER.

A MOMENT PASSES. "GRAND JUNCTION SITS, YOU WILL NOTICE, AT ABOUT THE GEOGRAPHICAL MID-POINT BETWEEN SALT LAKE CITY AND LAS VEGAS. IT IS A JUNCTION BETWEEN THE HEAVENLY AND THE DEMONIC. IT IS A PURGATORY ON THE MESA, SOMEWHERE BETWEEN LUXURY AND SELF-DENIAL. YOU FIND IN GRAND JUNCTION, MORE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE UNITED STATES, A PLACE BETWEEN EXTREMES. WHEN YOU DRIVE WEST THE ROAD FORKS IN TWO, GOING NORTH AND SOUTH - BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL. THE QUESTION YOU ASK YOURSELF WHEN YOU GET THERE IS IMPORTANT. WHO IN THE HELL WOULD EVER WANT TO GO TO SALT LAKE CITY?"

A BLACK AND WHITE O'LEARY IS CAPTURED IN THE TINTYPE, HANDSOME AND BATTLE READY. HE IS TWENTY, BEARDED, AND BROAD SHOULDERED. IN THE BACKGROUND, TRINITY METHODIST CHURCH, AND THE BODIES OF NATHAN, ELLEN, FLORENCE, AND LAUREN HUNGATE - MUTILATED BADLY. THE BODIES OF THE TWO YOUNG GIRLS APPEAR AS TWO DARK SPOTS - AS IF LIGHT ITSELF HAD REFUSED TO CAPTURE THEIR VISAGE. BARNES KEEPS THIS PHOTO WRAPPED IN A SPECIAL PLASTIC FILM, STORED IN A FILING CABINET BESIDE THE SHELVES OF ANTIQUES. THE PICTURE ARRIVED WITH A BOX OF A FEW HUNDRED OTHERS - ORIGINALLY ON LOAN, AND LATER GRANTED AS A GIFT, THE TINTYPES RANGE IN SCOPE AND MESSAGE FROM THE BANAL TO THE ROMANTIC. WILDLIFE AND SCENERY ARE SECOND ONLY IN OCCURRENCE TO SOLDIERS AND FAMILIES. OF THE MANY HUNDREDS, IT WAS THIS PHOTO WHICH MOST SPOKE TO BARNES. O'LEARY'S STARE IS INTENSE, THE BLACK OF HIS PUPILS - THE LINES IN HIS FACE, THE UNMOVING AMBIGUITY OF HIS EXPRESSION. THERE HE IS - AS MANY OTHERS WERE - OUTRAGED, CAUGHT UP IN THE STORY AND PATHOS OF REVENGE. THE PHOTOGRAPHED IN THIS MOMENT IS A MONUMENT TO HIS ANGER, TO THE ANGER OF THE FRONT RANGE SETTLER. WHEN SHE SEES THIS PHOTO, BARNES ALWAYS FEELS THE HEAT OF THIS CENTURIES-OLD EMOTION RISING SUDDENLY IN HER BLOOD. THE BEATING OF HER OWN HEART IN HER EARS, HER BREATH HOT, SHE IMAGINES HERSELF A MEMBER OF THE GATHERED CROWD. SHE SWEATS PROFUSELY IN HER CHAIR, SITTING COMPLETELY STILL UNTIL IT BECOMES TOO MUCH - PICTURE IN HAND, SHE RUNS TO THE BASEMENT AND FINDS O'LEARY'S HEADLESS SCALP ATOP ITS WOVEN FIXTURE. HISTORY IS COMING. IT WILL CONTINUE TO COME UNTIL MAN DRAWS HIS LAST, IT WILL COME UNTIL THE RIVER HAS ERODED THE VALLEY, UNTIL THE BLACK STONE OF THE GUNNISON IS WHITLED AND WASHED AWAY, AND THE VAST MOUNTAINS ARE BUT A NUB OF CONTEMPTABLE EARTH IN A VAST GRASSLAND PLAIN.



Welcome to /lit/ Anonymous ## Mon 02/15/21(Mon)20:06:25 No. 17657914

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Check the wiki, the catalog, and the archive before asking for advice or recommendations, and please refrain from starting new threads for questions that can be answered by a search engine.

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