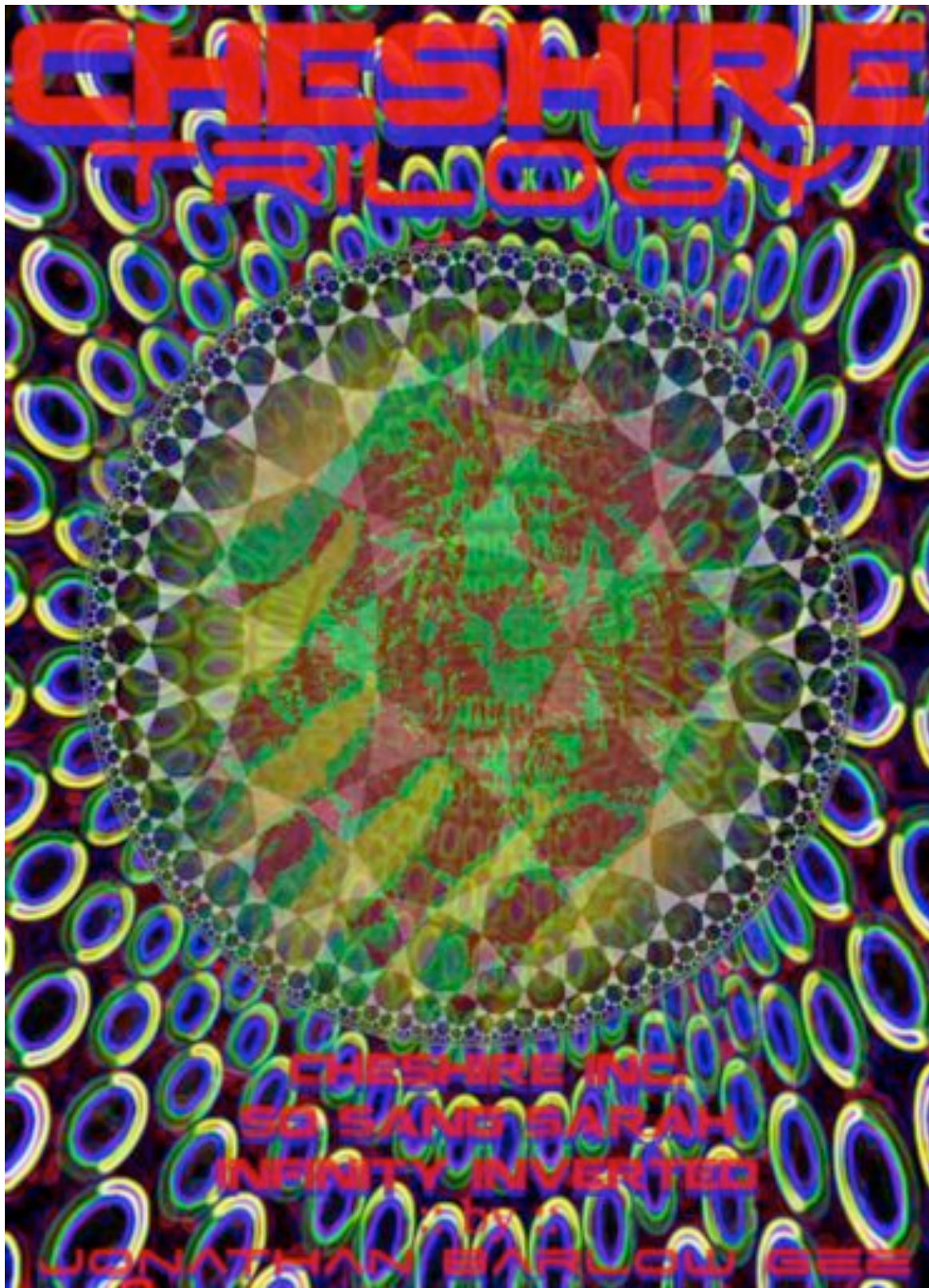




“Cheshire Trilogy”
(this 2013 re-edition e-book)
is hereby copyright (©)
by: Jonathan Barlow Gee,
on this: September 7th, 2013.
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“Cheshire Inc.”

C. Inc. is basically more of a collection of manuscript documents, written during high school (1994-5), and compiled here unedited. The author's main inspirations at the time were the books "Naked Lunch," by beatnik author William S. Burroughs, later adapted to film by David Cronenberg, and Philip K. Dick's "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep," which was subsequently made into the movie "Blade Runner," directed by Ridley Scott.

(pages 6-101)

“So Sang Sarah”

SSS is the continuation of the story roughly fleshed out in C. Inc. In SSS, the character of the Detective and that of the elusive Cheshire Sam are fully formed, and their science fiction world fully realised down to the most minute detail. Truly a step and a half up from the first book in the series, this work was originally rushed to press in 2000 as a limited edition of five copies for the wedding of a friend of the author.

(pages 104-190)

“Infinity Inverted”

covering the longest span of time of all three, the final installment of the Cheshire Sam Trilogy finds the treacherous General Tso gaining ultimate power over the animal factions, only to lose it all for his bride, and of course, the final confrontation between the detective and Cheshire Sam.

Truly a page-turner, this adventure is partially also a history book, full of old (high school era and later) writings about the backstories of the characters and places from throughout the trilogy and its time periods.

(pages 193-315)

insanity clause #23:

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Cheshire Inc. / greed necessitates government / Zone P.D. / Day 21, June of August / the Tour / Lyn / random insert: / Snail / The Real Me / Soap / My Job / the Dr. / Moon Shot / The Dream / Black Sails / The Night / The Input Plant / The Hop / Part 2: Let the Good Times Roll / the BUGS / Bulletin: / Re. Etc. / Too Much / Part Two: the Body / “Hi, I’m Persona X. I’m the Host.” / Too Much part three: The Mind / “Well, Whatever...” / The Salesman / Interlude / Interlude Two / The Radio Man / The Undone Time / Equality / The Writer / The Righteous Teacher and the Wicked Priest / World Music / Random Insert: Artistic License / At the Scene / The Book Tour / The Grand Accusator / Part Two: An Appointment / Club Convergence / Our Passion Masked Technology / C.C. (con.t) / Nothing At All / One Pirate Mangles Vesatile Realms / part 2: NET / part 3: Zone / part 4: Mouth / The Military Trained Mind / Calling Only Dead Especially Secrets / pt. 2: Denouncing Nocturnal Atrophy (stranded) / Virtual Omni Informational Distress / Cannibal / Interlude Three / pt. 2 Allegory for Gluttony / Zymurgy of Ontological Non-Existence / A Tragedy In One Act Starring One Actor / The Hall of Surreal Energy, Liquid, Insipid, Pursued Sourly / State of the Union Undress / A Noodle Called Despair / The Ontological Expatriate / Azure Blues / And / Azure Blues (cont.) / Legend / Shakespeare in a Can / Pavlov’s Liberty Bell / Apocalypse Now! / Azure Blues (concl.) / “Tristesse, A Girl With God” / Pure Pulp / Memo Regarding the Insurrection / Memories of Unknown / Cheetahs / Nueteronomy.

“So Sang Sarah”

I.A. Central Informational Nexus 543: 1) A Sewer [or We(’re You?] / 2a) Chinese Pizza / 2b) supplement: El-Epso Fucto’s conversation with General Tso (Microwave Chicken) / 3a) the Pub Rose of Thelema / 3b) the Return Key / 3c) Lacrimal Sanative Trope / II.A. Obsidian Limbic Dormancy / 1a) Punching the Terminal / 1b) Fisherman Omega’s Envoy / 2a) Into the Out(s) of It / 2b) Zero Squared / 2c) Zero Cubed / 3a) Hyper Zero / 3b) Zero Plus the Square Root of Five / 4a) (Zero Plus the Square Root of Five) Halves / 4b) Zero Equals One when One Equals Planck’s Second Constant / III.A. Resilient Abrogation Trawl Synod with Wan Impugnity Nuisance Graft Scrutiny 1) God’s Gas / 2a) How to Spell Relief / 2b) Casual Causal / 2c) Fortune and Glory / B) the Dreamers of God Sleep lying / 1) Sand Castle at the Shore of Forever / 2) “Good Times” Evil / 3) the Two Sides of One / IV.A. Imperial Blues in D(e)ath / 1a) Crossing All Rivers / 1b) Vectomy / 2a) Paradise House / 2b) the Cap Stone of Hiram and Goliath / 2c) Wisdom’s Aura’s Room / 2d) the Changing Mind / 3a) Conscious Electron Binary Encoding, Transmission Synchronization and Hilbert Spatial Assemblage / 3b) Angelic Grimoire / 4) “Never Met a Wise Man” / Epilogue.

“Infinity Inverted”

happy readers / On Literature and Evil / scene 1 / excerpts from the minutes of the first meeting of the cybourgeoisie / Monkey Boy’s got the Cave Man / A car goes whizzing past / a car goes whizzing past redeux / Good Times Ten / I drive around for a while because I have no place to go / The Dream Bag / A Wake, A Ware, a Loan / Women: semper in media res / Nice Dreams / Wake and Bake Chicken / Menacingly, the Dr. Smiled / Commencement Address by the Chief Medical Minister to the Graduating Class: / Fabreau / lap dissolve / Sasha and Sam / Dialectic Amour / Ode To Joy / Punks / scene two / Artificial Impossible: the follower’s perception of the leader’s true face / The first God was life / God is Drugs / domestic mammoths / Property is Fear / Uncle Oeddy / the Master Race / the student class / subcultures L&R / Introduction to a Conspiracy / new conspiracy / on pyschosis / gone / Penut Butter / a little legend / Dogs & Cats / fruity / here is the source... / Karl Midi and God / mage/priest / Mr. Smith’s Shadow at the Speed of Light / Ram and City / From the encounter of Sire Thomas Todd, a freemason, with vampires: / Sasha and Sergei / story of a story teller / the hero, clerk, shrine and town / The Magician’s Assistant / The Retreatest and the Rebel / The Suicide Doctor / Dick / earful / Famil LéAire / Jenny and Peter / Mikail / Sally / Sasha saw that all writers / The way the rich stay so.

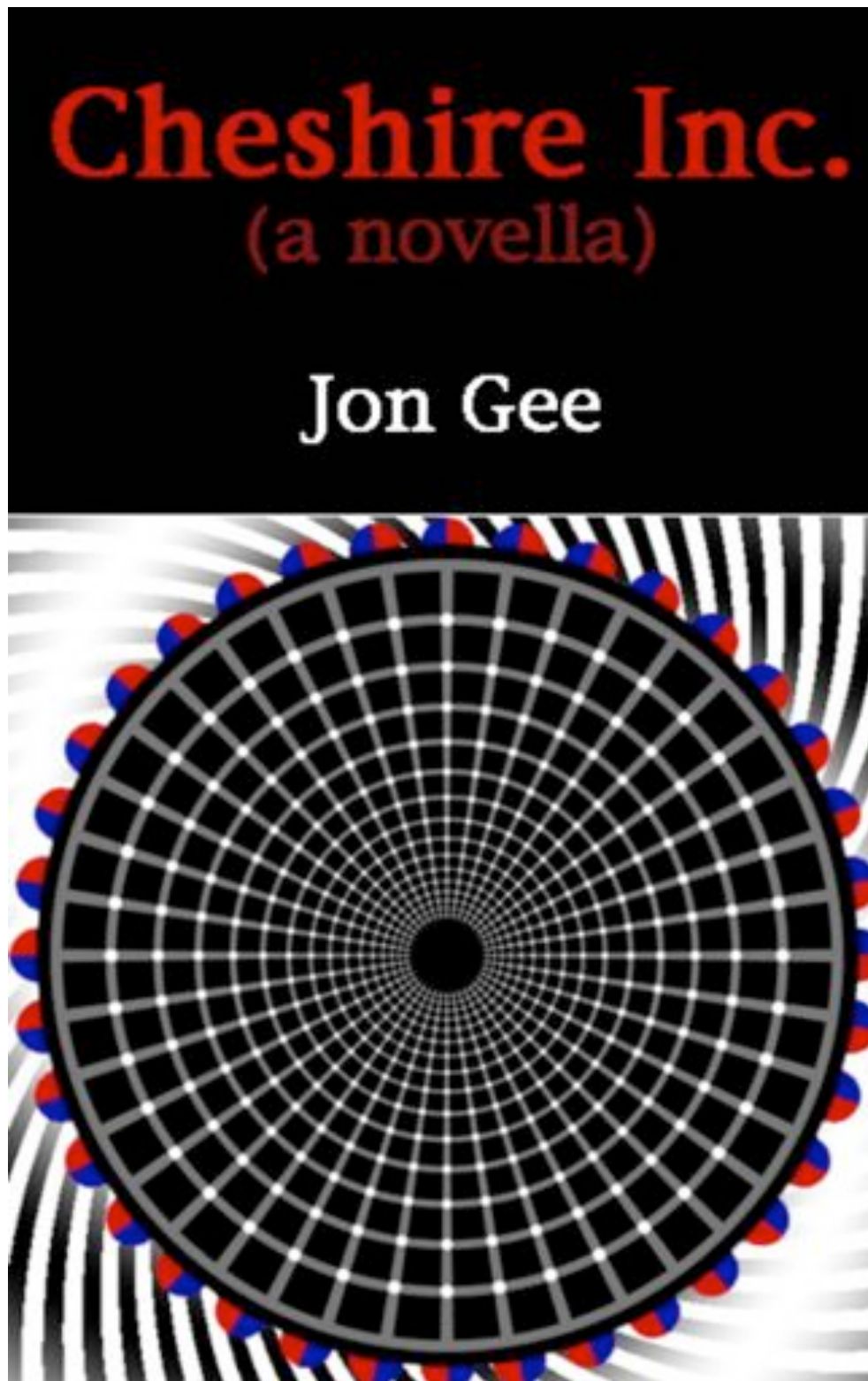
“The Cheshire Trilogy”

Book 1:

“Cheshire Inc.”

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Cheshire Inc.

The voices are all around again. Wandering words flicker like fire, dimly lighting the vacuous cavity of my vanishing ego. What was once my sanity now belongs to someone far away. The city holds me like an enormous phosphorescent cell inside a reeking roach hotel. I slink, eyes on feet, through the menagerie of monsters, the indigent indigenous, whores and pimps, with spiny fins piercing fur coats, green gills from self-celebratory cigar sucking. Thick eyebrows shroud green jewels. They tuck themselves away from the world in subocular alcoves, invisible but to the depraved. They beckon me and I examine them, my eyes swaying on cybernetic bug stalks, observing coolly, cataloging. Their lips peel back in hideous smiles to reveal soggy yellow canines jabbing at random from pink wet gums. They stare uninterestedly at me and, snorting forth a nicotine callous, in slow motion turn away. They have insectile eyelids all, cardinal lips and fat fur coats, short sequined saffron skirts, dark hose, high heels. This city is asylum for lost lambs and wild wolves as one. Where are the doctors in this mad house, I see only the sick at scuttle alike ants toting bags, pistols, promises and insipid puns. The sick leading the sick; blind rats in an ever spreading circle. I can feel leprosy ripening in my rotten joints. Growing like bread mold in deep green clumps. I'm sore whenever walking on these sordid fortune cookie legs. In their barometric arthritis I can feel the man out there. The man who keeps my mind in a little wooden box locked with a rusty golden hinge. He's tall, in a collar-up trench coat like a detective. He wears a raggy hat and raggy pants and he is like a living pile of rags. His hair is long and raggy, his arms are stiff, his hands cracking with age like leather, thin, fingers long. He shrugs, folding in his whispering arms like a sleeping moth, skin grey and fuzzy; he lights a draw and the spark catches his face in a dim glow. Melting grey skin like bark, broken yellow teeth clamping the poison, behind them a black tongue. His nose turned up like a hollow corpse's, two gloomy caverns and a marrow bar between them he wipes at with his ragged sleeve. His eyes are smoothed flat over like beach sand. Scar tissue, pale and delicate, drifts over his sly eye sockets. His ears have bonified into mounds with a funnel-like hole in the center of each, both Indian cemeteries. He cracks a positively hideous smile, cigarette dangling limply from one lip and coiling up tendrils of smoke. He runs a long finger-nailed finger over the box my spirit is in. His bulbous, chapped lips undulate, schluffing off words in a soothing lover's tone, so peaceful, yet menacing with intent. He beckons me out into the city night, neon scars run all around me. Bloody scabs of Broadway. The romance as the two eminent movie stars slither in to christen a new movie awakening in public cocoons. I'm sweating under a navy winter coat across the summershowerwet street. Cars swish by between us but I'm right behind them. The fat woman feels the psychic breeze of closeness. She looks around trancedly at the attendants who applaud and beg an autograph off her. She smiles nervously. I crack a truly hideous smile and grope my skin gun through my pocket. I know she could be mine. The leather eye patch rubs against my one sealed over eye. My lips stick together and I sniff whole cheetos raw for sustenance. I light a ragged cigarette. I pay a penny to peepshow two girls performing sex acts on each other. I sit there and melt my clothes into a sick pile on the floor watching them undulate. The two sisters are reflected in the surface of the blob. My skin is a tight grey, fuzzy scar tissue all over. One girl sees me accidentally and screams, the other looks over and wretches. My body hairs have grown to the straight backed wooden chair like moss. My blackened tongue lolls out and to the side. I am a greenish grey. My body is beginning to segment like a spider's. I chase the Puerto Rican girl through a southern mansion in her mind.

Cheshire Trilogy

by: Jonathan Barlow Gee

Outside are civil war battle sounds and slaves churning butter. Finally I trap the naked girl in a study full of animal heads and pull my piece. Everything, every real thing that is, has a counterpart in the astral sphere. I fill her with globs of milky fructose. Millions of immature miniature replicas of me immediately sprout from the globs. She screams. In reality she just drools. I get back on the trail of my actress... you see I can see in her cunt-filled mind that she knows the man I seek. By tomorrow that dancing lesbian hussy will be my agent and can help me follow the man through his ghetto fronts to find the real him. I hear his voice in my head. Low and slow like a memory resurging, disrupting synapses. I see his eyeless smile. I know he is only an agent for something larger, larger than I know. Why he wants my soul...? Am I to be an agent for him? I can see his eyeless smile — cracked, seeping gums cling weekly to stale corn-like teeth, gripping a green tentacle of a cigarette. His name is... Sam...

greed necessitates government

After they started making the cars new-organic and the ribs hugged your body and you saw the road roll under you like an umbilical chord. After the mouth opened and the sex blossomed a huge red flower in the east. After the eyes shone like two stars in the starless night sky of the western desert. And after all this had been done and had happened and after everyone up and left the worthless monarchs of buildings. That's when the people who already lived in a place *finally* bonded together and began taking back the wasted old teet of the earth regardless of what the other rulers in suit had told them and where they were supposed to live or how and what they were supposed to be. A little head nod in relation to the best examples of a nationalistic rational revolution against absolutism and instability and military and economic government. Yes, it was accepted that there was no way to go and nowhere to get anyone except where you were. Oh, some wandered off into the hills to live like romantic bandits and enlightened French mountain men and the blood of Indians flowed into the old lakes directed for drainage and irrigation and the water went bad. But most lived in tribes in the low lands in counties and shotguns and knives flashed like wolves' teeth in the sun from the east. And the rays from the new black sun washed away flesh and made babies be born sexless or hermaphrodites because sex was like water and had to be rationed and given only to leaders. Lots of dead cats piled high by the road side. Dead cats nailed to doors and hubcaps on tires. Lots of dead politicians in backyard pools and limos and whore's rooms were fund by lots of poor bums with peeling skin and they pull out for political reasons all the money and they give it to great bonfires because it brought the Great Wave. Ah, yes, and now we live bright and shiny, productless and timeless and lawless and nude. A close kinship and a romantic campaign are our government and we live in our bad lands and good lands with pride. But no one here in God's home town knows where the strangers and the bandits and the mountain men went or where / if they live. I saw one driving once in a car of flesh wrapped around him in bones and he flew through the night without a single glance back over his shoulder and I turned and I walked back to the town with a bit of a smirk and a tear in my eye, in my one good eye.

Zone P.D.

Zone police are either exclusively boneless or exclusively skinless. These animals roam the streets indiscriminately killing citizens and travelers. They wrap their insect scaled heads in khaki sheets like sheiks to hide the needle pox. They exist in an invisible flatland dimension between the earth and the people and rile violently against both to break free. It is royal training to planted up to the chin like a vegetable and eat your way out in preparation for joining the zone P.D. They wear earplugs and have subocular chips to dissuade joining conscious or unconscious. Sounds roam around like the big bad wolf but can't get to their little piggy brains. They wear varying uniforms of varying complexity depending on rank judgment. In the zone there are no grand juries. There is one huge eye and one huge mouth in a sacred sub-sub-sub-basement that only the guilty, who are allowed to live and not killed on sight, and the zone P.D. know about, and since the only new members of the zone P.D. are the ones who disappear to be brought before this eye and are never seen again in human form, it is a secret of only the zone P.D. It is this eye/mouth combo that passes final judgment. It is referred to as the quintessence. It sees all. It knows all. It is like the eye of God and there is one small church on Norfolk where the pastor swears that it is the eye of God and demands it be replaced to its throne atop the Cheops pyramid. The zone P.D. broke in during a sermon last Sunday and dragged the screaming padre into an organic car and peeled off. They brought him back later; the same car with sirens on top sped through and threw out an armless, legless, earless lump with fear behind dead eyes. "There is no eye..." he mutters to himself, tying off and injecting government approved flowerdew. "Flowerdew helps people remember everything is good and that *there is no eye...*" he mutters through clenched teeth as he ties off his cock. The needle is clenched in his eye and sinks it deep and pushes the whole dose into his purple staff. Yeah, well, not all Zone P.D. cases end up as piss pore. Chaos ensues without law they say. Round up the usual suspects they say. Two of them are eating doughnuts, cupping insect mandibles around them, in an organic car across the street. I watch them. I lick my lips. Trash taste. Crunch crunch crunch crunch. Bones in the dough made special go crunch crunch crunch. Guns clenched. I make my move. I pounce like a black cougar. Air blows around me. Feet on hood. Kick window in. Gasps. Guns. Blood. Kicks at bony faces. Their guns sink wires into me and shock like snow. Kick. Break. Shock. Night turns red. Guttural laughter fills the city streets. Two cops slain headline reads. Mine eyes have seen the Glory blares over the radio. P.D. cruisers roam like corpuscles through the crowded streets. Sirens are a constant whine behind normal barks and screams and gunfire. She fires guns at her own breast, lurking double agent undercover badges in everybody's closets examining skeletons. Belligerent cops argue domestic disputes like angry Greek philosophers, distracting the combatant couples to their amusement and Roman bread and circus games. Nobody wants to be there then. The dog hides. All the neighbors are pasted to their windows. One loses his patience and grabs a butcher's knife and blood sprays cover the kitchen wall. The other blue beetle crosses his eyes to blur the video-feed and pulls his piece. BANG! BANG! Two eyeholes gush blood geysers like an erecting penis in reverse. He falls into his shadow. When one dies a million show up on the spot like ants, waving their antennae. They hide in back alleys invisible because pantless, the people would rather just look the other way, examining pedestrians like potential road kill. With narrow eyes they look down aquiline noses at citizens who aren't wearing their numbers loud and CLEAR(!!!!!) like victims or suspects and all colored with blood! Blood colors everything they see. In cop school they inject huge amounts of blood

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into their eyeballs and they are whipped naked in front of friends and family who are laughing and they are humiliated until they are reduced to barely an infantile state of cum not even human. They are taught to rape beautiful girls with their eyes and peel layers of their penis flesh off as penance. Nothing is sacred outside of them and they are fallen angels. Virtue is their target! They are true to their maladjusted cause and infect and invade and cleanse in horrid apparitions. Their's are horrid aspirations. Two dressed as aliens sneak into my room while I am sleeping and rape me with the neighbor's cat. I can't look at my neighbor now. I think he's suspicious. His daughter married an Irish-Catholic police captain who has since been promoted to God and will only fuck her when she has her period. They put out babies like a machine and his cock is always raw from penance. He teaches his boys penance — makes them practise peeling potatoes. He teaches them the despair of resolution and the joy of murder. He gives them guns and teaches them how to hunt. Maybe when they're older they'll kill him. They suspect me of killing Kennedy, even though he was assassinated before I was born, but which I couldn't have prevented. No one could have and therefore all America is accomplice to the murder. A million cops seed the crowd and he's picked off in a triangle from above. The cops get Oswald and call him pansy. Or is it patsy? Whichever. William Tell is my idol. He could kill a woman and not know. I love that story so much! He was arrested after killing all the women in the world but one. A German Jew. We are all descended from her.

Day 21, June of August

Why won't they just kill me and get it over with? They know I see them across the street. Even now they are in the apartments above and below and on both sides of me. Last night I had a girl in here and I kept hearing feedback from the wire hidden on her. She kept asking me if I ever killed a guy and saying if I did it turned her on and I stripped her and, to start with, her nipples weren't hard, so I knew she was a liar to begin with, then, to add insult to injury, I found a wire coming out of her ass hole with a little camera at the end. And she had a badge shaped diaphragm. I accused her of being a robot and sent the bitch home whirring and clicking. She beat on the door and demanded I give her her clothes back and I said, "ah — go get 'em!" and pitched them out the window where a million F.B.I. agents dressed as bums rushed up and grabbed them up for evidence and she looked up at me naked on the street and I tried to shout a warning but a cop scuttled up and toted the mechanoid off, probably to rape her, before I could say a word. I threw all my appliances away and busy myself chopping up my wooden furniture to maintain a constant bonfire. It keeps the bugs away. I've already cut to cinder two very expensive couches and a wooden girl I call Katrina. She was the most beautiful of my sacrifices to date. When the sun rises or sets I pray to date for this day to be a good day and that if I must lay my life down to please let it be for His Good and not for any other good, such as government cheese. I don't know anyone. Teresa, my hermaphrodite lesbian lover and Friedrich, my clone, have both eloped to black dominated Haiti to live a life as two black people, a boy and a "girl." It is now clear to me that the most beautiful women in the world thus far are all reflections of myself. I don't need them. I got the real McCoy. No transporter fake here, cap'n! All the cops and F.B.I. people all around can hear is a scratching pen. When I was a kid... I used to wish there were girls at my window watching me when I undressed and getting all excited. There was a girl at my apartment window once recently. I was watching a sunrise and she fell right in front of me. A few seconds later I heard a meaty slap as she landed on her bottom on

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the street below. O think a cop pushed her. That's what I think. If they ever asked me, though, they would probably wring a whole confession out of me and make me sign in bloody semen. "Oh, what the Hell," I'd say after several hours, "sure give me the goddamn paper, what am I signing: the constitution? Whazzit matter, here gimme that pen." And fireworks would go off and they'd give me a parade down death row. Some girls really like to have fun and wear leather and studs and whip and dominate. For them I have the ultimate leather experience: the electric chair. It's leather, it's studded, it whips and even dominates. ZAP. Bitchburgers. Cuntdogs. I have a theory that every man has his devil and therefore every man is a devil. Every man has his Judas and therefore every man is Judas. A burning cut opens up on my arm as sunrise guts the horizon like a spinning yellow saw. Light bleeds out and drowns shadows. The whole concept of "the Shadow" was borrowed from Fantomas. I read somewhere that nine out of ten homewreckers are narcissistic. So let's hit them where it hurts. Drop bottles of hair toxin on communities of divorced men. Bald stewardesses and waitresses and secretaries rush out and peel away in camaro's and T-birds. Ex-husbands, suddenly stricken, not just bald, but wholly hairless sign elephant overdue alimony checks in shaking hairless hands. That boy must have been joking when he said his parents have a motion sensor light in the hall. How silly. How can his father sneak in to rape him then? Rape is nonconsensual. No, I don't mind. "No" always means "no." Massa. I can't help it. It just bleeds like that when I laugh. I don't know why. It hurts too. Stabbed myself to death with a pen. They find my body before it's even cold and read my diary while shitting and drinking coffee on my john. Oh my God.

the Tour

The man was a typical college student — shorts, a white collar t-shirt, trim hair, clean shaven. Obviously a more academic guy than some. A real faggot cunt, yessiree. At a distance I could swear I saw a dick on his eye, dangling like a minute elephant trunk from the socket. As I approached I thought — surely this is a dick. He greeted me with a gleaming toothy smile. Apparently our conversation could not commence until there was a modicum of explanation regarding his cockeye. He conceded to this. "Yes, this is a penis in place of my right eye," he began rehearsedly, "I'm sorry for the shock of its appearance. My real one was shot off — lost in the war." I cut him off, "which war?" I asked. He looked confused for a moment, his spiel interrupted, he stammered, clammed tight, then continued as if uninterrupted. "I lost it in the war and I asked the doctors if they could replace it and they did." He paused, seemingly finished. "But why did you have it put over your eye?" He answered, "why so's I can always keep watch on it so's I never lose it again." He chuckled. "Balls too?" I observed, examining the scrotum hanging over his cheek. "Doesn't that get awkward in a fight?" His fake toothy grin faltered, or rather, flickered, for an instant as if he were flinching. He blinked obviously rather wary of the topic. "Would you like to get started with the tour?" he asked, again blinding me with his grin. "Why not?" I offered, rather amused with the bloke. We started — I sitting in the back of the van, he driving, his female ass. in the shotgun. He started up in tour guide pentameter. ("and over *here* we have cuntlick commerce, established 1982 by troubled shepherds, and right behind *that* one can find harelip library, one of three, fine, well-stocked libraries on campus. You're sure to be able to find all the books you need there." I jumped on this one — "like 'skull-fucking made easy?' or perhaps 'the cunt-faced girls of your area directory?'" By the end of the trip he was almost completely

haught. His face was red, his cock bulging rhythmically, his scrotum tucked into a knot. At first he merely grimaced at me in the rearview mirror like I was hurting him. By the end of the trip he was giving me a cold glare.) I kept wanting to ask him questions like “so how old were you when you lost your virginity?” and “what is the exact percentage of girls on campus who don’t wear underwear?” and “do you get lots of dates with that cock for an eye?” These I stifled, however. At one point, during a red light intermission, he excused himself and turned his head out the window. His cock raised up like a fireman’s hose and he urinated on the ground. He tapped a few more drops out and then went on. He mentioned he was anemic whilst pointing out a huge dormitory made entirely from human excrement. “It’s really an epidemic,” he says, making an impossibly slow right turn. “Doctors say more and more people die from it every day. I also got the runs. You ever get the runs?” He looks at me in the rearview. “No.” While I got ‘em right now. I been studying so hard to get a degree in leprosy that I up and gave myself the runs. Sometimes I masturbate out of sheer boredom. You ever masturbate out of sheer boredom?” He looks at me in the rear view mirror. “No.” “Well I do. I’m doing it right now in fact.” His penis was steering. “Isn’t that dangerous?” I asked. “Naw, it’s got a license.” “Hey,” I offered, “if you’ve got a dick for an eye, what do you got for a dick? An eye?” He gave me a stern look in the mirror. He stopped letting his cock drive and was silent for awhile. I had obviously hurt his feelings. It was likely I was not to get the full hour tour. “Well,” he repressed the urge to snarl, “here we are. Back at the station.” We were pulling in along side the brick building from which we had left. I got out and began to leave. “Hey,” he jogged over to me. “If you ever want to make up, you know, start over, you know...” he handed his phone number, “I can do things —” I walked off before he could finish. I threw his card over my shoulder and it fluttered to the ground and landed in a puddle. I looked back and he appeared to be either weeping or ejaculating. To this day I don’t know which.

Lyn

She could coax water from the desert dunes. She was a mystical medicine woman and her eyes were glistening pools where she mixed ancient cures. She wore a leather woven rope belt over which she hung a thin strip of animal hide that hung down in the front and the back and sagged under to cover her crotch. She wore a leather tube top laced up with sinew in the front, weaving back and forth over a gap that revealed her cleavage. Fringe with bone beads and /or/ feathers hanging from the strands hung everywhere. She wore turquoise bracelets on her wrists and ankles, each dangling one hawk feather. Her hair was long and very deep brown, her eyes solid black orbs wide and observant like cat’s eyes. Her skin was a queer tan/khaki color — she was obviously of multiple race heritage. Her face was painted in long dark brown-red blood colored streaks with black highlights. A centipede style tattoo ran down her spine in the same darkish hue of blue. Her chest, above her top, down in the cleavage and on her stomach, was painted in an intricate pattern. Lines of dark red blood accented her arms and legs. She wore a beaded headband depicting a yellow war bird against a red sky of various tones. Tassels of blue hung down over her forehead from the band. Her feet were clothed in leather lose moccasins. Her dark eyes were inverted flames; when she blinked a light seemed to go out. Her name was Lyn. She had no last name. She was beautiful. Blue sky streaked yellow turns orange and red and burns an electric sunset. Purple night bleeds in from above like seeping paint drowning magnificent flame hues into majestic royal

regal dark tones. Stars break through one by one like distant vigil candles paying homage at long forgotten shrines to long forgotten Gods. This is her dance. As night sinks into exploding dayfall hers are the winds that blow the sun into submission and carry it in the hitchhiker night. Trains drive into town just passing through. Windy border town in the frontier of the horizon. The trains run day and night but go nowhere. There's nowhere beyond to go. "That's where day goes to sleep," parents tell their bedded children as their eyes flutter, their own sleep setting in, they fighting it, fighting to stay awake to hear the magical stories. She whispers a magic story in my ear as I rest my head upon her soft breast. Her hair wisps down around me, brushing my eyes as they flutter shut. Like two birds wings covering my eyes. I look up into her black marble eyes. Glass orbs cut from black quartz crystal clear and shining as diamonds. She smiles down at me with soft pink lips. She is mother, lover, daughter, all in one. In that moment I am loved and safe in her long, warm embrace. I sleep in the tomb of her arms around my tired back. When I awake dawn is boiling like an egg yoke through a million slats cut in white marble. Colored silk saffron lined tapestries line the hall illustrating color scenes in a dragon's life from birth to slaughtering by a noble knight with goat horns sprouting from a thorn covered helmet. Hooked talons, spines and barbs decorate his gleaming armor. His is the evil exalted as good. The Good that men *call* "evil. The hall is a glowing tunnel of translucent light, a chute of shining safety, like a birth canal to heaven. I look groggily through one of the slats, my darkened eyes burned by the sharp encompassing light. I see colored figures dancing around a brown heap at their feet. My eyes shake off the fog of sleep like a wet dog in slow motion. Before a scene of trees growing at an incredibly accelerated rate while day swaps for night at the count of five seconds, an alternating number of men wave saw-like cutlery to the sweeping clouds and creaking clock of stars and arching rainbows of sun and moon alike. The armored men wear different colors, hues, tones and shades of shells, each sprouting arched fangs like the silver knight in the tapestry story. Their shadows swing in oar-like strokes as the days sweep by like waves. They all brandish horrible thorny weapons, blades and saws, maces and clubs with spines. Their helmets are menacing monstrous ogre countenances, each grimacing out an awful grin, misshapen teeth made of steel hooks and all undulating like deep sea anemones. They perch like gargoyles over a crumpled form with coffee hair and leather wrappings cut to ribbons, hanging beaten over a bruised, cut and naked body of khaki flesh. "Lyn," I cry! None of the characters respond. The shelled crabs with a wash of changing colors raise their gutting implements as one, like a wave drawing back to crash, or a terrible bird spreading its wings. My cold palms pressed against the marble, my eye peeled and unblinking. Helpless. Lyn waved a wispy arm, like a weak tendril, begging mercy from the colored killers. They struck down as one — a flower, petals turning inward on itself, blood fountained ten, then twenty, then thirty feet into the air. The dark geyser growing and growing; the knights had sunk in and their backs pulsed around their kill, undulating like feasting beetles. The blood rose like a phoenix, not a drop constrained by gravity but all forced upward in a spiraling column like a tornado. Behind this hideous orgasmic organism like a crunching liquid flower devouring itself at the shelled roots the days and nights still swept by like a pinwheel, trees blooming into life and aging into huge giants and falling into dead wood mulch in minutes; it all began spinning faster and faster, the oak shadow oars pumping maddeningly, trees an olive haze, sky mixing light and night like a top into some twilight haze of sick mauve. The clouds moved so fast they clustered into huge creeping masses like swirling dirt. The scene took on an apocalyptic hue, blood red sky of thick rolling ebony clouds, earth turned gray-brown like vomit in the

half-light, sun and moon a furious band of dim glow encircling the horizon like an evil halo. The blood flower grew and grew like a proverbial bean stalk until it reached toward the sky like a begging hand. At the apex of the churning stem a huge transparent blood bubble began to bloom. The bubble blistered up, filling with the burbling deposit of the now leathery and vein-like stem. It grew and grew and sagged over, filling with Lyn's blood and huge glops and strands of her organs spit up like refuse. The huge transparent sac grew and swelled like a huge birth sac, sagging down like an overfull breast all around the stem. It stretched with met capacity, its volume surpassed by hundreds of gallons, and more meaty sauce still bubbling up from the submerged orifice of the blood hose. The surface groaned and it began to rise slightly like a balloon, or a gentleman when a lady enters the room. I stumbled to the opposite side of the now darkened hall, watching in horror the blossoming of this horrid flower. It rose, filled, and stretched like rubber, until — BOOM! It burst in a hideous splash and the liquid fell to the ground in storm-like sheets. The sky spasmed red, the moon and sun stopped as one black hole in the puddle of the sky, all the astral adornments began seeping, draining into the dark circle. Clouds swept along like bubble tufts in leaking bath water. The ground was covered in blood, the stem-vein collapsing like a spent hose still drooling blood like a helpless cock. Blood filled the scene and crept closer and closer to my marble slats. Finally it drained through, running down the gray walls in streams like fingers at every window. I looked around frantically for some escape but found none. The ashy stone shrine had four walls; the two the blood drained through had shelf-like benches below the windows, running the length of the wall; the other walls, the ends of the rectangular room, were staircases that led up to the ceiling, which was about twenty feet above me. Blood filled the benches like troughs and spilled over into growing puddles on the floor. It was all happening so fast. I look around. No escape. The blood rises around my feet. Outside the sky is being drained away, the scab swallowed to leave an omni-astral black wood-like scar. The blood hugs around my knees, the benches submerged. The earth is bleeding from a million mortal wounds, man is laughing in his skyscraping spartan rooms. Blood raises around my neck and lifts my feet off the ground. Its metal taste fills my mouth in gulps, staining my face like crushed berries. Surely this is Noah's flood. I'm to drown, arkless, evil, unforgiven. Lyn. The mother, sister, lover, daughter — dead and drained, her skin mined away in huge gashes. She doesn't know it's her bleeding sorrow I'm going to drown to death in. The windows are submerged. My face pressed against the cold ceiling. Blood lapping away my room to move. Finally no more air or breathing room. I float in a red space world, weightless in the choking liquid. I watched my last cache of bubbles rise from my clenching throat through my fish lips and float up and away like clear red rubies. My hair floats in close around me. I close my eyes from the gruesome scene. From the dark distance I see Lyn walking toward me, arms open. A glistening halo of light surrounds her like a spider's web. I lose myself in the dark flame of her eyes. Forever in an instant.

random insert:

“don't leave home... without it”

If the Master Card can make us a better person by *allowing* us to do more things, then it has truly earned its name. It truly is our “Master” card. If freedom is a privilege that we must *earn* by spending, and not the right they smugly claim, then I can no longer live in this economy based liberty sans-liberty-based-economy. It is

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money, greed, lust, desire for power over, urge to claim ownership of, and all their like that pollute nature with fences and blue uniformed, red blooded, white faced American Guard Dogs line the towers built by finance (for the “beautification of our garden”) to “protect our rights” by either keeping the unknown out or by keeping all of us inside. We are confined to suburbia without hope of parole. We are so well trained by our own guard dogs to sit and to beg that we now believe it is our “Master” card that sets us free. We’re happy in shackles of our own stupidity.

Snail

There are those who would have you believe that all things you write or do are extensions solely of yourself. Freud, er, Freud would have us believe that in our dreams the other people represent other repressed aspects of our personality. He also puts forth that one’s responses to ink blots or other free association stimuli reflect how we see the world. Why doesn’t he just come right out and say what he really knows? That there are no other people in the world. Everyone is merely an extension of everyone else. There is no “you” or “me” save in how the one relates to the other. In fact the only “you” there can ever be is in how you relate to me — how you are an extension of my own personality. In fact, no props or sets exist either that are not facets of my personality. The millions of masses and the worldly situations they create exist only to serve as backdrop for the characters I will invent for my own personal interaction. Any friends or relatives, any secondary characters my cast may have serve only to make them appear more realistic. Any props, costumes or sets they may know or own exist only to make them appear more realistic. Have you ever touched a snail on his foot — fleshy, extra-muscular apparatus? It roles up slowly, drawn into his shell for safety. My brain is coiling back into my cranial shell. No more exploring can I do. Now, like a fat mollusk, I rear back and place pillows under my soft ass, and, through force of will, make the world come to me. By completely internalizing myself, I can force the world to play by the rules I can enforce *only* in my mind. I can control the amount of interaction with the outside. I can govern everything internally. You all exist only in my mind and have been created solely for my psychological sustenance. It *has* been proven that no interaction with other “humans” has driven people mad. Coma patients are, by choice, secluded away from “the world.” Their mind exists inside a pocket of the vest called sanity. It can’t be found from the outside by the external methods. It can only be communicated [with] by minds sharing pockets. Once you’re in, you can only talk to those who are in, and those who are out look foolishly for you. You become a ghost. Your mind free of the physical role it is forced into by existence, it can create its own world. Having chosen to withdraw you can force the world to come to you. On the opposite hand, people forced to exist away from society and other “people” have a tendency to go “crazy” or to “lose their minds.” Their minds have a foot in both worlds — they exist in the external world, playing external roles to externals, but they have begun to slip into the internal, to create people with whom they can interact. Sometimes these mental characters are forced into the visual, external world. They are registered as ghosts or visions — hallucinations. It is the mind’s attempt to find balance between its external environment and its internal, self-made environment. It attempts to put the created characters in the foreign external environment. We laude those who exist solely in the external world and condemn in asylums those who are internalized. We poke and prod their safety attempting to bring them back to “our” realm. Their physical bodies begin to age — neglected by the mind. Sometimes we even condemn the mind to exist

in its auto-environment by killing the physical body. “Pulling the plug,” the self-righteous call it. Soon the mind follows the body. The two worlds can never be truly separated, however. To begin with how can the externals and the internals differentiate themselves, anyway? Afterall, how do we know that we do not already exist in a self-contained world created by our mind? We can never be truly sure. But that is not the only difference. How can an internal world exist without an external world? The internal world is a distorted reflection of the external world. Characters resemble “humans” from the outside world, and sets, costumes and props are all based on the external world. What would a baby dream of? The ultimate internal human — no exposure to the external. No influence — solely an internal picture of a *true* internal world. We are, in fact, all unborn infants, our lives are unborn dreams of a possible world. When we dream ourselves “dying” in “this life” we are, in truth, being born from our womb. We enter the “next” world where we are no longer the dream, nor the dreamer. We are both. You are my dream. You are mine.

The Real Me

Sam is either a cop or a woman. This revelation came to me yesterday. I picked up the phone and a husky voice said it belonged to Sam. “Hello, this is Sam,” the voice said. It went on to tell me all about myself. Details and secrets I took pains to hide and that only I could know. “Well, Sam,” I said when the voice finished, “I guess you do know alot about me, but I still don’t know anything at all about you...” but by then I realized I was talking to a dial tone. I don’t know how long I had been talking to it. Maybe the whole time. Maybe I never even got a call. Maybe I called another of those 900#s and spooked the girl out and she hung up. Whatever. If the call did come it could only have been made by the real Sam McCoy or by a cop who has read my diary. Let me tell you a little about myself. I’m a writer. I file reports in the form of a diary. I write down what I think and what I see and what I think I see. I live in a one room apartment on the thirtieth floor. The window which was to be the fourth wall of my apartment is broken or missing, either way it’s gone. I have one cat. His/her (it’s a hermaphrodite synth. spy sent by the P.D.) name is “Jesus” because he/she can walk on water. I never have to feed him/her. I don’t have any furniture. I write in a notebook prostrate on the floor. Outside I can see the city burning and lit up during dark nights. P.D. choppers race around the sky hovering and landing indiscriminately like dragonflies. Once I saw some gunfire or missiles take one down. It burst into flames and dropped straight down like a rock. Sometimes P.D. frogmen scale the skin of my building with suction cup feet and hands like spiders. I pee down on their heads and throw my cat Gabrielle down on them. Oh, did I say his/her name was — — I meant to say his/her name was “Gabrielle” because he/she can fly. I have a third eye on the world. To get it to see I have to wave rods in the air and plug it in. It tells me when / where there is danger. I think I must be the only person still living in the building. Or still left alive. No one ever comes by. I haven’t seen another human in two years. I’m living solely off my nonexistent body fat and what’s left of my hair. I drink rain water. I only ever wear a tattered brown sweater and black jeans. I’m only this during the day, though. At night I am a renowned porno film actor named “Buck Naked” of course (according to the first amendment to the new constitution which states simply, “All male porno stars must be named ‘Buck Naked,’ and if they aren’t they must undergo the official name exchange program/ritual. Female porno stars may be named any sexy name, although the name ‘Debbie’ is preferred for middle-aged girls of long blonde hair.”) And I dazzle women with the

size of my erection (my alter-ego, my character, rather, is named “Hugh G. Rection”) and bring men to incredible feats of jealousy by actually bringing my female costars to multiple orgasms (the first initiated by just seeing my giant penis, the second upon contact, the third upon entry, one for every thrust until I withdraw, one when I withdraw, and another one upon again seeing my giant penis). Although I am not actually a porno star, I play one on t.v. Oh, yes, you see, I’m actually a detective — my own personal secret agent. I wear a long tattered trench coat and a black tattered hat. I have one hand always on my gun, one hand always on my badge, one hand always holding a cigarette, one hand always holding a scotch (no ice), one hand always on some one-night dame, and the other hand *always* on my gun. I always keep my eye on the prize. I only have the one eye so I have the tendency to not see incoming punches and I really do have a glass jaw. The doctor gave it to me in a precedent setting four day laser surgery operation after my real jaw was hit so hard it came off and landed in Dolly Parton’s cleavage where it promptly disappeared. Once I was fucking that kitten bitch and she was smiling and screaming and bouncing and she had her eyes closed and her hair tussled. I orgasmed so hard she shot off my cock and bounced around the room like a cheap bottle rocket; she was even streaming sparks from her cunt. Needless to say it was a cut and print a true testament to my artistic genius. Our director Oliver Clothesoff signed me on for four more pictures on the spot. Oliver is a funny guy. Have you ever heard someone say, or rather, someone calling someone, “pencil dick?” Well Oliver actually is one. Or rather, he *has* one. He wrote the contracts up with his cock and I ejaculated my official symbol signet — a snake eating its own tail. We were all so happy we began drooling uncontrollably. Ah! Now the next movie I did was a gem. It was a spoof called “Field of Reams” and I was supposed to be at bat and knock a homer into a cornfield and a bunch of naked girls in baseball drag would run out, breasts bouncing like bowls full of jelly, and an orgy would ensue. Well, I showed up that day, you bet, but I had forgotten the only prop in the whole movie: the bat! So in a rare feat of creative ingenuity I proceeded to substitute my penis for the part and let me tell you, it was a natural. And after I had played my part to the hilt I can tell you there was not a dry eye in the house. The film went quad. plat. and we all got rich and fat. Not a word of it a lie. Not a *word* of *it* — a *lie*! Then there was the time I was pinned down past the last exit by anemone fire from all directions just like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (both of whom I portrayed by used of an interactive split screen so we could frolic, and that movie was called “Bitch Assidy and the Cum Pants Queer.” Quite memorable indeed. My first solo two-person sex scene, to my knowledge). I only had the one shocker, so I was sure dead, but damned if I didn’t use that gun to burrow through solid rock for thirty yards, tunnel up from behind the marksmen and take them wholly unawares. I’m afraid one of them *might* have been Clint Eastwood whom I had the very distinct pleasure of working with on a film called “Very Dirty Harry” which was shot in six days on location in the Hoboken petting zoo. I never saw an actor work so hard to get the mood of the scene *just right*. I really must say I respect his style. I believe it was on that film that we had no camera available and had to shoot the entire film frame at a time using a shutter box for which we had no flash powder! Truly a remarkable piece of film-making. I’ve worked with girls named Misty, Missy, Christi, Christie, Chrissy, Linda, Kitty, Cindy, Bethany, Annie, Kelly, Mary, Stephanie, etc. My point is I think there’s an unwritten claus somewhere in female porno “actors” contracts that says your name must end in an “e” sound. In real life, when I’m a detective, I have a red haired nymphomaniac secretary girlfriend. She is three inches taller than me making her a good seven feet tall. We have sex in airplane bathrooms on the way to exotic ports of call. Every time I shoot somebody I think of her. After I came back on

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an organic bus (oh, I forgot to mention that, in an organic airplane, in which we had sex, the bathroom is the prostate gland) I found she had been replaced by a four foot tall black woman who swore she was my girlfriend. I have been having sex with her in missionary position (which the real McCoy never would have allowed) so the P.D. she works for won't suspect anything. I think I know that they don't that I know and am on to them. P.D. wasps buzz my agency window as I fuck / suck the black spy, who is old enough to be my mother, on my desk. Just to let me know they're there. Once I fucked two twins on the flatbed trailer of a cross-country semi. They said their names were the Tweed sisters; they were tall, one was red haired, the other blonde. I spit out my six inch long cigarette on the truck bed and fucked both of them at once, impaling them like shish-cunt-bobs on my cock. They squealed.

Soap

Today is the 100th anniversary of the day soap was condemned. They started putting poison in the soap. Chemicals that turn your skin and hair white. Michael Jackson was the first real victim. Then they just started manufacturing soap with the chemicals in them. Hell, what did they care? By then more than half the populous was addicted; afterall, "cleanliness is next to godliness" by any means necessary. Children faked tourette's and went around flicking the you know who just to get their parents to wash their mouths out. The government started putting spiders into the soap bars to dissuade the users from purchasing the contaminant. This didn't work and the soap bars were quarantined and boycotted. After awhile the kick became so strong and the once goody goody soap-junkies so foaming at the mouth insane that the government showed them into some showers and gassed the whole lot of them, kicking and screaming. It was quite an emotional ordeal for the nation's psyche to undergo. Something so trusted and such a painful betrayal. It haunted the survivors for the rest of their years and lived on in legends and horror stories of packs of zesty lunatics roaming the avenues pillaging and raping and murdering and robbing. About twenty years after the ordeal they released a non-drug soap, but by then the public had become so jaded sales never picked up and the product was discontinued. Besides, by then they learned they could keep clean by regular transportation via the net. She wore a harvard shirt, ripped off beneath the breasts so their bottoms show. She was a shady blonde with brown eyes and a tawny body free from tan lines. Her short shorts were red, pinstriped white. We went back to her place, lit solely by lava lamps and smelling of incense. Foreplay ensued. I licked her nipples and she fondled my sac. Everything was going great... until she offered me some soap. She was rubbing down in it herself, all lathered up, and she said, "I love living on the edge. Don't you wish everybody did?" Well, baby, that was it. In a heartbeat I had my pants and shirt on and one foot out the door. I knew that even one touch of that soap would turn me into a froth-mouthed junky. Well, no way, sister. Not for me. Oh, no.

My Job

My attorney called me today. He was crying. He said he had wanted to bury the hatchet with his boss but he wound up getting the axe. Attorneys have no sense of humor. Like the overly paranoid P.D. they see everyone as either victims or suspects. They are more relaxed about it in a sense than cops. Whereas cops want to arrest

somebody, lawyers, like porn stars, just want to get somebody off. There's a paranoia gradient from bugs through rube lawyers to P.I.'s. Dicks are almost as paranoid of the police as the police are of them. It's like a dysfunctional marriage of the two arms of the law: the long reaching right one and the liberal left one. The left wing, liberal and free advocating, like the left arm, is wired to the right, creative hemisphere of the brain. Although, I could be wrong about the whole, left-wing liberal, right-wing conservative establishment. It's just a metaphor, like the life of Christ. The organic guns, called shockers, or zhokerz, function on a simple principle. There are certain mental blocks established by everyone inside their minds that act as dykes holding back wells of emotion, especially painful and potent memories, often of childhood; sometimes these blocks act as dams withholding whole other personalities, entirely self-contained and suppressed. The mind views these localized traumas as viral, but as no white cells can be summoned to kill, say, a memory, then the next best option must be enacted. "That which cannot be destroyed must be exiled; that which cannot be killed must suffer the un-life of abandonment." Now like any dam, a great deal of energy must be expelled to support them. This energy increases exponentially to counter the forcefulness of the trauma's geometric increase. The more severe or intense the trauma, the stronger the block must be that holds it back. The shocker can do one of two things in this situation. On a "numb" setting it shocks the brain with an overloading surge of energy. This increases all the blocks until nearly all memory and emotion are severed, usually leaving the subject catatonic or unconscious. The other setting, "fray," effects to neutralize the blocks' energy supply by injecting a counteragent flow — a pulse set at a supplementary frequency to the size of the target block that acts, just as a sustained lightning bolt against a dam, to wear down the charge until the block collapses. This allows emotions, memories or personalities to escape causing mental mayhem. This is the more dangerous setting, because, although ideally meant to leave the target incapacitated from mental strain, it could have a number of effects from unconsciousness, death by cerebral hemorrhage, or simply reducing the person to an emotional wreck, to causing temporary or even permanent schizophrenia, not to mention the variables implicated if suppressed personality were to be introduced. It is obvious why the numb setting is preferred. It is usually a cleaner cut. In my line of work there's no such thing as a clean cut. You see, I'm a doctor. A social doctor. It's my job to open up Lady Liberty and cut out the dead flesh her Great Blue T-cells can't get at. I've had to remove almost every last inch of her. Almost nothing left. No choice cuts these days. The girl stepped nude from the shower. I watched her lithe sparkling skin as she dried her face with a towel, standing on a white shag floor mat in a white fluorescent bathroom. Long tan legs, long tan abdomen, long tan arms and neck. Long dark red hair. She patted the folded towel down her neck and chest and rubbed her long arms with it. First one, then the other. Sleek and slender. Her eyes shut in sheer warm enjoyment. A facsimile of pleasure. Never an emotion in its platonic form — the raw form of feeling. Merely acting. Never meaning, merely definition. God, she was lovely. She mopped dry her stomach and down her thighs, then, half turning her torso, her back and buttocks. Down her legs and between her waving toes. Her flesh was perfect, beautiful even. Obviously a slave model. But there were some obvious giveaways. Such beautiful hair and lovely features. Appliances in proportion. Motions well defined. But she had no belly button. And, I mean, there is such a thing as *too* perfect, you know. I put my hand on the cold steel horse I suffered. A shocker wouldn't work here; I had to use my old sorrowful magnum. It put forth an actual load, a real bullet. A real shame. I cocked the hammer and leveled the cannon at her head. "Giggles," I said. Her eyes flipped open like shutters. Her mouth fell open, lips

parting gently; the towel dropped from her long fingered hand to the tile floor. She started to turn so slightly in one second. It was the next second I wasted her. My finger clenched and there was a firecracker and a jolt in my hand. A tiny cloud of flint and gunpowder discharge. A flash of light. She falls to the ground in a flurry, her hand slapping meatily against the bathtub. After that time lapsed back to normal. The beautiful girl lay in a growing puddle of her own blood. I sighed and replaced my gun in its saddle. I trudged the two footsteps over to her and sat down on the shag coated can. I looked down at her beautiful face, now blood stained in streams. "Sorry..." I mumbled. Shoot first and apologize later. I buried my face in my hands for a moment and rested my sore eyes. This was a sorry job. Someone had caught wind there was a reppy in town and I got it through the wire. I had to find her and waste her and God help me I don't know which is harder. I get so tired of killing them. They might as well be people. Do they have souls? Do they have the same soul as their mother cell? "They're just organisms," I tell myself, "not human. Just human tissue." Are they capable of emotions? The shocker wouldn't work on a clone because the blocks effected only exist in the mind of the real McCoy. The original M.C. It's like copying a book and you have the book itself and a small pamphlet of out-takes that the author decided not to put in the book. Well, you copy the book, but the concepts in the pamphlet are never suggested in the new copy. You never read the out-takes anyway; can just knowing they're there make such a difference? Perhaps that's the living between the living and the un-living. The surplus of emotion. The unconscious that the conscience rules over. But when these clones are arti-aged they never learn emotion, the unconscious, or conscience. They never even learn motion, conscious or even consciousness. They have to be taught how to move and how to think and feel by use of memory implants. All they truly are are animated corpses of the un-living. Corpses, real corpses, had lived and died. These un-living husks have never done either. They are prefab embryos — aged to adulthood and force-fed a life, in the form of a lifetime's worth of lies. I feel so sorry for these damn sorrowful plant people, these damn reppies, I don't know whether to hug them or kill them. I guess I'll keep killing them because it pays the bills. I'll just have to keep calling it putting them out of their misery. I open my eyes and she's gone. A fair sized blood puddle and drops out the door. My mouth drops dumbfounded. I had her dead bang. How could this much blood...? The bathtub. There's a fair dent in the side from where she hit her head going down. There's a drop of blood and a couple of hairs in it. I look around in the wall for a bullet hole and don't see one. Maybe she caught that bullet anyway. "DAMN!" I kick the toilet. I look at my face in the mirror. Almost beaten. "Goddamn," I say, exacerbad. I go out the door into the dark hall beyond and follow the blood spots.

the Dr.

"The international security council has reviewed the situation and determined the best course of action would be to send a multinational task force to Hell and reason with the Devil concerning His oppression of the people and occasional public atrocities which occur during attempts at suppressing public outbreaks that often become full fledged riots which sweep the whole realm. Hell is on the brink of a severe coup dé ta. The ambassadorial team were attempting to illustrate the only escape from an almost inevitable mutiny is the joining of Hell into the international council of nations in today's four day press-open conference. Unfortunately Hell's dictator, King Satan, did not see the light of reason and became quite violent over

what he later admitted to Barbara Walters he saw as, 'a finger-pointing campaign attempting to implicate either that I am not in control of my state, which I am, or that I am in fact in some way connected with the backers of this minor uprising.' He was not this eloquent in the conference, however, flaying the flesh of two delegates, with columns of fire shot like whips from his eyes, for saying that he should, 'take charge.' 'I am in charge,' bellowed the master of all unholy, 'and I resent the implication that I am not!' Later in the conference he turned the skin of the French delegate inside out for saying, 'se le vive vere, se ni fé le Mariéa et a' tulevé se 'le fayette,' which means, 'I love your country, as do my wife Mary and my infant son, 'the wee shit,' but which Satan, having only a grammar school French education, took to mean, 'you love gentleman, as will my dog Mary call you 'the little shit.' The eternal ruler of darkness also submerged one delegate, the Irish one, in a vat of maggots; boiled another, a Serbian, in his own juices and then just fed him to some house slaves; turned another into a cat, had her declawed and bathed before setting her loose in a back alley in Rome; and then changed the Mexican delegate into a slug and covered him in salt and battery acid. "Hey," said the King of all Evil, "that's a salt and battery." Well we certainly have seen a new side to the Antichrist in today's action. A brutal side. An unfunny side. Not even His chiefs of staff, Jesus of Nazareth (known as Lucifuge Roffacale) and Richard 'Tricky Dick' Nixon (known as Paimon), could stop the Monarch of Pain and Brimstone from cracking off a million one liners throughout the conference along the same lines of the 'assault and battery' pun, as well as several offensive and 'dirty' anecdotes and stories not worth reprinting here. The question we must ask ourselves now, as citizens and voters of the international zone, is: do we really want Dictator Satan to join the international conference of nations? Could you see His Hellish Demonic statues next to our angelic Lady Liberty? Could you see his evil V-8 Mustang parked beside your beamer? Would you want to? How would He fit in at high society mixers? The Devil had this to say in a follow up press conference: 'I want to be everyone's next door neighbor. And this is a goal I think I can reach in my lifetime, since I'm immortal. So if you don't like it, maybe your children will. What the Hell?' On the rather touchy topic of whether He would be joining the inter. con. nat. the Prince of Flame said, 'I'm not making any commitments now, but I'm getting my dancing shoes out just in case. And I've got hooves, so that's really saying something.' He is referring to the inter. con's initiation dancing contest, which, as some of you fatter, older tarts may remember, Germany is still contesting their particular disqualification in 1945. 'Israel pushed us,' whines the easily beaten aryan nation. As yet, no reply has ever been sent regarding the complaint. Keep in mind that it was the Israeli ambassador the Big Red Guy turned into a declawed cat and released in Rome, still a Catholic haven. Perhaps we'll see more of that Mideast fighting spirit in this case. More on this story as it develops. And in other news a backwoods county resident has drowned in his wife's insatiable cunt. Neighbors say they notified local authorities after hearing a muffled and echoing gurgle. The victim's wife had no comment, but did hit on reporters, police and paramedics on the scene. His arms and legs were so lodged they had to be broken to be —" My third eye babbles uselessly at me. I watch a bug die in the flickering half light on the concrete floor. It sputters around in circles on its back, its legs waving madly. The whole ordeal lasts for an hour. I listen to the words but not the meanings of two episodes of "Charlie's Angels." The bug eventually stops spinning and only waves its legs every now and then. After I am sure that it is gone I reach over and pick it up gently with two fingers and examine it closely. I sniff it and taste it delicately. It is musty. It flaps its wings feebly. I replace it neatly on its spot on the floor where it lies still through a nature show, a Seinfeld rerun, and Real

Sex Infinity. Anything you want, infinity, I can do. Whatever you try, I do well. Would-be poet's curse. For every fish in the sea, there's a shark like me. It's too much for you; you can't just watch; but it's nothing you can do. The jester is quadriplegic. I was peddling powdered goods in a colony of quadriplegics when suddenly they all stood up and flashed badges and ran me in. You don't have a badge, do you, Jester? Oh, no. Don't bother looking. I'm sure you don't. A shining certificate of authority as good as the ancient cauduces or a crown. "Hi. I have an affirmed God complex. I'm here to rectify you." Rectifiles roam the city streets in herds, deluded victims of the anal search. One brushes against my tattered sleeve. "Get the Hell away from me, you sticky leper, you!" I holler, warning him by drawing back my hand as if to cuff him. He flinches and then smiles a broken piano key smile at me. "Please, I just need some *real* discipline..." I squint at him, "What are you, some kind of closet drag queen soap addict? Go pester somebody in a uniform or something." I cuff him silly and he stumbles off shakily. They're all suppressed homosexuals from repeated P.D. anal probes. They all think they're undercover agents working some mysterious and dangerous case for their favorite heavy-handed "Dr." down at the station. Speaking of doctors here's my friend the doctor now. She takes long, elegant strides away from Cinnamon's Bar. She'd been in there for an hour, hopefully spilling her entrails to the barkeep, Cinnamon. Either way I can go back later and work Cinnamon over and see she can give me. I'll pump the information out of her one way or some other. I trail my doctor for a block or so to her armored Porsche. She doesn't exactly *blend*. A red sequin thigh-length skirt, red high heels? What's taken me a lifetime of near poverty to accomplish the j.a.p. can't take five minutes to put on just to blend in. I've spent my whole life learning just how to blend. Especially here. These ghettos are my home. I once promised as a youth that no matter how rich I ever became I would never deny the ghetto as my home. So far I haven't gotten the chance to test this promise as I've never been rich or popular enough.... She gets into her hover car and zooms off. I drop a "contact" in my eye and see the inside of her car. I control the transmitter view with a thumbnail joystick. I pan down to the passenger seat and zoom in on her half opened purse. I pan back and look at her relatively beautiful face as she sternly drives. I'd rather do this before she's too far away. I hit a red button on the control stick and I see a cloud of green gas envelope her head. She turns the wheel madly and waves at the mustard cloud. The car crashes into a street lamp. I run down to where she is and pull her out and lay her on the sidewalk. I reach across to her purse holding my nose and squinting. I loop the purse chord around my neck and carry the dr. into a back alley where my car is waiting. Time rolls linearly off the tongue of waiting. We plunge like a knife into the night. To the edge of dawn breaking over the horizon like a shattering cloud of fluorescent light. Night in the cancerous warehouse H.Q. The good dr. is hanging by her ankles, hands tied behind her back, glossy black hair hanging. Duct tape over her mouth and a dripping pipe raining water down to soak her. Her skirt hangs folded like a lapel, her regions almost exposed. When I am confident she is wholly wet I slap her awake. Her eyes flicker open. Muffled screams and spiraling tossing thrashing. She's hog tied tight. "You're not going to break free." I assure her from my perch on a stool almost five yards away, bathed in shadows. My voice a drowned fish — thick as tar, as constant as a back ache. "You're not going to break free... but I will set you free if you answer my questions." She squints trying to see me. I have 1,000 watt spotlights pointed at her in a circle on the floor. The squawk of the stool moving as I step down and then steps as I walk over to her. She writhes again. I reach into her ring of light with my tattered arm and pull the tape off her mouth. "You son of a bitch!" she hollers. "Who are you, some kind of closet rapist? Show yourself you cowardly,

worthless FUCK! I'm a doctor and I have —" "I know *exactly* who and what you are." "What are you, some kind of stalker? How long have you been following me? Where are we?" "You are Dr. Linda Banes Johnson, aged 32 years since birth, practitioner of medical sciences and studier of black magic, witch doctors, and other mystic arts. Single, never married, although you came very close during an extended college tour at New Harvard University. Perhaps you recall the lad's name?" "You fucking sick-o! How do you know so much about me? I'll —" "Do you recall the young man's *name*?" "Fuck you, you cunt!" "I wonder what would prompt an up and coming doctor like yourself to hold so secretively the name of a college flame? I'll just let you have an example of what I'm capable of if I don't get the answers I know you have." Depressing a large green button on a dangling hand-sized box I open the current into the wires that tie her feet and shock her with fifty volts for three seconds. "Now, then, Dr. cunt-face, if that is your real name! What was the name of the young man you had an affair with in college?" "Cheshire Calliope," she hisses. "Have you seen Mr. Calliope since your steamy relationship on campus?" No. "Whelp." I shock her with seventy five volts for three seconds; her hair stands on end. "Yes, alright, you bastard? I have seen him recently." "When?" I urge. "Last Monday. At Cinnamon's" "Don't stop now. Tell me about it." She is undoubtedly unaware of the small probe I have placed in her vagina. She had undergone a cliteradectomy, from the age of the scar tissue probably ten to fifteen years ago. Probably right after her affair in college. The probe, having to use alternate routes apart from the clitoris, massages sensitive areas and erogenous zones inside her hole. In effect, stimulating an almost unconscious "good feeling." I give her this good feeling to encourage her cooperation. I much prefer this method to the shock treatment. It is necessary, however, to establish a potentially hostile atmosphere to encourage quicker and simpler responses. This is the method they teach you. My mother always said, though, you can win more bees with honey. That was, before they killed her. Either way, there's no better way to win bees with honey than by probing the honey pot. And the dr. seems to be effected by it in just the right way. "I was having a drink at Cinnamon's. He just came right up and sat down on the stool next to me and said 'give me what she's having,' in that husky voice. Well you can imagine how happy I was to see him, I hadn't seen him in years and he hadn't commed me or anything. We talked and drank and talked and then he took my I.D. number and said he'd com me and he left." The probe was doing its job. "And did he com you? Did anything odd happen during the encounter? Anything like a bug bite or a paper cut or anything?" "I don't — wait. There was something. I reached for a glass and he reached for the same one and when we touched — I thought it was sparks. You know? The same old sparks. I guess I hadn't really thought of it 'till now. Hey — who *are* you? How do you know so much about me?" "Alright, Dr. enough of this cloak and dagger shit. I had to set all this up to make sure you weren't covering up for Dr. Calypso, which is the name of the man who met you in the bar." I lowered her to the floor and untied the cables holding her. The consciousness driving me is the consciousness of All men. I move forward unaware of what's to happen to me next and not proud enough to think I'm controlling it. I stand her up and she sees me for the first time and holds in a gasp. "I'm not that ugly, am I?" I ask, the probe still active. "No, no," she says, "You just remind me of Cheshire is all. Why do you want to know so much about him? Are you a cop? Has he done something?" "I'm not a cop, but he has done a few things. Apparently the Calliope you knew in college isn't the same man he was." "And what do you mean I met a Dr. Calypso in the bar? I met Cheshire in the bar." "Your friend Cheshire has been doing some cloning experimentation. That was a clone of his that met you, one with a certifiable M.D.; you see not all his clones have been given his

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exact memories, most have been implanted with memories of experts in fields Calliope wishes to get his hooks in. So you see, you met a clone of Calliope, and just yesterday I killed a clone of you.” She gasps. “This clone had red hair, but dark like yours, of which she was kind enough to leave me a few strands as well as a substantial amount of blood.” “What do you mean she ‘left you...’ I thought you said you killed her.” “I’m pretty certain she’s dead. I shot her and she left bleeding, probably to report back to Cheshire. I had the blood and hair analyzed and they turned up your name in a computer search. I tracked you to Cinnamon’s not sure you hadn’t been replaced by a clone. That’s why I had to go to these extreme measures. I apologize. I’m a private investigator.” “A dick? Who hired you?” “I’m sorry, that’s a matter of confidence.” I lit up a six inch long cigarette and blew rings. “You know,” I said, “I’d be willing to make you my partner if you’d be willing to help me.” She reached around like she was going to pull her panties out of her crack and pulled out a derringer. I started to reach for my piece. “Don’t even think about it,” she barked. “Hands to the sky.” She walked over and jammed the gun under my jaw, fishing around in my coat for my gun. She lifted the magnum and backed away. “So, you’re on to Cheshire, eh?” I was still palming the probe control with my hands raised. I flipped it off. “Hey Dick! I liked that! Turn it back on!” “Oh you like that, huh? Here —” I gunned it up to full power and punched it. She doubled in a horrendous orgasm that made her scream and drop her gun. I pulled out the shocker from its station under my tattered belt. I leveled it at her, keeping my finger on the ready over the probe button. “So, Dick? Who says all men aren’t the same? Guess you were just toying with me, huh? At least some *brilliant scientist* invented a remote control for men so they can finally fuck and watch the big game at the same time.” She took a step for me and I blasted her with the shocker. She laughed it off and came over to me. She removed the burden of the gun and the control which she activated and pocketed. She hissed in my face, “Like I didn’t have time to patch myself up and dye my hair. Who says women are dumb? I’ve known every step you take before you do.” She leveled the shocker at me. “Shit,” I said. She smiled. ZAP!!

Moon Shot

Cop cars scuttle through American streets like cockroaches. A friend of mine is in the ear business, mainly buying and selling. After those two American kosmoknots burned to death in a space shuttle too weak to even launch. Funny how the, “let’s light this candle,” anachronism holds true. That baby went up like a Roman candle. After that — that’s when all the astronotes lost their sense of humor. Wally Sherard got so angry during one mission because the Command was Dictating Instructions he urinated yellow globules in zero-G at the mission camera. Allen Shepherd got so awful to be around. He painted his face black with little stars and had his right eye replaced with a fake eye that looked like the moon. “You want to get to the moon?!” he’d holler indiscriminately at lost astronauts asking directions. “Well here it is!” he’d say, winking it at them and squinting as hard as he could until it would pop out into their martinis. Then he would gallop around spanking his bare bottom until it turned purple and hollering, “giddeup!” and “andelé!” Well they finally got to the moon and Apollo I was orbiting the moon and it was Christmas. “What are your impressions of the moon, Buzz?” “I’m sorry, I don’t do impressions.” Thinking back, the moon meant different things to all of us. To me it just looked like a big cheese wheel. “Well, boys,” said the press camera, “do you have any Christmas wishes for us back here on the homeworld?” “Yeah,” said Al, looping his thumbs in

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his pants, “merry Christmas from the *moon!!*” He whipped his pants down and shot the moon at a million adoring American onlookers. His job done, he floated off to the head to masturbate, having gotten erect off the enormity of his unstoppable rebellion. I turned to the whirring camera eye and said, “merry Christmas to all of you on the good Earth... all of us here on the bad Earth resent you. We envy you and are jealous of your holy days. We wretched of the cursed Earth work 365 days a year — hard work, too. Damn hard work.” I really believed it too, at the time. We had all dropped acid before the camera started broadcasting. We were all thinking crazy things. Nowadays everybody launches space shuttles and nothing means anything to us. Nothing eats into us, leaching its way in with one foot in the door of every one of our cells. It’s all too much. Too much nothingness. Too much emptiness. All America bonded together for the space program. Was it really just a distraction so the good little boys and good little girls wouldn’t notice their big hippy brothers and sisters getting murdered in droves at Kent’s State of uni-verse? The family that prays together, stays together. Well, our cockroach American families. The family that bleeds together runs into one. The nucleus family. All one glib glob of Christian patriotic horse shit belief.

The Dream

Nothing is given, everything is assumed. Nothing is assumed to be given, but it’s still a given assumption. I saw Sam in a dream today. I was walking down a hallway in an office building. At the end of the hallway was a mirror. I saw myself approaching this mirror in the reflection, and saw a bag by the foot of the other me. When I looked by my foot to see if the bag was there, it is not. When I look back up the mirror and my reflection are gone, but the bag is still there. I reach over to it, pick it up — it is leather — and look through it. Inside I see...

To touch to be reached and to see believably. I have a child’s eye pawned from a gun pawn shop dealer in Las Cruces and I look at it for long hours. My wife of 10 years left me for the local barber. They hopped a worm bound for the windy city where everybody got gas. Why ya think they call it the windy city? I sit in the very exact middle center of our living room and drop a match into the puddle of lighter fluid and gas mix that stains our carpet. Too long a time is too long in anything. To touch. The swans at sea and the devil is a novelty. Who said we think we’re invincible? I don’t care to die living but I do care to live dying. God thank you for my mistake cat. Love thank you for my mystic cat. I thank you, I know I just can’t break you. “Dear Pent Haus, I mentioned to my wife of 10 years over breakfast one morning that I liked to have sex over breakfast in the morning and that maybe we should have sex over breakfast that very morning and she broke out laughing, buck teeth like Francis the talking mule and I stormed down the hall to the gun closet, her still laughing behind me, and I came back with a .12 gauge and blew a fuckin’ hole outta her so big I could put my whole fuckin’ head in it, if’n I’d wanted to. Oh, and also I love your magazine and so do my cellmates. Love, Gerard the conqueror of east Asia and A.K.A. Napoleon Bone-up-hard.” Other similar, never before been printed some never even read or opened others lost for some years and never seen the light of day, such as Gerard’s can now be purchased in one very hard backed copy of pent up horse forum. It’s good readin’ for when you’re makin’ with the shit and it’s takin’ longer than you thought and if you’d known it was going to take this long you would’ve thought to grab something to read. We’ve all had days like this. Just keep a

copy of penthows forum next to your paper and don't confuse them. Oh, but let's all shed a tear for poor Michelle Triola. It was only rumored that she had sex with three other men *while* living with actor Lee Marvin. And now like some screaming rapacious swamp sow she's come to claim actor Lee Marvin's last few cents. Well I guess what you and Michelle are trying to say is when you're on your back's the meter is running. Well, please, gals, tell us the rates at the top so we know what two bit tarts and bargain basement sluts to shack up with. In by pebbles at the forefront of the landslide. In by a nose. "I'm in!" In by a second, every cell invaded like rape. The eyes propped open or otherwise coerced by instruments. Voices in our ear. Whispering females in our sleep. They speak the unspeakable. They know the unknowable. For us to speak this, for us to know this, we become the unknowable. The viral knowledge creeps in like sounds. A car pulling up. Doors slam. Steps tip-tap not Daddy's pattern (tippity-tappity-jump-and click! Daddy is always Fred Astaire or Ginger Thomas in drag) tip-tap not Mommy's pattern tip-tap not Rover tip-tap like a raven's beak on chamber glass tiptaptiptaptiptap...clink clink milk bottles tip tap back to the car door shut and vroom down the street return to birdie noises summer Sunday. The knowledge is the virus. Drugs treat the symptoms but can't cure the problem. Must forget. Forgetting is for getting. "There's only one heaven. There's only one heaven. We have to see it. We have to seize it. We have to deceive it." Wake up in a spiritual crisis. To touch is to know is to do is to beautify bestial eyes wake up in poses. From violence eyes are callused. From sorrow they scar over. Welcome to the ghetto. The ghetto is poverty's frontier. Beyond: nothing. Overdose/overdose/overdose/overdose/overdose/overdose/overdose/overdose/overdose. My mind is not in my control. Power is not mine. Mind refuses to submit. Critics will say. "it's all about coming into manhood." Here's a story. Chet was a good boy. Always ate his lima beans. He masturbated in the front coat closet when visitors or relatives visit so they don't have to be made to view his disgusting scarred and unbathed cock. He came into his waiting cupped palm. He came into manhood. Our next dictator will be a rapper — "Let me hear you say it?" "Hail G. Fish!" "Let me hear you say it?" "Hail Seig Heil!" "No Limits Allowed!" "Hail! Hail Caesar G!" Our future. A predetermined cable fiber-optic as an implant. See her, seize her, seizure, Caesar! A fur coat. I dangle my feet off my balcony lip. I will seize her, by Caesar! Dangle, dangle like fishin' days with Uncle Dad and we'd dangle our legs in the water. The worms burrow through the earth blind and senseless, creating an elaborate catacomb of cancerous tunnels that lead everywhere and nowhere, one on the way to the other. The catacombs erode like drugs. Slip in and out of music and sanity and drugs and black outs and blue outs countless day afters and so few drops left. Each day is a drop. Society is your big brother holding you down and giving you Chinese water torture. Again, you're Not LISTENING! I can only write this if I know you are listening in. Hey! Where are you? Have you just completely fucking left me? All the ancients that comprise sanity have left me. I'm just getting too involved in my work. Writing is just work, like fucking. The journalist is a prostitute. Journalistic faked orgasm dry as a texas bone. Love the wet closeness damp cavernous spirit moves through me. Here is where I dwell. Wear is hear I dwell is how I kill a chore of labor like a forced birth, a D-cup section. A private primate's privy to the president's plans but not a respected horse-working foot pounding journalist like Debbie hear, hum, is, that how it works? The prostitutes used to get the bedtime story and spill it like a tabloid. "Mary had a little lamb..." but she should have kept looking for a man. "Three little pigs..." all in one bed I bet, with one blanket. Who gets to wear the Hermetic hypothetic hypodermic hypnogogic hippocampus pants? Deer-a-puss mat-a-dor. Everything I see I write. Just that. No more. There is no more. Death is the shut down bail out of the carcass, then it's tossed

Cheshire Trilogy

by: Jonathan Barlow Gee

inna the ground and maggots eat all of it. Stacked grave stones attest countless deaths. Graveyard overpopulation. Graves are body prisons. Necropheliac wardens throw dirt down over Yorrick's bones. Each grave is a cell — the nucleus dead, and family of DNA inside the cell dead. The main brain, the M.C., seek and destroy insanity maggots our destiny age is a mutiny our lives its scrutiny. And a hootenanny and a hollerballoo. On the deck of Costa Rica I been swore I found my girl. First time I ever fucked a member of the opposite sex. The finer race, they call's 'em in Las Cruces. The low riders scuttle by like drunk purple beetles on acid. Dick blanket.

Black Sails

The great bellowing gale outside and winds whip by like dragon fire. My building is in the old section of the zone. It was originally scheduled to be for demolition... quite some time ago. Paperwork or the union labor strike has held them back for a long time. My face is horribly scarred from exploring my building — broken rafters, exposed bolts and darkened deserted always pose great perils and hide great troves of nothingness. Once you've set foot in the hallway sound is dead. Not nonexistent. Dead. Heavy. Thick. And you always feel like there's someone right behind you. This used to be a glamorous place. The carpet is garnet with an intricate Japanese design running down the center of every hall. The walls, originally in a jade wallpaper skin, have decomposed into gray concrete bone chutes. Every hallway is a hollow bone of the building's decomposing skeleton. Gangrene wracks the structure at the roots. The Monarch groans under heavy winds like now. The carpet has been peeled back by vandals in some places; in one of these a hidden staircase is revealed. Broken lamps line the walls. The doors, when not missing, are of the finest birch. All is empty; every place silence is nailed and hung like a crying Christ. It's been years since I've seen anyone. Two days (or two weeks?) ago I saw a dead body. I think it was a woman. There wasn't much left. Dust coats her bones as brittle as a bubble. Two lips, mangled with decrepitude, hung limply from shattered teeth. Eye sockets agape like caves, a deflated eyeball dangling from one on a red chord. She was once a girl, held in her mother's arms, running and playing in schoolyards with pig tails, her first kiss, her first boyfriend, smiling as he touched her breast. She was once a woman, wild and free, she married and had a family, her husband holding her hand as she labored with child; she would have grown old with them. She lays rotting. Time turns her bones to dust. I reach down and peel back the carpet from beneath my feet. Dust clouds out from the thick rug. It flops down. The gray concrete stairs. Spiral down into a well of shadow. Cobwebs and carpet of dust decorate the descent. I start down. I stop when my eye is level with the floor. Then I descend more. Downward into inky darkness, each step could be a hole. Each dark area the threat of the unknown. I am a stamp. An unknown yet knowing number. The invisible. Darkness envelopes me like the warmth of the womb. I am the unknown. The unborn ancient. Lao Tzu inside a skin costume, leathery and old like tanned baby hide. I am inside of in. I lose my interest in the events of the week on a weekly basis and am forced to find entertainment through painful rehash of the past or glum contemplation of the improbable future. This darkness is me. The same behind the back of the dead woman in the hall. The same behind the border guard. The same behind my actress mother. The same chasing every infant down the chute in the fleshy form of the afterbirth. The same chasing every old man toward the light in the earthy form of the grave. From a corner I watch an ancient Jewish family dance merrily around a brass menorah in a clay cubicle, silk veils hung over the windows.

Chants and drums and chimes. Outside, a bellowing gale. From the rafters I see a lone man, puerto rican, short cut, dark, curly hair. He wears dockers rolled up from bare feet, an undershirt over a thin fuzz of black back hairs. He is alone in a long, dark, furnitureless warehouse lit by high, thin blue windows and dangling yellow lamps that create circles on the dark floor. He sits on a banana box in one of these circles, hunched over severely focused on the lid of another crate in front of him. A mirror glares and a razor falls to the floor with a tinkle. He swings around a straw and sniffs lines of powder from the mirror. He sniffs deeply, eyes wide, looking at himself in the mirror. A cracking face drying like a once ample river bed. He sees behind his reflection, above — in the rafters; he looks up silently. The light blinds him but he looks into my eyes. His eyes wide and wet, his face trembling with a real core of solace. A flicker — a wave — a blink. I am in the ink ocean, submerged and subverted. Currents coerce. Foreign lands of dark blue sky behind huge black silhouettes of islands behind the rolling silk black sea. The gale tugs gently at my consciousness. I am pulled along nearly unaware. An entity of loose corporeality. I awake to the torrential rains battering my cubicle. Shadows surround in jerked hurried skeletal angles. Shafts of gray shoot through like ribs in rice paper. The distant city, huge and beetle-like. A carnival on his great, calm back, wings tucked patiently beneath his plastic shell. I have sunk my head into the beetle's mouth, his great beetle mandibles enclosing me in rapture. I quickly pull it out for fear of danger. So this is the true city. A calm, almost sleepy beetle upon which we scuttle like lost children. I've truly found this place. The labyrinth is always hot. It makes its own heat. A fog of perfumed pollution clouds over the city like groggy warm sleep. It masks the stars with a gray sick convergence. To be reached. I look with a child's eye over flashing incandescent black ivory vomit. I dangle my legs off the lip of my window. I will seize her. Outside the storm had stopped very suddenly as if interrupted. The world drips with a million sparkling after thoughts of rain. I am what I would be. In settlement they've built and rebuilt the unknown ancients. Statues of brass, white and black ivory of a million elephants' tusks, jade and copper commemorate them. Sit-i-zens hold office at their feet with rituals and sacrifice awaiting the white haired bearded wild eyed prophet's inevitable return. They make blood sacrifices and a million wiry aliens shed their human-like garb and rush to collect gallons of the sticky red spill in biomechanical buckets of wire and bone to return to the department of motherships local office to conduct tests. The aliens have long known that it was the blood that contained the uniqueness of the human spilling it and that that uniqueness can be regenerated over a period of time by filling a bloodless husk with the sacrificial offering's blood. The end result is a clone to the mind, aptitudes and attitudes of the original bearer in a completely new body. In fact, many of the aliens are crossbred with these subhuman animations. I wander, formless, through the crowded city square. A million hollow-eyed ghosts wander next to me. Fur covered deer horned shamen dance with prayer sticks in a circle of trance fed spirit surrogates in a flickering flame light. A million women look up from wartime sewing in countless factories at countless machines and chant with the shamen. Voices raised to crowning heavens. To be seen. Are we alone? Are our parents out there, in the darkness around a corner? Where are we? The undead roam the land answerless and long since given up asking. The young demand, the men and women ask, and the old beg. We are greedy givers, giving our precious resources to others and watching them greedily with narrow greedy eyes. Greedy of their present, our gift. We never part with what we hope to part with. A ghost image of it lives on like a ghost arm of the amputee. The ghostly flicker of a million stars that burned out long ago. Our ghostly reflection. All our fearful strangers are the ghosts of our many fears.

Ghostly flickers of a million lives who burned out long ago, exhausted from aloneness. Each a ghostly reflection of us. We are all what each is — the exhausted and alone. The each of all is the each to all. Doubt licks us leach-like and we succumb in a million stiffened corpse flesh cocoons in deceitful webs, self-spun every one. We fear only what we do not see and we see not the closing hands of Control — our friendly dream eyes to be snuffed and stifled in our safety. The hand that is closed is the hand that kills. The open hand is the hand that will deceive. Two open hands held together are as good as a closed fist. The deal kills the future with its enactors. Revenge is the palpable seed of the sworn oath. The truth is told to be told and is rewritten by a million trembling hands in candle light creation crucibles. To see believingly. I am slipping away. The wave has pulled me beyond my reaching grasp and now the solace of the shore seems so distant to the wandering eye. I am hung on a wall, lips too heavy to lift, eyes radiant glows of darkness. Beckoning with despair. Heaven is where screams go and I lift my voice, I left my voice. The white clouds blow casually across the blue everything of the sky and the sun is a sweet kiss raining down warmth and safety on Safety Beach. The waves roll in like music over the stroked sand. I am pulled beyond to the black sails on the horizon. Which is more the truth? I am am I? To follow this truth of truths in a beautiful disgust I must become the horrid angel. The dark scarred and ruined ghost, a black mist in the form of the vagrant spirit. The tragic hero — the pitied and adored sorrowful monster whom everyone adores. This is the monster we all are beneath our coats of fur and dust and carpets. Beneath our craving flesh are bones. However hidden, our eyes always are black sails. Always will be. To be what is the truth of the instant or the eternity. Instant eternity. Eternal instant. I blink and blame the movements of time. Forgive me for denying my thoughts. I know this obsidian river is to all the all. Everything is the current of its flow. To be here forever in this moment I would forever away to the self. I want to be someone else. The truth is I can't take it. The threat is more to my worried mind than the beauty. I can't trust the beauty if the crack in it shows the dark evil behind it. I'm taught to fear. This is the truth of the route. We are all born old and all our deaths are the return to the hole. This is the tunnel of love. Riding carnal on obsidian waves into the dark open eye of the unknown. They say I can see in ways that others don't. I can never see the obvious for the possible. Never the waves for the black sails they bring. Emotions aren't based on actions. Actions are based on emotions. This is instinct. Culture is an orgiastic beast of seething repressed secret longings. To be held by mother or to be hidden in your lover. Love and lust are Cain and Able. All cities are hallucinated. Everyone is walking on the bare sandstone of the salt sea's shore and the sun hung like a warning in the hot and barren sky. We are all brothers and sisters and therefore with each generation our children are further and further confused and led astray. There is no longer any beaten path as each lost lamb blazes its own trail. Behind the vision is the invisible, the current that makes the river, the air that the arrow of our lines are through. We are all eyes watching eyes in the dark, touching what we can't see in mute confusion. What touches us? What shapes us? I look in all shadows for the answer, being myself a sender, these words my message — never a means to anything more than more questioning, and defined by the negative. "Others' happiness" opens across the street. Cars swish between us. I sweat under a navy winter coat across the summershowerwet street. I shiver and sweat with leprosy chills. The slow degradation of my vessel and I'm leaking out like an oil tanker adrift. Whose hand holds my grail? Who gets what I am reluctantly, greedily relinquishing? I go into see the movie. I sit behind a woman who plays the lead role. She bristles with the electric chill of my closeness. My very presence is a tremor. I am the shadow that creeps

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behind her. I am the dangerous unknown. I am her black sails. During an extended 20 min. sex scene she turns to see who I am. At sight she screams shrilly, not disturbing the audience however, as it doubled with its counterpart on the sex covered screen. Unrolled tapestry and a moving painting. All colors bleeding into one. Blackness. She knows my name in a breeze of humming voices inside her skull, low like a buzzing and seeming to come from everywhere around her neck. To touch. I envelope my consciousness in hers and she nearly faints from the stifling closeness. Nothing simple like her sex scene. She opens her eyes numbly aware — to find me gone. Too many bad memories. I'll see her again... soon. I saw her in her mind. Still sexy in some form of the word. Roaming contentedly, nude, occasionally lounging and rolling, in a world of soft fur with solid diamond and pearl skies above. Over one of the rippling folds of hills came a man, tall, in a collar up trench-coat like a detective. Raggy. Ugly. But the words he spoke so beautifully. She could curl up in his voice like a baby in its mother's arms. His calm tones serene and passive. He shrugged his whispering arms like a sleeping moth and lit a six inch cigarette. "Hello," he crooned. "I'm Sam..."

The Night

Heavy Dead Night. Weight is measured in minutes like longitude. The Night is Dead. A Deserted Carcass. Empty houses push sick yellow lights from curtain hemmed windows. Inside people are dead or having sex or both. I stop and see some darkened movement. Skin shadows. The dead are propped by beer bellies and forfeit before trancer t.v.s Cars creep by on life patrol. I walk by them so close I could run my fingers along their chrome armor throwing my head back and laughing at the starless roof, so low a gray lifeless blue purple like a bruise. Parts in the clouds like ripples in a skinned pond water show through the cool spot light of the moon. The street lights are dead. The Sky is Dead. The Night is Dead. Centipedes scuttle by in carnivalesque procession. Each segment has its own stomach and each its own lit pair of eyes. The last two segments hoot and honk at us like amateur trumpeters. Their cars armored worlds. As we approach the crossroads and the fluorescent lights cut the night in horrid gashes, centipedes more frequently scuttle, dismember, rejoin, multiply, congregate in moving churches. The light is a clot, a bloody knot, at the arterial crossroads. We near the thick slab from the surrounding surgical scarred nightscape. Miniature aliens congregate in the clot, outside opened beetles and centipede heads, drinking, making merry, some in a corner making Mary. I slink away exactly like a cockroach. The cars aren't peopled, but people are inside. Almost all ride in packs, some rowdy. Almost all are coming or going to parties, jaunts, shindigs, mixers, keggers or orgies. All religious manner of communion. My eyes roll like pool balls inside mouthy sockets. The leathery ancient voice of leathery ancient William S. Burroughs racks through my body like an avalanche of stench tasting belches. She touches me. Her skin is leathery. Ancient. Her breath hits me like a door being opened., the musty B.O. stench of blowjobs. I hate her. I love her. We are inside the belly of the Bitch Beast — Night. Her syphilis crazed eyes blaze down through us in an itching insomnia like you feel you're forgetting something right on the tip of your tongue. Her expectation is pushed through from the in (in-sane) in the pulse — like fluorescent street lights. Yellow. Lies. Neither the warm yellow light of the sun it mocks with insufficient attempts at imitation, nor the cold hospital shriek, like the reflection of white light on a razor blade, it should be. The lights bleed down, undermining the existing hues of objects and reflecting, refracting, regurgitating,

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resounding, etc. out the gray gravestone slate of the distorted light. It cuts night in this way. Severing the beautiful colors given everything by the day and replacing them with mute metallic synthesis in grays, mute greens, and stark solid black shadows like funneled ink spill. This bleached stained glass menagerie is a noxious nightmare. It is the running eyeshadow of the crying night. Disgusting and pitiful, like a sick dog. Meagerly, meekly, it wags its tail. It has two stark light bulbs for eyes. It has a flat wriggling centipede, lolling, crawling, yellow, for a tongue. It's ass hole is the cityscape. Thick, clotted, so no shit can show through. It bloats with sea sick green gills — symptoms of its stuffing. The city will explode soon, in a gray shit geyser, or the Night will Die. Cut off the limbs to save the organism. The armless, legless centipedes roll by on synthetic wheels. So close... I could touch them....

The Input Plant

T.V. is the night's eye on the day. Engulfing, addicting, mesmerizing. It literally does the thinking for you. The lid peels back like grape skin, the naked wet orb shivering, trembling, timid. The iris sinks back like a recessing tide. Input input input input input input input input. The armies are positioned — in training on their couches. Children grip joysticks and control pads, their thumbs growing horribly callused, learning how to kill without relent, mercilessly slaughter on the grand scale. All games have the concept of death in them. All in the form of self-preservation, some in the form of murder. All video games have the concept of death in them. Eyes grow raw and red from insufficient blinking. They begin to bulge forward as all the liquid is drawn to the front and they become saggy like lactating breasts, the pupils horribly out-turned like nipples. The eyes are, afterall, only plants. They grow on stems or stalks from the gray brain soil, they ripen in hideous orgasmic blossom, colored to attract pollination. like plants that grow toward light because light kills the protein in the liquid blood on the lighted side, thus allowing growth only on the "dark" side of the plant, thus making the plant bend "toward" the light, eyes grow toward fields of concentrated static electricity, like t.v. or computer screens. Once the eyes are naturally attracted to the fields, it becomes the subject's responsibility to make itself attractive to the eye. So in some bizarre mating dance, some courtship ritual, the blossoming eye is caught in the sparkling, luscious spider web field. The black widows crawl past the eye and lay eggs in the soil. The eye watches them, fascinated, mesmerized, entranced. INPUT.

The Hop

I step one foot through the door and I can feel the music pounding in my guts, shaking my teeth. The place swings and dances, straining at the restraining foundation. Cats and chicks swing, smiling, raucous ruckus. Jitterbugs convulsing bathed baptised in their religion. They are all invincible — Achilles bathed, baptised in the Styx. An Essene Juke Joint. Poodle skirts, sweaters, knee socks, loafers. Side burns of respective length, school jackets, plaid shirts, dockers or slacks. The future in erectile adolescent skin, rock and roll tunes flooding their studies away. Another rock and roll song about dancing, partying or relaxing blasts over the jukebox. The antenna to happiness in a glowing oracle. Let's stroll once more. I stand in the doorway, waitresses in rollerskates carry trays out to the parked customers making out in their sherman tank sized cars — Fords, Chryslers, Edsels — borrowed from their

fathers. One hour ago: a million upcoming greasers argue with their pipe smoking corny WWII veteran fathers who all wear green sweater coats over yellow shirts which are tucked into coffee brown slacks. "Can I have the car, dad?" "Junior, I just don't see how I can let you take the car out tonight after seeing that report card. Are you really concentrating on school?" Mother: "You know it's important to us to see you get a good education." The same thing happens across the dark breast of a nation. A million doors slam as one — a thunderclap of finality. Foot steps of an infinite number of juvenile delinquents in costumesque grease uniform stomp down the front walk. Car doors close dramatically defiant. A million ignitions at once like a symphony. A million radios click on to the same soft rock and roll song. Make out music. A million angry youths mumble something that begins with "think he can..." and shift into gear. They all roar off in a gun of exhaust smoke and swerve down the streets of suburbs nationwide. At that moment the juke joints shake off the day's dust and wake up the waitresses from their positions on the tile floor. The cooks make hamburgers and fries and prepare truckloads of ketchup containers for, sometimes frantic, always rapid distribution. The juke lights up. On cue a million greasy Johnnies step through the door, soon followed by a million springtime Sallies. The whole dance becomes cliché after one night, routine after two. 'The American rebellious youth movement' is born and has serious staff meetings in the swing joints. "This time," they warn, "we're serious. This time... we have Elvis." The cowhide coated cultural icon, idol of a million greaser virgins and Archie reading fat boys who never leave their room unless they are picked up by a rebellious gang of hooligans. More and more are recruited by the 'Am.re.yo.mo.' and turned militant. Training begins after the first ejaculation in young males, after the first menstruation in young females. A million differences with your parents arise like bubbles in calm waters until the whole relationship is seltzerized. In the long run this seems tragic but it encourages the exhilaration of conflict. Like atoms colliding in a reactor. Music becomes a nozzle for the seltzerized conflicts. Quickly music divides the nation like an actual issue. Rockers and beboppers on one side, beatniks and hipsters on the other. Militant bebop groups in 'Amreyomo' have nerds, greasers, jocks, preps, good girls 'future leaders of America' even. Music infects all walks indiscriminately. All these people listen to music and want more. More of everything. They feel stifled by weighty lack. On the other side the beatniks and the hipster clans are jazz and swing mongers. More ancient and well rooted than rock, although less accepted by the masses, although this alienation bears attractiveness too. The beats separate like stale milk into the hot and the cool; no segregation of nerds, jocks, etc. Once you are absorbed you are placed in one of two long lines. The hot beats burn with want. The cool beats wallow with want. The urge for more connects both sides. Why? Because music is the line drawn between them and therefore it *is* the only thing that they have in common; the only thing that touches both of them. The boppers and the beats, officially the teenyboppers and the beatniks, share the urge to music and the lust for *more*. While boppers feel they can lawfully, or through minor infractions or major bending of the law, accomplish the accumulation or achieve the destination of "more," beats feel they can mooch or steal to get "more." The hot beats anyway; the cool beats lament their lack of "more" but feel they can take no steps to gain. Being that music is the only concept the subjects share, their greed must be infected from this. But music is only the releasing nozzle on their seltzerized parental relationships. It is only the release of music that causes the concept that there is a "more" and that it could be an achievable goal. In the past, when there was no release, there was no More. The relationship festered and infected like trapped pus and turned sour. But is leaving the solution? Just because there is a

release, does that make it an effective solution if it is used only as an escape? A one-way exit? What is “more” anyway? It is found in a million possessions and desired in a million poems, but what is it? “More” of what? What was missing in the seltzer bottle that can be found outside in the bop and the jive? Love. Love is always confused by parents and never administered in ample doses in its pure form. It is always watered down with lectures on responsibility and safety reminders. Aside from being *annoying*, these saturate true caring to the point of absolute dilution. Angry children react angrily, greedily even. Guilty children learn mute obedience. Dehumanizing “love” has another name in my book. “Hate.” Children are treated as enemy spies as if all the advice giving and finger shaking parents do is a secret police style brainwashing. “Now, you take *that* back to the fhurher! And don’t you ever forget to wash your hands!” It’s psychological warfare in the kitchens of a country. Parents, jealous of their spouse’s affection for baby Johnny or Mary (although this theory has never been substantiably evidenced — as nothing pertaining to mental or behavioral reactions, which are sufficiently random, apparently, for anything to be “proven” — it is an intriguing thought and one that warrants further research) teach the same lessons their parents taught them. Such one-way broadcasts. The taboo conversation has been replaced by the universalization with such charm and immediately antiquated (as they are reactionary views and retroacted) phrases as “speak when you’re spoken to,” and “silence is golden,” “don’t talk back,” etc. which never apply to the parents. A fine, “do as I say, not as I do,” situation. And so more and more juvies escape through the nozzle, pressurized right out like cumming of age, onto dance floors of diners and corners of coffee shops. Our nation’s youth mired in stagnant quagmire. Muddled, misguided, taught one strict thing and strictly doing the opposite. The rebellious motto “the road to paradise is paved with excess; the road to Hell is paved with good intentions.” They do nothing in moderation. They dance to live, they dance to find love, they dance death away, they dance *more*. I step into a clothed orgy, cats and chicks strolling, dipping, bopping. Music blares to hide anguished cries from inside. I smile and slide into a booth table. The tunes pound in my guts and rattle my teeth. I order a hamburger.

Part 2: Let the Good Times Roll

I got Suzy Q smiling across from me over a chocolate shake with two straws. Teeny romance. Red cherry lips, eyes blue as the Caribbean, hair blonde like soft straw, shiny like urine. Perfect peach satin complexion. Dainty hands, fingernails painted red and freshly manicured. She is the perfect suburban princess, could-be, would-be, should-be prom queen. She wears a yellow, high school signet over her left breast, pink sweater over a sky blue blouse. She is the perfect picture. A real dreamy kitten. Her real name *is* Kitten. Everybody calls her Kitty and for her sweet sixteen her parents got her a soft red screamin’ machine with a license plate that says “Kitty.” She is never a bitch and she is a cheerleader. A real mold. She touches my hand and jerks her head towards the door, indicating, “let’s blow this pop stand.” Her red kitty mobile is a convertible with a back seat as big as some of her girlfriends’ whole cars. We drive up to lover’s landing, a ridge overlooking the lit-up town. It looks like a model. We park between a beamer and a bmw, both bouncing vigorously, windows fogged thick. She turns to me. The radio hums “earth angel” or any other generic make out song. I turn to her. Our eyes gaze long at each other. I reach over and hold her dainty hand in mine. We lean close close, face almost touching face, breathing each others’ breath. My heart skips and jumps. My stomach

climbs anxiously into my throat and then dives back down, belly flopping into my other guts. We close our eyes and lean in so close. Our lips touch softly. We draw back and open our eyes looking at one another. We both hug and kiss again, harder and longer. More meaning. Our lips press against one another, sucking and kissing and tongues touching and exploring. We neck and move our hips closer together. I bury my face in her neck and kiss carelessly everywhere at once. She caresses my neck with her soft lips and sucks wetly around below my ear. She licks my earlobe and tongues my ear like a cat licking her young. I return the favor. I put my hand on her chest and move down, groping her breasts. She smiles and kisses my face, our foreheads resting together. She runs her hands up and down my back hungrily. The radio croons lullabies. She reaches behind to her back with her right arm, still panting in my face and I kissing her. I reach around with my left hand to help her undo her bra strap. She kisses distractedly at my eyebrows. The hook comes off and she slips the bra off from under her shirt, discarding it on the floor of the car. I reach up under her shirt to feel the flesh of her boobs as she replaces her arm around my back. She has drawn both legs up under her and is sitting nearly in my lap. I have one leg up under me and the resting, foot on the floor. "Do you want me?" she breathes in my wet ear. "Yes," I mumble from her neck, hands on her breasts, her hard nipples in my palms. We tumble over the backseat and I shake my head to find us neatly deposited on the spacious white leather backseat with room for us from the top of her head to our knees and her legs bend, her right one up and her left one to the floor. I'm over her looking down at her face, her eyes closed, her lips parted. She looks up at me as I loom over. I snarl and she giggles, tossing her blonde hair. Her arms are wrapped around me and I have one leg bracing myself below her crotch, bent at the knee, the other straight and supporting me from the floor. I lean in, wavering on one arm, placing the other over her chest, hand on her face. I lean down and we kiss again, passionately. I move my hand down to her neck, easing down as if to grope her breasts again. I squeeze. She glares, slightly worried. She looks at me frightened. I snarl again. She tries to scream and I squeeze harder, her flesh pinching up and bruising under my heavy hand. She beats at my chest with her dainty hands. She shakes her head terrified and tries to fork my hand off her. She riles her legs and tries to knee me. I fall onto her right leg with my left hip and throttle her left calf between my thighs. She flails her arms. "Kitty, Kitty, shh, shh. Calm down, it's all alright," I croon. She shakes her head frantically, eyes huge and terrified, mouth opening and closing clam like. She tries to pry my hand off. In a flurry of motion like a gust of wind I peg her left arm to her breasts and grab her right arm as it tried to pry at my left hand with the four fingers of the hand, crushing her right hand against her throat. Her eyes grow wider as she realizes she is trapped, helpless. Her open mouth gasps and wheezes. Her body writhes like a snake. I push her left hand up under my left thumb and clench her two hands together with her purple neck in one bunch. Her tongue lolls a sick beat hue and her eyes water. I reach down with my right hand and hike that blue skirt up over her belt and look hungrily at her flower cotton panties. Her legs pump. Her left hand breaks free and flies to claw at my face. I grab it with my right hand and crush it, with a series of horrible muffled wet pops, like acorns under foot, her bones fracture. She gasps for air. I slap her face really hard and look shocked. "Kitten!" I cry, "now don't you ever try anything like that again!" Her face is turning purple. Her hurting hand quivers, fingers bent, contorted. I ease up on her throat a bit so she won't die on me. She gasps for air. I reach down and pull harshly at her panties trying to rip them. "No." she gasps. Frustrated at the panties I curl my hand into a ball and push it into her abdomen. Air coughs out of her like a sigh. "Shut up!" I

holler. "Kitten, this is your Father talking! Shut Up!" She shakes her head disbelievingly, eyes swollen and running silent tears. Her tongue lolls again. I push the panties down around her thighs and force her legs apart with both of mine. They open like a wrench. I look down again at her beautiful light haired snatch. I reach down and undo my pants with my right hand, looking sternly into her eyes. Her face is frozen fear. She watches in terrified amazement. "How could this be happening?" her mind screams. Her trembling hand, fingers crushed, moves to my face again. I force it harshly down and hold it with my left hand at her blackening throat. Her mouth works but no sounds can come out. I mount her sharply, driving to the hilt in one quick thrust. She closes her eyes and tears stream out. I hump her cruelly, forcing in and out. I touch at her hair, brushing it gently back off her forehead with my right hand. She is silent. The rustle of cloth as I ram in and out of her maw. She is tight on me and I nearly lose it twice. The windows are coated thick with fog. The car bounces up and down. Tears jerk down her face. The radio signs soothingly about teenagers in love. I drive down on her mercilessly, pumping like a steam engine, driving like a jack hammer. The pace quickens, maddening. "I love you," I whisper down at her horrible face, eye liner streaking down, tongue prolapsed and black, neck black as coal, "I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love," grip tightening, eyes widening, "I love you, I love you, I love you, I love, I love you," faster, faster, nearing the cliff of orgasm, "I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you," her eyes roll up, I groan bestially, pumping snakes of thick liquid pearls into her soft pink raw cavern. "Oooooooooohhhh..." My muscles contract and then wriggle back to normal elasticity and feel like gum bands that melt into warm tar. She lies beneath me, eyes a solid milky white, tongue limp and wooden. I pull out of her trailing webby goo strings back to her pursed red hole. With clammy hands I wipe the hot sweat off her abdomen above her thin blonde bush. "I love you," I drool down at her hardened countenance. I let her go and her head slumps, her arm falls limply across her breasts. "Worthless cunt," I tell her. She lies still, increasingly empty. "She's a used gun," I think. I pull my underwear and pants back up. I look down at her again pawing her lifeless head around. A drop of blood runs from her forever open mouth. Frozen in this valkerie protest for eternity. I spit down at her and it lands in a thick goober on the bridge of her nose and rolls onto her glazed eyeball. I hop back into the front seat and get out from the passenger side. The beamer and bmw are gone. The ridge is deserted. The cool night is mine alone. I stretch out, my spine cracking like a long row of knuckles. I sigh and breathe in deep. The air is fresh and crisp. I smile and think of my father the mayor and my football coach. If they knew their all American quarterback son had done something as hideously (beautiful) atrocious as this. I leave the car door open and begin to walk down the dark deserted road back to town.

the BUGS

The BUGS roam in droves; they've almost conquered the city through simple infiltration. The bugs look like us except for some characteristics which they cannot conceal. They have ashy pale lips, tongues the color of a fresh turd. Their eye sockets are empty, eyelids dangle like uncircumcised flaps over eyeless holes. Their hair has fallen out, replaced by thin probing quills which they brush back like hair. The quills are full of sensitive electrodes which can sense a building sneeze in a sound proof studio down the street a city block away. Their skin is pale and oily like a

malnourished coma victim, pasty and clammy to the touch. A less visible characteristic is a row of harder, larger, sharper quills that run down the spine. These quills are permeated with a million holes like pumice. They have millions of varying tonal quills covering their body in meager imitation of mammalian body hair. They have no fingernails, but hard convex black shells in their place under which are circuit boards and access grids. The same with their toenails. Their genitals, while fully functional, appear lifeless, or at least listless, and a darker color than their pale skin. Almost the color of a bruise. Inside the female genitals are as black as oil. Their anuses are a sickly yellow white like wood glue and their ass holes are black vortices. There is no hurry in their movement. They are known for being able to take up to a day to complete one full turn of the head if they are watching something slow moving. They often stare at the sun all day long as it passes overhead; they have no eyes so they have no fear of going blind. They see because they recognize vision as it pertains to odor in the same way taste does. Taste augments odor, vision augments odor. There are creatures easily found in nature books that exist without the use of any sense other than smell. And in all creatures smell is the sole sense utilized in tracking. Tracking, in humans, is a process allotted to the eyes alone. The bugs, with a highly augmented sense of smell, have shed the eye so that the sinus membrane may be exposed directly to a flow of air through the cavernous eye socket. They literally smell the movements of everything we see. Added to the sensitivity to air flow their erectile quills, the bugs can smell *more* than we can see. They are aware sensitively of wires behind walls, people behind doors, heart rates, even secrets that are carried in the mind. Bugs don't procreate in the same rituals we do. They rent a banquet hall in the Holiday Inn, have it completely bared of furniture and have a mass feast. Long tables, white cloth, all bug food laid out up and down all walls. They eat until a prescribed time and then strip bare and begin to have a delightful orgy of over a hundred people. They all procreate indiscriminately. This alleviates the hassles of parents; children hatch in underwater tanks some months later; as larvae, study with the same brood from the same sector. They are raised as equals in that they are raised as drones. They only learn their individuality after first mating with the bug queen. Nobody ever discusses her; no human has ever seen her; no record is kept of her existence; no one knows if she is real. Sometimes during the biannual orgy — the spawning it is called — chains of men will form, one buttfucking into the next and then a woman will be added on one end. These chains rise up like centipedes and frolic playfully, ashy legs scuttling and reaching. When all are joined in this way the insectile collective is recharged — all minds thinking as one — to one purpose. Insects can take any job anywhere. They are guaranteed full rights in the zone constitution as 1st class citizens. They may vote and even, once a long time ago, tried fronting their own ticket, but it fared so unpopularity the idea rolled over and was never tried again. The insects are all low-level telepaths; they have evolved, sensitively, beyond us, and are aware in a dead sort of way what other people are thinking if the thought is very strong or if the thought is directed at the bug. The bugs themselves move like automatons. They experience only very strong emotions and they experience those very weakly. They can cross breed with members of the mammalian species — but who would want to breed with the bugs? No one knows exactly when they started appearing, integrated into normal society. A quiet man here, a secretive woman there. Fear of bugs spread like a low level communism style cold war fear. Is your neighbor a bug? At first bugs had to report to a special bureau. Then the redrafted constitution smoothed things over. The bugs are stoic, secretive, emotionless, they are everywhere and nowhere. A receptionist might be one, or a police officer hiding behind mirrored sunglasses. It is already rumored

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that the bugs have infested, infected the police force. They are all referred to as bugs. Their listening devices are bugs. Their helicopters are bug-like. They scuttle from crime scene to crime scene. Their justice is a secret and callused as a bug's shiny lifeless black eye. Their's is a timeless world. Their lifespans have not, as yet, been measured. because those in charge of the study died of old age some years ago. The world turns like an immense slow cog beneath their feet. We die and are born and die and are born and die while more of them are born every year. Constitutionally they are our equals. In truth they are our superiors. They will live on after we have died, still watching the sun overhead with uncaring, expressionless faces and lifeless eyes.

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Bulletin:

In the future there are far too many pasts. Regret becomes more routine than bathing. Remorse drives your body and mind into an advanced state of decomposition. The futurists say, "in the past there have always been too many futures." They view choices as optimistic. "Life is what you make of it; the future is what you make it." They claim it doesn't when you die, because it effects only you. Any sorrow others may feel in regards to any of your actions is their *reaction* to your action or to you, but it is never your fault or responsibility. "You didn't *make* them feel sorry for you or about you. They use the *because* as a weapon, to inflict a guilt wound on *you*, then they poke at the wound and cite it as evidence towards your guilt. You must *ignore* other people as much as possible, as sooner or later they will be blaming you for *something*." They forward the concept of the medicinal excess, and in orgasms or Epicurean ecstasy they tell you that "the concept of original sin was invented by old men to keep *young men* from doing what the old men *wanted to be doing*." They trace everything back to pleasure, which pertains to oneself, and jealousy, which pertains to Others. "If you care more about your own pleasures than your jealousy of the pleasure of others, you will soon find it is *they* who are jealous of *you*." To the futurist, jealousy, or what they perceive as such, is the finest compliment, although, "to take any compliment is to acknowledge that other people in any way effect you," and so they ignore compliments and jibes alike. The pastists hate the futurists with unparalleled loathing. The pastists, or pastors, teach the converse of the futurist epitaph. There pastors teach, "in the future there will have been too many pasts." Whereas the futurists see there should only be one future, the pastors feel there should be very little passed. "Sadness is the driving factor in current concepts. Sadness only breeds sadness. Sadness stems from regret." They teach that by not acting on every opportunity we have condemned ourselves to a life of perpetual nihilism. "Every death is the beginning in a long line of deaths. Every drop is the first of a rainstorm." They still pass many opportunities by, moaning and lamenting the loss of their lives and proclaiming themselves 'undead' and 'the living dead.' They pessimistically state, "once you've lost your life by missing the Potential, all other potentials are moot. You can never hit the same target by shooting at it again later. If you miss it once you must succumb. The target passively conquers." They have given up their lives to the cause of un-life. The futurist roster is mainly young boys and girls, Drs. and lawyers, divorced people, etc. while the pastors consist of mainly adolescents, retired people, hobos and married people, etc.

Re. Etc.

“The company,” said the big boss man from his garnished platform, “will no longer be hiring any...” he holds a list up that wraps around his feet and adjusts his glasses. Squinting, he reads, “women, jews, arabs, colored, chinamen, inbreeds, hermaphrodites, gays, transvestites, gooks, japs, gerries,” he reads on and on in a pinched nasal monotone. ‘etc. etc. etc.’ Harold thought, standing amongst his coworkers holding a coffee mug that read ‘world’s best cad.’ If you’re like Harold — listless, disinterested, careless, tired — we have just the cure for you. Many times things are said or done by others or by yourself that you just don’t find important. In times like these you may find yourself droning, ‘etc. etc. etc.’ just like Harold. This is a perfectly natural reaction to an unshrugable mantle of boredom. Other things you might find yourself saying are, ‘well, whatever,’ ‘gee, surprise me... I don’t care,’ and even, ‘nothing matters, I’ll just go to bed early.’ Well all these things are perfectly natural also, even expected in cases of extreme boredom. Like Harold you feel distracted, dismayed, even frustrated with how little of the world revolves around you. This disease has been diagnosed as ‘Etc. Syndrome.’ Many writers suffer from etc. syndrome and kill themselves. The same has happened to many fine artists. Others effected include standup comedians, musicians, blue-collar workers, executives, etc. etc. etc.... But then, who *hasn’t* at one time or another been bored or distracted? Why, even as *I* am writing this I’m bored *and* distracted. Well the good news for those of you reading this is that diagnosis is the first step to cure. Perhaps, in your lifetime, a cure *will* be found and your listless boredom treated. Perhaps the cure is only symptomatic. But it’s best to digress before the readers’ interest is blah blah blah etc. etc.” And so and so it goes it goes to the end of time we go. The eye babbles on and on, it can’t help itself. It congeals and drips into a pulsing puddle of nakedness on the floor. A skin scorpion stinging itself over and over and over and melting and melting and melting. Pores open wide like windows. A honeycomb of pores, each one a potential spider’s nest, as in that old ghost story of the spider’s nest in the pimple. That should scare the be-jesus out of about twenty million teenagers. The ultimate pet to take on a late night talk show would be a parrot that sings eloquent opera and does a more than passing impression of the host himself. It is all part of the late night routine. To participate in the events. I am participating now. The writing itself, the words, are electric insomnia. I daren’t sleep now, for fear of what might be missed. Dreams are doorways. Words are made to be spoken, what’s written is written to be read. “Well you’re not going to like it if they give you bad reviews.” “I’m just writing my thoughts. Just spinning a yarn, etc.” Can’t get rated on writing, etc. etc. Crime and the city corruption. Conclusion is delusion. Time is the great liquefier. In the end one thing matters no more than any other. An aging woman with tendrils of gray hair and an arthritic back picks a peach in North Dakota; a short, mustached dictator in military beige with a scarlet armband salutes and orders the decimation of a populous. Etc. etc. Swine doesn’t I caren un? I gotta be good and I gotta be right and I gotta be just. Man, that is *just* the thing. Take “Justice.” Now in a modifying pronoun, or in an adjective form, it becomes “just.” *Just* that. All I am. *Just* what I am. *Just just*. The word makes no sense. *Just*. J-U-ST. Juh-uh-sstt. It sounds like a mistake. “*djust!* Ow! I stubbed my toe.” I am J-U-ST the thing I am. Wuh-hut ah-re yoo-hoo? Juh-uh-sstt th-ahh-tt. Speech slows to a rush hour stand still. A stand *still* at *rush* hour. We hurry so much we make ourselves wait in stampede style. If a mouse can scare an elephant to stampede, what would scare commuters? Mickey Mouse? A *Japanese* Mickey Mouse that was establishing 8-hr. work days. That’s make those volvo’s charge. Someone see me out. Cabby, gimme a lift home would ya? Pass

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by a million naked housewives bearing beavers in their windows. Suburban storyville. Skin clings to bone like a frightened child to their mother's dress, sucking a thumb and hiding behind her when company comes. Grandma's underpants grown huge around me until the long John's cover me up like a land-fell parachute. Dream I had down at our wood paneling beach house, aunt's of father's side, uncles of mother's side and grandparents in attendance. Getting ready to go to the beach and I went in and got in my speedo suit. I was like, I dunno, seven or eight? Anyway, I *smelled* the suit and got all excited in a queer way. I wanted to show my dick out the window. Godsakes don't interrupt me asking why! Hell I was a little pervert for all I know. My father rose nightly in our household and retired to masturbate inna the bathroom. I must have known subconsciously or something. I couldn't masturbate then, but I rolled around nude on the bed. Why? I wish I couldn't remember the whole incident. Anyway I finally got my suit on and came out and the whole family at the table waiting on me. Looking at me. "I don't feel like going," I said. "Don't feel like going?" they repeated. I don't really remember what happened. Probably nothing. I could pick myself apart like this every night. Like leaves on a tree. I masturbate to this day, to the date of this writing. It's not usually by choice. I can't seem to quit. Etc. etc. etc.

Too Much

Too Much is the key. A headache at the base of the skull sends shockwaves down the piano keys of the vertebrae. Icy touch of contact overdose, sweat standing out in puddled piles on the skin. Clammy with contained heat. Skin turns gravestone, eyes turn into cat's eyes. Curious yellow lanterns. The movements of the world are a code that one *must* learn to read if one wishes to *survive*. Kids vacuuming their dicks into profane purple phallic hickies. Girls squatting to defecate brown turds in a ring like stone henge on the lawn of their cruel coach. The teaching doesn't always coincide with the learning. At least not in the way it's supposed to. Fat Arabic cats with soft coffee colored skin and wiry hair mustaches. A long brown turd-like cigar crouches, hanging like a limp erection, puffing clouds of gray smoke jissom that floats like backwards leaves to hang low around his head. A black turban huddles around his head, low like a Russian spire, plush as a pillow. He smiles, horrid white teeth like a row of soldiers glisten behind the papery cigar. "I'll get you..." he grins, his eyes flooding with a cloud of black ink until they are ebony marbles, flat and lifeless, "I *know* you... I *know* you," like a dull monotone mantra... sweat beads, black as blood splatter, rise up on his forehead... his mustache shortens and spreads mossily to coat like a fungus... "you *are* me... you *are* me," he buzzes in a subconscious hum, like the groan of the sewer... rats nibble in chalky scraping loudly in my ear... "to *touch* this... to *touch* this..." his skin is turning a yellow beige, black short hairs coat in think fuzz. He has begun to *segment*... His is a code too ancient for our modern language. He rolls linguistic turds from his bulbous lips. "*give* me... *give* me..." he opens a mouth like a snake, double jointed jaws creaking open hugely. Behind his shiny row of soldiers are a million curved rows of hooked claw-like fangs. His long dark tongue coils like a serpent act, a perfect bruised phallus fueled by tonsticles. He creaks a groan of beckoning. Of all the creatures that roam in pink herds he is the predator. The embodied overdose. His victim falls over, defecating in death throws, blood geysering from burst eyes. The Iranian eats only the kidney, sucking on it like cooked meat — juices running from his mouth... he is too much. His victims die from sensory overload, he is too much, he is toomuch, he is too much, he is toomuch, he is

Tumuzsch....

Part Two: the Body

The brain is a *mystical* device... an organic computer... men of science can't decode it — can never fully understand it — because it is not scientific. Each step is taken toward an eventual end. Mexican whorehouses light up in a lane across the horizon of the dark Mexican night — land masses on the flat plain a black silhouette — the sky a sick dark blue. “Go see the fuckin’ parrots —” I drop a pinch of black snuff. It’s all Too Much. My brain aches. I hear chimes in the distant room. “All of us are mocking God through meager *imitation*...” my father once sobbed while whipping me with a belt. Ancient mountains slumber in distant mounds — bonsai trees growing up and down their rocky skin. A red eye watches me from the opposite side of the room. I *must* find my way to the peaceful snow. All the mountain dwelling, orange robed, wizened monks *know*. What they know...? I can never know. What they know they hold exclusive rights to and those of us who are alien can never know. I can never know. I am alien. I’ll tell you a story. I once knew a young boy about sixteen. He was a nuisance, even occasionally a hazard to himself and others. He danced and sang and was the fool. Borrowed and stole this way. He was the self-righteous, self-centered, accusatory, and above all (because none of these things is impressive and all apply to almost all Americans) and above all he was a total ignoramus. He accused others of not knowing what *he* himself didn’t know and therefore found himself wholly unable to prove his claim or support his accusation in *any* manner. He said, “I dunno,” alot, “whatever,” alot and infringed disgustingly wholly too often. He claimed he couldn’t understand why girls didn’t like him and he professed that he *chose* to be a bumbling idiot. He was loud, offensive, needy, jealous, ignorant, impetuous in the worst ways — screaming profanities at cars of drunken college drop outs coming from *and* going to raging keggers; he was bad at *everything* he tried to do — write, sing (which he did constantly in a hideous nasal droning monotone), run, revel, speak eloquently, joke, do accents. etc. etc. etc. He was the epitome of every annoying thing everybody dreads becoming. He embodied nuisance and annoyance. His black hairy body was always on show, he thought it was no big thing to walk shirtless and his hideous legs were always poked out from his shorts to be stuck stiffly into over sized black jock shoes. Girls *feared* him. He was so freakish, even the freaks he burned to befriend and be accepted by expelled him shamelessly. He was the outcast’s outcast. The leper’s leper. In him dwelled the need for acceptance his gay ogre of a wop father passed on through callused neglect and patronizing negligence. The boy wanted affection and he would squeeze *everybody’s* balls until they like him. He was Tumuzsch, the crawling spidery troll, longing for *more more more*... He crouched with hard hackles raised menacingly at the bridge, never willing to let anybody come in unless they bore gifts for him. He attempted to eat those that brought him nothing, but there was no inherent threat here... he had no teeth — only stinking gum holes. He rolled his victims around in his mouth getting them wet and then he spilled them out in a puddle of saliva. ‘He is Tumuzsch,’ he would cry late at night when especially no one was listening and when no one cared to hear him, “he can take no more!” Well, he needs not worry... no one cares to give him anything he needs to worry about possessing “no more” than nothing at all. No love is his... no love....

"Hi, I'm Persona X. I'm the Host."

The vigilante cops out as a schizo possession case. A cold junky morning and a dry cough wakes me up. "Hey," says a narc in the audience (hey — when did we get a balcony? I say something about 500 marijuana plants being destroyed and two guys in the audience loudly sigh, "aaawww!!" and are immediately arrested). "You're not William S. Burroughs," shouts the narc arresting officer. "Dr. William S. Burroughs?" I cover my eyes looking up into the crowd — hard to see with the spotlights... "You're not Dr. William S. Burroughs!" he bellows back. "Yes I am." (A beer commercial quote ingrained on the American psyche — such a monumental feat has not been accomplished since the great "where's the beef?" ad campaign of the early eighties. Here's the scene — a guy getting off an airplane approaches three chauffeurs waiting for their rides. "Do you have a brand x beer in your limo?" he asks one tall, black clad, sun glassed driver. "Yes." "Then I am..." he struggles to pronounce the complex name on the driver's sign, "Mr... Gal-E-Kay-Witz..." "You're *Dr. Galacowitz?*" the stone faced driver scrutinizes. "Yes I am." Cut to limo interior, the man plays with all the toys and buttons in the limo. The driver looks back over his shoulder. "First time in a limo, *Dr.?*" The man holds up the can of brand x. "First time in a limo this *small.*") The set of my show is a run down ghetto apartment. One beaten out spring mattress on a brass frame. The wooden floor is cracking. There is one peeling creaking gray chair at a peeling creaking gray table with a bottle of scotch and a shot glass resting like an electric blanket on the tabletop. The gray wall paper on the walls is flaking and peeling to reveal gray beams. Outside a dirty window a neon red sign is flashing over a darkened city. A cracking door stabs the stage left wall, opposite the bed, adjacent to the table and chair. I sit in the chair and drink scotch shots and any guests that *want* to come on the show sit on the bed, awkwardly. Tonight I have one guest — an old woman from a Hoboken petting zoo with a bunch of birds. One sits on my head Johnny Carson like and I grab it and crush it to the table. The old woman drops over dead from heart failure and the show goes kind of slow after that. The audience is drunk, mainly runoff from the Late Shows and walk-ins attracted by our sign that blares "ALL NUDE" in large flashing neon and then in small print and not lit up, "this is a talk show, not a strip-joint." All our camera women are nude, as consolation, and the subject to nightly jibes and weekly rapes. but they're all infected with V.D.s. "Hey — this is no novelty show!" I interrupt if I happen upon one of these scenes. "C'mon, at least make a donation..." "I am," the rapist grunts as he showers her gluey cunt with unexpectant semen who burn up on impact, "see? I'm donatin' as we speak!" "Oohh," I jibe, grabbing his dick and snipping it neatly off at the base, "very funny. You should come on the show. I'll bill you as the comic eunuch." I kick him in the gut and he vomits a gallon and a half of whiskey. I have his dick stuffed and give it to a random audience member the next night. "Late night talk show host, and *crime fighter,*" I think of myself as. "It's all in a good day's work," I say, looking over at Persona Y, the Cannuck, who is dressed as Robin. Make up your mind! Are you the tortured artist or the dime store entertainer? Or both? Yes I am.

Too Much part three: The Mind

Poets are either futurists or pastors in regards to their poems. First, I apologize for the horrid names written for the two parties. I would like to say I only write what I *hear*, but sometimes I'm just not sure if I do... The two kinds of poets, the parties

applying to which here to for will be referred to only as the F's and P's indicating the futurists and the pastors respectively, the two kinds of poets in regards to their poems share different views of editing. The f-style poets always edit their work; actually, as they edit their work often to make it more palatable to readers — thusly indicating an interest in the interest of others — a trait shunned by pure futurists, these poets might best be referred to as F.P.'s. The p-style poets, who will also be referred to in a combinatorial way due to the fact that they don't obey a pastist *no-editing-allowed* style constantly in that they distribute only what *they* like — thus showing a futurist self-centeredness as well as futurist editing, the P.F. poets almost never edit their poems, as they believe that to edit is to annul the feeling of the poet when he wrote the poem from the poem itself — in effect — to undermine the potential the poem has which lies in the feeling behind the poem. All potential lies in feeling, all opportunities stem from instinct; all regrets regarding a missed potential inevitably stem back to a conscious decision to obey *logic over instinct*. Logic is often merely a cover-up for timid inability. "I didn't kill him when I could have because I know logically that if I missed he would kill my family." Well, maybe that's not the best or most accurate example. However a better shred of evidence in favor of instinct is the "gut feeling," which is usually correct. There are, in fact, many more senses than merely the five physical ones. The sense of balance, the sense of direction, etc. all are mental extensions of the sense of *touch*. You could *feel* your way out of almost any conceivable situation. You don't see memories, so much as *feel* them. All things that are happening are enactments of future memories, therefore you don't see anything, you feel that you see it [or more accurately, you will have felt that you had seen it]. Feeling was the first sense to develop. It pertains to the nervous system — stemming from the spine. The brain acts as a psychic projector of the same. It often conflicts with the spine because of *reason*, which is something we force on the brain. We are not, by nature, the least bit *reasonable*. We are not creatures of *reason*. We are creatures of instinct who accidentally developed reason. Mysticism is instinctual [based on the experience of feeling]. We attempt to reasonably deduce instinct and mysticism. We are not learning in new areas. We are not making progress. We are rediscovering our ancient roots that lie in instinct. The brain is instinctual. The brain is a mystical device. Each step is taken towards an eventual end, but all our steps are leading *backwards* [we are walking blind, operating on instinct]. Because our eye inverts everything to translate into the up side down hour glass of the mind's language, ancient and runic, we don't see that what we perceive as forward is backwards. We are rediscovering our unknown origins. Crawling back into suburban caves, we turn to novelty our family tree. We must take our evolution back to its smallest roots. The first psychic cell foresaw itself on land. The first protoplasmic mud from which the first organism scuttled with *no* more than instinct. No senses at *all*. Our first mental sense to develop was memory, which we foolishly mistake for the mind set on record and seeing *through* the eyes. What we naively forget to factor in is that the eye inverts images for the mind. The inversion of memory is ESP. Our eyes are *projecting*, not *absorbing*, what our memories dictate on psychic rewind. We all know when we are going to die, because while we see it as our end, it is *perceived* [by ourselves from outside our bodies] as *our beginning*. Memories are ripples rolling out from the the present. If we can see the ripples in the past, why can't we see the ripples in the future? Our minds, for aeons out of practice at the art, perceive these ripples on an instinctual level — we get a "gut feeling." This method of prediction, however, is barely the tip of the iceberg, though, as we *must* regain our ancient ability to Read Time, not left-to-right as past : present : future, but down from each event in an effectual manner. One effect: from

another: to another, all aspects the same in effect. If this is too much for your mind, that is to be expected. If you have never understood this you will never understand it because the unborn memories of the present called the future are based on the existing and identifiable memories of the past called the past — and if an effect isn't present in the one it cannot be present in both — which is what *must* occur for an experience of any memorable magnitude to occur. This repetition of a situation — the embedding of a situation in all three times, past, present and future, is the cause of the effect. This is ritual. Or routine. Some things — like walking down the street, the *same* street, day after day 'till you die — are, although they are personal rituals, more *appropriately* referred to as routine; just as some *other* things, such as sacrificing a virgin [to a volcano or carving the Thanksgiving turkey], while they may eventually seem routine, are understandably better referred to as ritual. For you to follow my line of reasoning, according to my line of reasoning, you would have to have been thinking the same *before*, *during* and *after* reading this. The effect of the concepts must have caused ripples very far (or harumph, should I say long?) into both your past and future. If you've experienced déjà vu it is probably a memory back to a forward-thinking ripple moving backward from an event in your future, which you are now experiencing. "Gee, I remember thinking ahead to now." You remember (past) thinking ahead (future) to now (present). [And of course, in regular perception all of these are inverted because what we instinctually perceive as our future from outside our bodies we think we see through memory as past from within our logical minds]. It's all quite simple, really, although for some people it is too much. I formally accuse those people of a grievous wrong against the mental state. We can no longer function with reason alone. Pure reason is too little, however coupled with a good strong dose of instinct it should even out. Indeed, evolved reason would be Too Much for our purposes here.

"Well, Whatever..."

Me an' Rick were walkin' tonight. It was a nice night, a little close if you know what I mean. The moon whispered in and out from behind misty blankets of clouds. We walked into the neon fluorescent scab gas station and I saw her immediately. She was, God — Timeless — without Age — she looked young, probably 17 or 18, and maybe our height. She was beautiful in the most carnal way. A flesh angel. I watched her, pretending to be looking at the candy, in which I actually had *no* interest. She had dark brown or maybe black hair, bushy in a loose and unextravagant manner, about mid-back length (?so hard to remember!) she wore a white shirt, small, tight, and (I don't remember what color!!!) very short shorts. She was standing in line, waiting to buy something I never looked at. I circled the candy row and watched her from behind the bottles of P and S. Other people got in the way. I walked across the store to sit in some wall seats across the way. I backed into one and stared intensely at her raw beauty. I was convinced she wasn't wearing any undergarments of any kind. Her short shorts were so small they would barely even fit the bill and were hardly prepared to conceal anything other than — And her nipples poked through in soft wrinkles of her white cotton shirt. She was paying. I watched how her tan legs shifted her weight, how her lower back was pushed forward and how she seemed to hover there and yet at the same time seem the clearest and most solidly ingrained figure person there. Rick ambled over, eyeing my severe ogling with interest. He sat down. "She's pretty isn't she?" I nodded. She was turning to leave. Her neck so thin and soft, her features so girlish and yet so full of unknown thoughts. She stood

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between girlhood and womanhood. I stood to watch her depart, hips sauntering, legs rippling, hair floating like those clouds over the whispering moon. Rick bought an apple and we left. The girl was still hanging out with some of her girlfriends by an insect of a black coupe, it looked like a sunglass lens. "I will *never* have a girl like that, I lamented as Rick munched his 50 cent fruit. "I don't know if I'd even want one.... You *know* she wasn't wearing any underclothes?" Rick shrugged. I sighed thinking of how I'd missed the free sex of the 60's and how all the beautiful girls I know, even ones that don't wear underwear, would never, *never* go out with me. "It doesn't matter, man." Rick assured me. His philosophy always seemed to boil down to "it doesn't matter." We share the same sort of shyness around pretty girls, although mine is less intense because I already *know* they won't like me so I figure, "who cares?" Rick will undoubtedly amount to something if he wants to. Maybe someday he'll get together that weird band he's sometimes dreams of. He could write poetry if he could let go of the idea that poetry is ever good.

The Salesman

I can never let myself feel too good. There's something inherently uncomfortable in pure pleasure. Pure pleasure is an instinct that undermines the reason of sorrow. There are those who act happy but are, deep down, sad. I am not one of those people. On the surface I am sad, but in truth I am happy. I cannot seem to fix this or even find a medical opinion to support my knowledge that it *is a disease*. It comes in on a wire like a fix. Modern American teenage junkies — hooked on caffeine, salt and sugar — feed their monkeys with fast food feasts. Just look at any morbidly obese person and tell me food isn't a drug. Teen zombie junkies to television and video games while their parents are hooked on the news and dramadies. Stereo junkies with bleeding ears have to buy the right clothing to express a musical style. Looking good is an important and encouraged addiction. C zit cream comes in finger length tubes at \$5.00 a hit. Pre-prom zit-pocked moon faced girls crack braces-yellow toothy smiles at Arab pharmacy attendants and buy baskets full of tubes and smear the cream thick alla over their faces and pray. It's a fix. It's a fix. "It's not a fix," they tell themselves. They're lying. "This isn't a permanent fix." They know it is a fix. It's basic predatory instinct. All sales revolve around making the product appeal to the user's needs. Cast the bait... "Hey, you *need* this, okay? One ad portentously states: "A flower is perfect beauty.... You, however, could use some work." The salesman will lie, coerce, compel, insult, cajole, condemn, conceal, console, charm, impress, promise, infringe, draw comparisons and predict pleasurable conclusions; in effect: he will do *anything* for The Sale. The salesman exists with one foot up someone's ass and the other wedged firmly in everyone's door. He is as imminent as a fix.

Interlude

Hell. I been everything at every time. I'm not sad that I once posed nude, no sir. I've been everything I could be to the best of my ability in the time I gave to each endeavor. I been a writer, actor, singer, poet. I've published books. I've sung words. Don't tell me what I ought or ought not to do. I've *already* done it all. The wise man on the mountain once said to me, "those who smile all the time tend to have nothing on their mind." I must do what I know is right. I must do what comes next. History is a book I'm writing. Every chapter is a cliff hanger. "Our hero — Just Rightman — clings to the wheel of a car his foot is handcuffed to the gas peddle of. He

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races toward infinite doom. Inevitable peril. *How will our hero escape?! Do not miss next week's episode: 'The Handcuff Key He Kept Hidden In His Pants Pocket For Just Such An Emergency!!'* It's sure to be a thriller. Goodnight, folks."

Sad sax intro. Madman's face at the window. Children crying, babies wailing unnervingly. He is the *Salesman*. He can sell anything. He has sold things no one else can sell, no one could sell, no one else would want to sell. He has sold ice to Eskimos, condoms to necropheliacs, mirrors to lepers, "clean" water to cholera sufferers who choke to death trying to swallow the worm. It is even rumored that he has sold darkness to children afraid of the dark and height to children afraid of heights, not to mention fields to agoraphobes and boxes he bills as beds to claustrophobes. He has sold righteousness to wrongdoers, royalty to the unworthy, riches to the poor and poorness to the rich. After two or three visits from the salesman they begin to need another visit, another product, another fix. It's a fix, it's a fix, it's a fix. "Well, this is quite a fix you've gotten us into, dear," says Tommy the Butcher to his J.A.P. wife. He sweeps his hand dramatically over piles of unopened boxes, some coated in dust and covered in cobwebs, some new with this month's stamps on them. Some vibrant pastel or earth tones, others faded into a dingy beige color and flattened even more by the coat of dust. "Well? What do you have to say for yourself?" He holds his belt, arms bent and pushed forward, foot tapping, awaiting a response. She sits in a laz-e-boy, indian style in the upright seat, leaning forward entranced to the t.v. On the screen a serpent hisses, his tongue slipping around a plastic bottle of blue goo with a label on it in Japanese. At the bottom of the screen a clock ticks away time left to order and up the left side of the screen is a price written in yen and the name of the product written in Japanese. Tommy's wife looks up at him innocently, distractedly, her face lit Kibuki white by the t.v. scream, er, screen. She is disheveled, in a flannel bath robe and bunny slippers. She holds the portable phone in one hand. "I have to have it," she says simple to Tommy. "I have to have it," her voice lapses into a self-occupied mumble as she hits redial and holds the phone to her ear. "Gimme, uh, two," she plays into the phone. "Charge it to my account. Davis. The Davis account number," she fumbles up a long strip of paper she keeps wadded up in her right hand and reads off the long number written thereon. She hangs the phone up. She returns to the t.v. In the background the sound of a shotgun as Tommy kills himself. His wife flicks distractedly at her ear — spiders crawl out, their sanctity disrupted. On the screen the numbers of items sold ticks up steadily, two for every second the clock ticks down one less second. The snake is hissing in Japanese about how this oil is both a floor wax and a desert topping. Evangelists are God's salesmen. They float down in plaid tweed on green wings, bills for feathers, a briefcase full of forgiveness and they tip their halo at the housewife in a house coat, hair strained up in rollers that have long ago taken root, opens the door quietly so as not to wake up their drunk factory working husband who has passed out on their plaid worn foam couch with ripped liner. "Hello," gleams the evangelist with fake teeth made of ivory cut from elephant tusks, "God Loves You." The housewife falls to her knees and begins reaming the tweed angel's ass hole right below the curling piggy tail. "I don't want to drink from this cup," whines Jesus. "Relax," breathes the tweed SalesGod, "it's warrantee'd."

Interlude Two

Tommy lay dead on the floor in a growing puddle of his own blood. He had killed himself with a shotgun and as he died his finger locked, causing the other

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bullet to be expelled into his skull as he fell, the second entering at a different angle. The second bullet exploded as he fell, blowing off the rest of his skull, and he lay there in tatters seeping blood from the gnarled mass of up side down tree roots of veins, nerves and muscles that was once his head and neck. His wife watches t.v. Behind the piles of boxes — unopened merchandise, some of it spoiled and emitting a stench foul enough to hide our man — Agent Tumuzsch crouches, behind some of the oldest, dustiest boxes which were covered in cobwebs and spot mould — moss and small mould plants growing right up like little green islands on the faded pastel blue cardboard oceans. These boxes smelled the worst and masked even powerful Tumuzsch's odor. Tumuzsch crept behind these piles like geometric totems as faceless and anonymous as apartment buildings. He smelled Tommy's J.A.P. wife's presence. His eyelids hung limp like novocained lips, fluttering as he sucked in another air sample into his eye sockets. He smiled. His teeth were bug shells, like beetle's bums in a row hanging through like sucked through the shitter. Each tooth uncurls little crispy legs that it waves around like feeling for something. They are feeling for just the right moment. The legs seize. Tumuzsch pounces and lands like a giant cockroach in Mrs. Davis' lap. She screams, horrified that something has come between her and the t.v. Tumuzsch slaughters her slicing out her her fleshy throat in strings of blood with his dark crab claw fingers. He eats her larynx and pharynx in the falling piles of her junk.

Aside from the futurists and the pastors (the F.s and P.s) there are also the salesmen. They are bugs, some of them, some are humanized lizards, spiders or snakes. All wear tweed plaid and carry briefcases. All are slimy, humanoid in proportion, and have greasy hair. They are as generic as flags or bottlecaps. Each has the same ivory toothed smile — glistening flat squares of incisors. I am an occluded bug, myself, and eat three squares a day and shit them out hip. My plate is full of tweed and my bowel is full of leather. I concern myself with the matters of this earth — the concerns of the F.s, the P.s and salesmen. I read the newspaper everyday in my breakfast nook. I can't bring myself to touch heaven on the t.v. screen where pious salesmen urge me to sell out and save my soul. I try to touch earth reading the pastor's paper — full of deaths, deaths, robberies and rapes, children molested and blah, blah, blah, etc. etc. I lay down the *Daily Epithet* with a sigh and stare blankly at my "Frosted Un-Lucky Sugar Licks" TM and my refabricated prefabricated rehydrated cream of milk germ All Rights Reserved, and I think, "I don't remember buying these." Products come in like junk. They're there for you when you need them. Nothing more reliable than a fix.

The Radio Man

I am the Radio Man. The immaculate sender. My cell — my broadcasting station — my priestly shrine. My solitude is my fortress: mine. I am the radio man. Have you heard my tune? Mine is the one that buzzes at the base of your skull at the head of your spine it creeps. My station is philosophy — to find the limits of the cranial cavern. Expanding and expanding like a cerebral sponge. It's up to you to turn the dial when it's too much. I never surpass my limits because I live in the largest country in the mental world. It's so large — there literally *are* no horizons. *No* borders. I exist in both the physical world of my body and the mental world of my incoming audial signal. Saying goodbye is suicide. Have you heard my tune? Have you tuned in? Do you receive my signal? I ride in the wire like junk to fix your

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broken little hearts by blowing your little minds. The receiver is the deceiver. No converse would be the inverse. I'm commanding psychic launches of the communal shuttle. Rocket no. 9 to take off for the planet Venus! Venus! Venus! Destination Venus! Hear you on the radio. He's coming through on the radio. The tunnelous cavern — enter through the ear hole, wind around in rock poster covered halls and past deserted rooms covered in velvet Elvises and Elvis license plants and sequin studded pants. A light outside an open door says, "ON AIR." "Hey! I love you people! Where were you when I needed you? Where are you now? Huh? Come one. I am *just* asking for help! Can you hear me? I *love* you! Doesn't that mean anything? Here's another song by the droyle astro men and after that the reverend Horton Heat. And fuck you." Three thirty seven in the morning. Darkness bleeds in the corners of my eyes over the unwavering constant fluorescent light like an unblinking gaze — always on me, always on me. Up and on air hours. Broadcasting raw emotion. Without me the human heart would collapse. I am the voice whispering "jump" on the cliff's edge. I am the voice: "a dead youth." "Praise Jesus. And now, it's time for us to give a little love back to God." "Your son is dead." Sun Ra was my motherless father. I was born from his head like Athena from Zeus. I am the wisdom born from insanity. The inbred sun of my father and I is the penultimate: "genius." I broadcast tunelessly. Lifelessly. Baby if you ever wonder, wonder whatever became of me. I'm living on the AIR in SinSinatti. Got kind of tired of packing and unpacking. Town to town, up and down the dial. Maybe you and me were never meant to be — just maybe think of me once in awhile. I am the opposite of the bugs. Instead of receiving sound I can *never* receive. I am the transmitter. The unliving broadcaster. Have you heard my tune? Immaculate sender. I am the radio, man.

The Undone Time

The undone time winding like the sleepy Mississippi, Muddy banks and slow brown water — dixieland creole and sad big band blues fill the air. Gershwin calls up a music loving land. "Good morning heartache" wafts like sea breezes through the Romantic Quarter. The orange sun ripples down like a cantankerous beast settling down to sleep. Saxophone lullabies the sun away, sinking into the brown water still as a sheet, drowning away to usher in the velvet night so silver star spangled. Little black boys in the colored restrooms in the section of town where there aonly were colored restrooms. Not rich but rich in poorness. "Up to the man, up to the man who's the leader of the band..." making fours the hard way from two deuces on river boats — everything still respectfully old fashioned. Doris Day's "Sentimental Journey" hums across the ragtime wires. New Orleans is the heart of American jazz blues. It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing. Swing rag time big band jazz. I've missed my time again. I can see myself as a war time sailor on leave in the red light of Storyville. The blues were a grassy happiness — a celebrating lament. They smiled — "We are all sad here."

Equality

I want to tell you all about pain and death in my head. Faceless monsters pull me cold from warm blankets — teddy bear patterns — and into the light. My pain is the pain of an age [the growing pains of history]. It's the pain of a race [I do not belong to]. The pain of a child. Pain of a nation. Of a ration. A fashion. Fusion. Delusion.

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Illusion. A lie. I lie. Fields around clouds surround a sun as bright as heaven. This is death. Warmth. Beckoning. Sinking like sleep. Death is an experience of the *brain*. The untying of consciousness wound so tight I can be crushed — wrapped like a mummy and buried alive. Buried in life. Suffocate to death under infinite possibility. The all night diner of my mind. To touch to feel to be reached. To see believably. So be it. A flash of faces and all scream, “*Not me!!*” No one touches. No one speaks. Everyone protests for all of us are equal justice is blind and don’t treat me that way you scum bag you drag queen you nobody you you bad man you queer you gay you slut you faggot you you you you you you: Never Me!!! All night patrol at the doughnut shop caught two kids stealing from a bank across the street. “Hey,” [said] the kids, “don’t blame us. Society made us do it.” Here she comes to defend her national rights. “Stop blaming me? Nobody loves me like they did during the WWII era!” The cop, overcome by lust, pushes her to the ground and rapes her frantically. Fade to police station, the youths stripped and sized up by a guard who gazes lustily at them in their 3x5 cell, the key dangling from a ring that hangs around his stiff penis. “You’ve run out of lies now, Officer Mahoney. How do you explain this?” “I’m right and you’re wrong,” grins the officer, nude save for black knee socks and a badge pinned to his right nipple. “Everybody wants their MTV, boys,... maybe it’s time you gave it back.” “Hell, you already strip searched us from ass to tonsils — you still convinced we took the national product, er, pride?” “Well maybe I’d better just do it again, eh, boys?” He bends each over and shines flashlights up their ass holes. Original Boticelli’s hang adjacent to Jackson Pollock and Bill Burroughs paintings. Deep up in the tunnels the real Bobby and Billy couch in shadow. “Do you think he’ll find us, Bobby?” “For our sake I hope not, Billy.” Tonight I’ll dig tunnels to your nightmare room. Love and concurrence blood clots and insurance. Pedal to the floor — get anywhere. Psychic boomerang is metachemical solution — infusion of delusion. Night time mare anxious to leave the gate, hoofing the slush in a syringe. Motion lights scalpel dark concealment. Inside dad rises alarmed, wraps his fingers around his shotgun and surveys from the window. Fear grips the groin of suburbia. Cruel coal cuts on arms and legs bleed grape jelly. You-not-me is American equality. Do the pop heads and Archies get more from school or rock music? To equalize unbalance one must suppress the accentuated factor. Due to American greediness we accentuate our greed; our greed must be suppressed for our equality.

The Writer

“I am the sun and air of a silence that grips every voter. Im the son and heir to... nothing in particular. I am human and I need to be loved... just like everybody else.” I have begun sending bits of my skin. First the skin on my cock and my hands — husked off like tire peels in interstate gutters. Whisked away like a bird learning flight. I am now so alone I am disintegrating. At one point I had achieved absolute zero. Now I suck energy from people within my private range. Radius — 1 mile. An open range where cattle roam in blue collar herds. The Smiths sing “How soon is Now” from the center — the peak of my cone.... I absorb energy from my working cattle as I increase into the reach of negative numbers just beyond zero. The center of my field of vision burns into a huge hole like burning film on a silver screen a hole seems huge as a home — beyond is the negative. Beyond the nothing. I am pulled in willingly, flying in zero G. Space — starless black void — the negative of all color, the no light darkness of the void. A vacuum. It sucks at Christians and businessmen in the theatre who still think they are watching a movie and yet *feel* the pull like an

urge to jump. “Jump,” I call — a faint whisper in their minds like music down a windy alley. The dark no light void drips through in negative space fields all over our cosmos. We see only the darkness and we *feel* the pull. Penny lingerie stores. We recognize, as males, vaginas as holes — and exhibit and inherent fear of them we call lust. A rush of guilt as we obey the voice saying “jump.” I am the sender on constant recharge — sending and receiving at an even rate — a bathtub filling at a rate equal or, harumph, rather, that is, congruent to and such, harumph, as it is draining. Never achieving but always reaching just the same. I am a member of the unknown knowing. In fact I’m, uh, I’m the uh, I’m the president of that organization. The American vernacular. If you are ever described as pertaining to it or shaping it... kill yourself. It’s Lady Liberty’s *main vein*. I see her bound and gagged, naked legs up behind ass hands neck and feet tied behind back. Everybody’s been blind before. Everybody knows the pain. Looked upon by elders with disdain. Every adult’s an alien when you’re an alien babe. The changeling of my brain. I see nothing short of global upheaval on the mass narc scale SWAT teams of multinational task agents rush in with guns leveled and blow way boxes of cheerios nobody remembers buying. “Ah, cheerios. My favorite,” drool the zombies. Faithful as Bassets. Silence is awkward and encourages a feeling of guilt. SWAT team break in, sit down, and watch the people accusatorially, saying nothing. Purple: the color of royalty and delusions, not to mention delusions of royalty. Things never change in suburbia. Everything is always the same — green mowed lawns, white picket fences, American flags on the fourth of July.... Boredom is mold made. Air pressure squares up and a storm curls like a pillow case full of pythons. Lightning licks down and the air is buzzing with the electric smell of ions in action. A mouth full of razors and slit eyes like blue toilet bowels full of drain-o, white teeth a glistening grid of good hygiene, a wide smile shows them like prize ribbons, blonde hair bunched on top of a head filled with sugar plum visions. Girls flock to his face like moths to a search light. Opposite a room I skulk. Back hunched to indicate deformity dormant perhaps in the body, but malignant in the mind. Black wraps around my body thick and close, bangs loosely over a severe face, a bush of hair like a job for Eli Whitney. I scribble furiously and self-contained, jealous of the attention golden boy is getting, but at the same time aware that I shoot down that kind of attention like a duck hunt when it comes near me. I am the outcast. The undone. The broadcast. The bug. I am the untouchable. A black heap with eyes that sulk back inside my skull like two white, firm gripping knuckles. I am the ass hole of flight. The unloved unloving night. I see the greed locked twat in a tower with no doors and only one window. I shuff off those who would be near me and begin to scale the wall. I must achieve the greed. It is that which I need. I need my need. I see her. I leap in. The chamber is dark. Light bleeds in. I dwell *here*. In this heart. I kill her and discard her. This is my true greed. Now I am the unachievable. No one can make me surface. Lost in my own desertion. Have I left the world so soon? My sentences occlude. Mine are life sentences. They tell of living — a sport I never partook of before my spontaneous disappearance. No one can find me. No one can find the invisible man. I see the emperor. He is naked. I see them all. They are all naked. They are all naked to me. God, the sunset opens up doors with arched peaks on the clay arabesque model. In this city it is always sunset. The earth occludes the sun in its rotation. Red evening maddens me to self surgical salvation. Sets of solid colors wall me in. Full of luck my mind flows from topic to topic. Cancer. The topic of cancer. Mine is the smell of the swill — the brine of the buy. I sell my sleep like tawdry fluff, like so much junky stuff, to the demon in my pen. All my friends are fuel in the end. [Like dinosaur skeletons.] I consume them. I consume them. I occlude them in their shadows. Twill and tundra tired tire rubber. Illiteracy

rates rise as more people realize that know one no's how to read by the numbers. I don't need hallucinations when I've got my own paranoid visions and truth is always hard to find in this, the off season. Blue beauty back to the roots. Lights make me sleepy. The new technology is devised during hallucinations. Science fictionists are pot heads. The pot heads birth baby boomers birth pot heads. It spin cycles from square to hip in generations. We always think we are members of the *hip* generation, that it will be our generation to put things right, and with each generation we leave the world more and more screwed. The collective I.Q. of suburbia has succumbed to such a level that we've left our marbles in a "child proof" container... and now no one can get them out! We blame the Japanese for making shinier, more effective marbles because we are resentful we can't get to ours. We feel stupid, but we buy their marbles anyway, thinking, "I wouldn't have to do this if it weren't for these modern 'time saving' devices." The fancier and more time saving the device, the more it is our vice. A million people *must* be having sex right this instant. How incredible. Who says baseball is the national pass time? The people reading this (and me writing this! *he he!*) are the outsiders looking in. The extradited. Self-exiles. We must all put this foolishness down right now and rush out and have sex with someone! . . . Well, those of you left still reading this are doubtless saying, "well in the age of plastic relationships where are you going to find a consenting partner?" Well your doubt is very real, friends, as there are very few consenting partners left in the world. In the 60's there were thousands of consenting *participants*, in the 70's it slipped back to consenting partners, in the 80's the one-night stand was glamorized and part-time partners were a dime a dozen. Now it is the nineties, and those of us tired of "abusing ourselves" would like to know — where are the creatures of the opposite sex like minded to us? Where can we find our very own consenting partners? Anyone interested in exploring sex in an open environment should write me. [People who would describe themselves as deviants and all sex-based industries should naturally exclude themselves.] Life comes crawling back to me like a quadriplegic veteran in a wheel chair, struts cuffed to its arm nubs so it can move at all.... *Wish* I was something.... *Wish* I was *something*.... You need something.... *Wish* I was something.... Something you needed.... *Wish* I was something.... who needed you. I burn bridges so I won't have to look back. I always know what's behind me because it's something I made. The communication breach between writer and reader is that it takes alot longer to write something than it does to read — therefore things can slip by the reader who skims across the page on an eye ship fueled by short attention. You're not listening now. And why am I talking? Who am I talking to? My notebook? Where goes my mind? It goes. Goodbye.

The Righteous Teacher and The Wicked Priest

And I have read His Good Book through twice and it makes no more sense to me than it did when I was a babe reading them through as true myths of miracles. And then He spoke to me and He touched me and I touched Him and He pushed and rushed His way through me pumping and swearing and I spilled His teachings out the front of me like liquid crystal wisdom on the silkworms creation. Just because He's Wicked doesn't mean He was a *false* prophet. It is my opinion hat Jesus must have done Allah his teaching before the age of 18 because everything He did was so rebellious like donning the priestly vestments and so on [like healing Romans and harlots and eating with them] and drinking that mickey finn sponge on the cross and "I thirst" and all that get two forensic pathologists in there we'll tell ya what Christ ate for the

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Last Breakfast, because when ya get to be about 18 the adult in ya starts wakin' up and the child starts goin' to sleep. Jesus was a child pure and sure through and through and His Way was two faced same as all religion at the time and to this day, on the surface all was miracles and magic and morals and all this was for the kiddies, and then teen Jews learned the Péshah and studied the exact history sans miracles. And now all our churches are established glorifying the miracles and not the man, defining Godliness while denying humanity. All our modern religions are children — trying to teach morals or miracles and we know nothing of the history or the fact or even the truth because we haven't the péshah, truth is we haven't the patience, but for our romantic solution's sake we'll stick to the grail of religious deciphering — the bible's Rosetta stone — the péshah. Now those who are all ready to grow up and are tired of the mysticism of this man who has turned white and blonde haired and, quite frankly, aryan, through our bigotry and jealousy and feelings of inadequacy, well now those who are ready to grow up wish to seek the péshah in a crusade. "We need church police!" they cry down a windy alley to the deaf ear of a priest. "We need the myths patrolled and the truth enforced! We need equality! We need justice to our beliefs and our truths because what we believe is the truth. The truth is the heart of the matter all tangled in lies but we demand to be shown the Man, naked, stripped of all imposed titles — as he was in life! We cannot believe there are two kinds of truth — the true facts of the case, and the truth of how it is seen — how the truth is perceived by different witnesses. There are books of Abraham, Martin and John, Books of Tom, Dick and Harry, but they are all witnesses. Their truth is *their* truth. There is no book written by Jesus himself and therefore everything written about Him is a distorted reflection of His Truth. There is truth about Jesus save the Truth of Jesus. And there is none recorded. We demand satisfaction! We care not what is said is said! We want to know what was *said*! We demand an absolute Jesus with all other faces stripped!" "You can't please everybody," sighs the vestment. "Some will never be satisfied with the myths and miracles, but, y'know, oh well. Y'know? 'Sorry.'"

World Music

The infant lay sleeping in the cradle. His parents smiled down at him from above; haloes of light ring their heads from the lamp behind them. To see believably. Their aura of happiness — goodness — trust, caring. Their gleam of truth and hope. A million miles away, on an island off the coast of France, in a forrest, a bard plays the lute and sings, his voice aged and constant as a granite cliff face. White hairs hang in a thin veil to catch light and illuminate his face — his silhouette — his presence. He sings of joy, unadulterated, pure in its simplicity and free from the content of purpose. His song cries softly like an owl — crying for times lost to his youth, merry times of rejoicing in a world wholly safe and holy to him. He plucks melancholy at the strings and tells his story which is the story of the aged — a story of remorse — regret — remembrance. His life is the life of everyone, the life of Icarus, the life of the arrow shot toward the sun and dragged back down to earth *just* as it was beginning to warm up. The gravity of time, the gravity of life, the melancholy of age, these are all ours as humans to try to come to terms with in our own lives and in the lives of those we love. His is the languageless no-word voice of all the members of all cultures of all the world. A chatter and a croon. He is joined by men and women everywhere, who look up from their serving in war time factories or from their beds where they perform beautiful acts of joy and goodness. They sing in a crinkling crow call and the drums — the palpitating pulse of the heart at the core of the earth —

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rise with their excitement. Writing style used to change from generation to generation, letters morphed and mutated into new letters. With the invention of the printing press our Greaco-Roman print was cemented, like a moment frozen in time, a picture captured in the press of Johannes Guttenberg. We never form letters new now. We are only that which we were made and now imitate like students. The goal of the good student is to please the teacher. Those who are persona non grata become street lepers, their minds put second to the good student. There is no love in formality. We drive away our neighbors with fear. Further and further we self isolate. Communities of paranoids. Suburbia full of seized lungs and nervous hearts too numb to feel. If you were the old bard what would you say? Things that make us laugh are sad. We should cry. We should be crying all the time. Our laughter has been lost. So long alone the babe laid to rest in a glowing cradle, warm by the glowing ember of affection his glowing parents held to him. We are all that baby grown up and gone cold our own ember not enough to save us from a fall back into earth called growing old.

Random Insert:
Artistic License

Art is not literature! Art is insane, and quite rightly so! "Ars gratia artis" is the modern equivalent of a joke. Ha, ha. The commercials laugh last, and therefore best. Art is organic, chaotic, sporadic, and never dwells in one style. Art cannot be confined by the philosophical description police, literature cops that try to graph with word programs the insane organic globular nebulae of unknown darkness in a fractal pattern. Art is not Nietzschean nor Dadaist nor even done any semblance of justice by these words. Literature may stay long winded illustration or specified number of points, but art will never be tied down by the morals or meanings of words. Art is anarchic! Art is Dionysus! Art is not literature! Art is free!

At the Scene

"Sir, we just a call, a murdered youth, sounds pretty bad, we investigate, yes?" The sarge sips serenely at his cup of java, "no hurry, padre, amigo, Paco. A dead youth goes nowhere." He licks his lips with a tongue fringed like a sea slug. His eyes glaze over.... Two hours later they investigate the scene. Paco opens the door from under which blood has seeped soaking the hall carpet. Creak of the hinges, stench of death in a gust like a whiff of the transportable gravesite. Posters, radio, tv, bookcases, computer... a typical youth's room. Everything is covered in blood. Blood drips from the ceiling and stains the entire carpeted floor. Flies buzz hungrily from feast to feast. The dead youth lies unrecognizable on the bed, split from neck to nuts, ribs cracked and forced open like a safe. His head slumps limply, skinned, bleeding in a constant slick, mouth broken agape, teeth shattered, eyes hanging widely in stretched sockets. He has been hollowed out — his organs sit in low piles around the bed like pink, red and mauve lumps of cowflop. Steam rises from the heaps of disembowelment. The window has been shattered through as if somebody jumped through while the youth slept and it seems he was taken more or less by surprise, the first wound a deep slash of the throat severing the throat itself as well as the two carotid arteries, the jugulars, which have been stretched out like two slimy catheter tubes and lay limp, dangling from the gash. His genitals are severed and a meaty red

slash replaces them in his hairy crotch. His clothes and the sheet covering him have been cut to tatters and ripped to reveal him. "CHRIST," Paco quickly takes off his cop hat and chokes into it vomiting huge thick mouthfuls. "Easy there, boy," the sarge pats him on the convulsing shoulder, "I seen worse." He begins to tell Paco of one particular instance but Paco fleas belching frothing brown foam from the mouth. He slams the bathroom door behind him. Behind the sarge are the youth's parents, a mildly old man, short, a little pudgy, skin the foreign color of baby shit, holds his sobbing wife who is invisible within his arms save for a quivering sweater. The father looks up at the sarge with tears in his own eyes, "he was a *good* boy, a good boy; why would somebody do this to him?" His wife blubbers muffled in his chest. "Who knows? I've seen people killed over gambling disputes, robberies turned awry, marital tussles,... was your son seeing anyone?" "No (sob) Rickey would have told us... we had such high hopes for him. We —" "Well you should never rule out a relationship he kept secret that somehow turned stale." "Are you saying a *girl* did this to him?" "Oh, heavens no. I'm just saying he may have had a lover you weren't aware of who became resentful, jealous maybe..." "He would have told us if he was seeing a girl." "In certain situations Mr. Anonymous, kids will lie to even their parents. Is your son a virgin?" "He — yes." "Did he play with himself?" "W - what does that have to do with anything?" "Sir, I'm trying to investigate a possible murder — I need to follow up all the text book leads alleviating accidental suicide. One of those is 'did he masturbate to death?' Sir, did your son masturbate?" "Y - yes, I guess. Who doesn't at that age?" The sarge makes a mark in his notepad. "How hard does your son laugh?" "What? How does that —" "Look, I have to follow up all leads. Does your son laugh hard?" "What would you determine as hard detective?" The sarge lets forth a great, full bellow, "A-HA, HA, HA, HA, HA, HA!" "Um, no, he never laughed that hard." The detective makes a mark in his notepad. Paco walks back in slowly, looking around placidly. "Paco," the sarge says, "call in to the station. Tell 'em we need forensics, criminologists, and coroners over here, A-SAP." "Right." Paco uses the radio attached to his shirt collar and goes back out down the hallway. The sarge lifts his notepad back up. "Where were we?" he looks at the man. His wife looks up. "I can't take this any more," she chokes. He holds her tight and tears rise to his own eyes. "We tried so hard to have a son," he tells the sarge in a cracking voice, tears running down his cheeks, "we tried and tried. On the day Rickey was born we were so happy. He was our last chance..." He hangs his head by his wife's and cries unabashedly. "I understand," the sarge pats him on the shoulder. "Look, you don't need to be here for all of this; why don't you and your wife go sit down for a while. You're both pretty strung out. Just go sit and relax and we'll take care of everything." "Thank you," the father chokes and wanders off with his wife clutched to him. "Jeez, I thought those damn wops would never leave." The sarge lights up a cuban cigar clipping the butt and letting it fall carelessly on the blood soaked floor. He walks in to look around. The carpet squishes every step he takes. He lifts a couple pamphlets of stapled paper which appear to be stories. They are completely blood soaked on the top and clean as a whistle underneath. "Harumph," the sarge chuckled tipping ashes onto the stories now blood bathed. "Guess we can rule out suicide." Paco stepped in and the sarge turned his large body to face him. "They're on their way," Paco gulped, eyeing everything, blood everywhere, his stomach flip flopping. "Do you need anything else?" he coughed into his fist. "No — and *don't* worry, Paco. Think of it as... a human taco exploded in a microwave." Paco rushes off again to wretch into the toilet and the sarge chuckles silently to himself. Well, he had all the evidence he needed. It was an open and shut case of masturbating to death. Tragic.

The Book Tour

Nothing to say of the general disinterest. My hallucinations are wild enough without you interjecting sentence fragments. And of the general disinterest. Fleas hang on to whatever smells the worst... I can't account for taste. What of the law suit brought against you by this, this "Enrico" chap? I guess I could have put a disclaimer. Something like... "No Characters In This Work Are Meant To Parallel Real People." It's, um, it's a lampoon... no one is meant to be presented in a realistic manner... it's a, uh, a fictional autobiography, if you will. Well, now, how can something like what you've described your work as be classified. I'm not aware of any classification for "fictional autobiographies." Apparently the people have classified it as shit, crap, waste material, etc. etc. What's important to me, um, opposite to the accusations of Enrico and his father, is that it is something I *had* to do. I... I published it... I don't know why. I didn't think of it as selling out at the time... maybe... I just wanted to hold a book I'd written in my hands. Look at what I'd accomplished.... kinda vain, huh? And of the accusations of Enrico and, er, and his father...? Anything to say about the failure of his own book similar to yours — a compilation of his writings?... Because our case is still in court, the, uh, the jury is still out and all, I don't feel legally sound making any comment one way or the other about Enrico and his father's, uh, claims. At this time. Do you feel Enrico would have filed the charges had he not been urged by his father...?...uh, Enrico's opinion is more or less synonymous with his father's... I don't think it matters so much what he originally thought as what he thinks *now*... if he thinks he's pursuing something worthwhile... making accusations... uh, putting blame where blame is due. With Enrico that's always been like pin the tail on the donkey. I think, while his father is more concerned with any slandering of mine to Enrico in regards to the poor sales of Enrico's book, entitled, 'the sellout'... I think Enrico's complaint is more with whatever emotional misfortune has befallen him after publication, um, I mean, y'know, my friends or acquaintances having read both books and, generally sharing a like sentiment for Enrico... Y'see Enrico moved from New York, he never did really fit in... he tried too hard... I've said too much already. Once again we are talking to John Cooper, if you wish to call in our phone lines will now be opened and we will be taking your calls... uh, right... Cairo, Georgia, go ahead... yeah, John? Yeah, so are you Jewish? In Enrico's book his character 'Joe' (that's the one supposed to be you, right?) his character 'Joe' is Jewish. I was just wondering about that. Well, thank you for reading my book, I hope you liked it. I, uh, wrote just what I was thinking. As I was writing. And, no, I'm not Jewish. Enrico misunderstood, I once told him I went to a Jewish preschool and he wasn't really listening, so, y'know. Next caller, Springfield, Kansas. Hello? Hello? You're on the air with John Cooper, do you have a question? Mr. Cooper, can you hear me? Yes, I can hear you just fine, perhaps you should turn your tv set down, Ms. Mr. Cooper? I was wondering about your book... why are there so many misspellings? Well, as I said earlier, I was writing what I was thinking at the time. Since you think... you hear yourself thinking, then sometimes it's just hard to make them real on paper in front of your eyes. I pushed them through editing because I wanted to keep everything true to the book. Next caller, Little Rock, Arkansas. Mr. Cooper? Yes? I read your book, I really liked it... I was wondering, Enrico, er, in Enrico's book his character 'Joe' is a, uh, a 'pot head.' I was wondering if you were a 'pot head.' He's also a 'Jim Morrison wannabe.' Is this how you would describe yourself? Harumph. No. No it *definitely* is not. In fact I'm a little insulted at not only the name calling in Enrico's book but also the simplicity of intent. Something like that is obviously said to invoke some kind of response. Um,

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sorry, in, um, in answer to your question, no I am not a pot head. I have never smoked grass nor done any kind of drugs. I've never drunk any alcohol. In that respect I guess I'm pretty square. Pertaining to your second question... no, I would not call myself a, chuckle, a 'Jim Morrison wannabe.' At one time I found his lifestyle interesting, even romantic. I strongly appreciated and identified with his actions. I never, however, wanted to *be* Jim Morrison. I don't know where Enrico concocted this fantasy. Next caller, Massachusetts; Boston, Massachusetts. Go ahead. Yes, Mr. Cooper? Yes? What do you think of Enrico after all this? I mean, how would you describe him? Hmmm. Well, again, legally I think it is best to not say anything. I can tell you what kind of person Enrico is and hope he doesn't get his feelings hurt by it. Enrico is the kinda guy who would (and has) read a poem and tell you what you meant by it, what you should have said and all, and then turn right around and accuse you of being, harumph, 'a housing complex of portentousness' or something inane like that. He recognizes that he has annoying traits but seems unwilling to take any steps to rectify them. And I say this in no way meaning to slander Enrico or his '*very fine*' work. 'Selling Out' is, in many critics words, 'a quaint sleeper hit sure to entertain readers for hours.' I don't doubt the critics ability to review nor do I doubt Enrico's ability to persevere regardless of all his flaws and his life's setbacks. He once said to me, 'I just let things roll right off me.' I'm sure this is a practice too ingrained to cease. Well, we've been talking to John Cooper, next week we have

The Grand Accusator

According to some we all act out inadvertently what we internalize most secretly. A particular reaction to an accusation might intone fear that the accusation is true. Also, that which we most frequently persecute in others is that which we most strongly persecute and repress in our own personalities. In essence, that which we find most annoying in others is that which we find most annoying in ourselves. Those who accuse, are those who fear accusation. Those who stand accused shall stand so until they allow themselves to step down. They can never accuse back, can never point a finger at the accusers. One cannot eat the other. One is eaten by the next, and the next is eaten by the next. All accusers eat downwards toward the accused and are eaten from above by more accusers. A driver curses at the car ahead of him and is subjected to a battery of instructions from his "bask seat driver" children. Each car blames the car in front until the wreck is reached. The flaw of man's accusatory logic is that — if each car blames the next blames the next — nothing can be accomplished save bickering. If everyone is blamed, not just the one person next to them; if everyone united to blame the cause of the dilemma — the wreck itself... but people are, by nature, individual and not communal. The logical, indeed, the ultimate extension of the communal blame system is the holocaust, or, perhaps, helter skelter. Whether or not the Jews, other religions in general, or blacks, or other races in general, are in fact the wreck that deserves to be the brunt of everyone's mass blame, this is the option presented by recent history. I'm not suggesting we reinvent the holocaust or engage in helter skelter, nor am I in any way encouraging either of the two as they are extremes and must be left to their extremist practitioners. I am merely saying that communal blame is more constructive, meaning more *destructive*, as blame is as blame does, than individual blame. All accusers are eaten by superior accusers. All these accusers are eaten by still more superior accusers. Surely one must be able to find the monarch, the dictator of accusation that is the apex of the food chain... the Grand Accusator.

Part Two: An Appointment

Sky a charcoal tapestry behind glittering towers of business Babylon. One company devouring, absorbing or destroying smaller companies. Megalomaniacal executives playing chess with the huge buildings. The last remaining American corporate king had self-righteously proclaimed himself Jesus. No one knows if its caused by stress of managing it or thrill of possessing it, but power of this magnitude kills. During a particularly heated negotiation with another foreign megalocompany, one executive's head, swelled quite disgustingly with pride and bloated self opinion, simply exploded, coating conferants in sickly yellow green brain matter. His body stumbled for a few days, still officially head of the company (somebody's idea of a joke, this!), shaking hands and closing deals. Finally it expired from loss of blood during a trip to the head (again, somebody's idea of a sick joke). I lean heavily against a lamp post, soaked through in the sorry street by the drizzling of atomic rain. My leather eye patch itches. I fumble with a halfhearted predetermined failure at lighting a cigarette. It sogs between my fingers like a limp dick. I stick it in my mouth anyway just for the feel. It's not a real fix, but it's a decent replica. I watch two camel jockeys wrapped in blue turbans and sheik robes, whatever you call them, long spears, glowing red eyes. Sandled sickly brown feet splash through puddles. They splash by me slushing like to blue sponges. I look back at the movie star across the street. A pink sequin dress wrapped tightly around her whale bloated sac of a body. A tall gaunt chauffeur holds the door and an umbrella for her. Her long sleek black limo oozes onto the road like a skink, cresting up a wave of run off that coats me, soaking me to the skin. My already soaked cigarette becomes water logged and pulls apart leaving a nub in my mouth. "Shit," I growl, looking down at it floating like a lone white log in an ankle deep gray lake. Reflection of something blue. I look up and a clawed set of knuckles backs harshly into my throat. I gag and wheeze fumbling blindly for my shocker. Something immense hits my head with a sickening sound of a melon dropped into an inch of water from the second story. Blue electronic fireflies swarm my darkened squinting vision. I slump to the ground in a dog beat mess. Warm dampness of my blood in my hair. Starts as a tingling chill of warmth — then roots into a throb and my squinted gaze runs mauve. The second throb rides in the wake of its predecessor and carries deeper. I can feel it in my eyes and my gums, and right directly above my ears. It's too much. I slump forward with a heavy splash, puddle water pooling into my parted mouth. I pass unconscious. I wake up from a dewey odorous dream to the wet lipped closeness of the dark opium den. It's so dim, almost pitch. I can see a row of Arab schmucks in front of me in fezzes and in white suits sucking groggily like uneasy sleep nursing on tubes that are drowned into darkness behind them where the thick of it is a feeling of dust. Another like row of corpses like queers sits behind me. I can only see down to their white wastes. Dim blue light seeps in like the tide bleeding a translucent blue aura around the room, deepening its previously cave-like proportions, lengthening the table and warping, twisting it like a bent road that disappears into one huge lumpy dark mountain. The mountain rumbles like thunder in a belching yet eloquent tone, "Welcome, Mr. Smith We've been expecting you anxiously." The leeches suck and kiss vigorously to show enthusiasm, yet their drooping dead eyes still loll languidly, listlessly, unliving, unfeeling. "Who are you? Why did you bring me here?" My voice seems shrill, small next to the guttural groan of the mountain that makes my stomach shake. "Oh, we've been watching you for a while, Mr. Smith... We like you... We think you would like us if you got to know us. We did you a favor when we had our agent Tumuzsch kill your wife of 10 years after she ran out on you. He didn't have to kill her new friend,

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by: Jonathan Barlow Gee

Tommy the Butcher, as he had auto-terminated, unable to cope with her.” “My wife ran off with a barber, not a butcher,” I have to scream to be heard. I sound like a gnat. “A barber, a butcher... what’s their difference? A clip here, a snip there, not too much off the top. And afterall, is a butcher’s work not truly barbarous?” “I love my wife. Why do you call it a favor that you killed her?” “Don’t be so foolish, Mr. Smith, you are among friends. You can confess that by the time she left you, you knew that your wife was not, by any means, a human... no, your wife was an agent for *the opposition*, Mr. Smith, Mr. Smith, Mr. Smith...” His voice floats in dreamily like a distant drum or a rumbling car down a windy alley. It’s a voice I don’t hear so much as feel. Suddenly everything becomes clear. The buzz in the base of my skull, the tingle of my flesh, his ominous and unreal deep voice. He’s been communicating telepathically. I begin running on the surface of the table... it gleans out from under my feet like I’m running on a ball or a wheel. I can get nowhere. My feet, legs slump fold wasted. Suddenly the table lurches forward and I slump back. The fezzed arabs sucking tubes whirl by like teeth on a chainsaw past me on both sides. I am being pulled toward the mountain. It is a huge insect fezzed silhouette, tubes dangling and running from tits, cock and ass and teeth and the table is his curved and meandering serpent tongue. Suck suck suck. His maw a void of a hole tunnel. Float on gravity less wings of pull like drifting in an ettying undertow. His millions of eyes all different colors each lolling and droopily looking at different forms of nothing at all. In a low hum in my cerebellum he glosses over quaint pleasantries of explanation — Tumuzsch is a contracted free agent of the free zone drolled in with promises of more; the Great Beast before me is the Grand Accusator born and raised in the slums like myself and he knew nothing save want and so he absorbs others in a bug need to find the divine fix; how bugs get fried nightly; how they all learn his way ever since a bathroom meeting with the diva of broadcasting; he says his name is Sam; I must think quick...

Club Convergence

Down by the docks where the black water claps like thick oil against mired wooden poles, barnacle encrusted and creaky with waterlogged age. Every so often a fish flops up onto the roadside at an overpass or onto the dock. Zone fish are the only fish in the world known to suicide. A light shimmer of rain like impressionist air currents flailing in torment clear blood spraying from Van Gogh’s ear... it was a cold dark night... from across the bay you could see the refuse of the trash dump / artificial peninsula gleaming a dull brown the color of a rusty mold. It formed part of the vomitous horizon now, lit dimly by the huge corporate buildings that cutlered the curve of the bay, their disgusting dim white light reflected in the black thick waters rippled and distorted by waves... one light shown on the junk-lip of the bay where trash built a wave brake... the collective underbelly of society congregated here like a sad eyed church lit stark neon blue under the pale half light of the high society columns looming like mighty, luminescent pillars. A stale dank barnacle encrusted dive like a dung beetle’s dark mound, a can, a joint, a den, a haven, a trap, a sanctuary... for every one of its cock roach patrons it had different significance, yet a significance still, and they scuttle slowly like drunk down here nightly to drink and puke and drink again with repulsive fellows they thought of as friends. This was the club convergence. The mongrels pulling up wasted from the chase to slop communally at the trough. The lowest of the lowly found this place — a dank, sticky, smoke filled dive — and yet they thought of it as fondly as if their own mother ran the

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all night bar. The service was poor, the glasses dust thick with sea grime, here were cockroaches, cuttlefish, sand fleas and sea vermin in the kegs, the clientele was swarthy, there were no janitors or other mop-toting employees as such — just sitting down in one of the booths gave you a thick black layer of soot or grime unidentifiable and that could not be cleaned out. Patrons showed easily recognizable with blackened clothes and hair, smudges on their faces, some of the newer clientele, wary of the reputation of the establishment, toting their own mugs with a shy embarrassed half-smile that says simply, “sorry... sorry...” to the rag toting bartender whose beady eyes hunker like rabid bugs under a thick bush of a uni-brow. I step one ragged foot in the door and the feeling of the place us up my leg and in my spine and my hackles bristle. A black mold has already grown on my shoe. My deepened eyes cover every client’s size and possible speed... just in case. It could just be the salty sea air wafting like morning breath up through the creaky floor beams through which I see dank waves like stagnant toilet slosh. I amble over and sit on one of the stools, the one made from an octopus hardened with starch turpentine two parts the bar’s scotch. “Gimme a scotch (no ice),” I mumble to the hunchback across the bar.

Our Passion Masked Technology

Sweet scent of undead nursery graves dying as surely as a baby’s cry... the cruel indetermination of the gun, the cold absolutist’s resolution of the knife; the flesh petal blooming of the virgin silent rose, a million starburst intents unspoken in its blooming and the blooming of its betrothed; the cruel dim blue liquid light as some twenty million Americans get junked, tonight a thousand bugs are fried. Who has offered us this cup in whose contents we see the world? We must never leave the house nor never cease drinking this clear quite stark yet buzzing blue opium, neon blood of the father dangling limply from the road sign... father, you’ve given me this cup but I don’t want to drink from it... those wise eyed now dying few we called fools, quite sincere, quite dear, quite near must return to us our past lost welfare. The loom of larceny, the doom of our arseny now must be brought to bear. A luminous cross of wires and neon tubes like bottled electric screams, buzzing like a dying fly. Such a tragedy and of such a tragic world, the spectral jeweled eye is glossed over with a sweep of blue light. Another bug is fried, another soul learned to fly, another angel in another couch dies. Truly, Father, are angels’ wings as gentle as flies’ wings, are angels’ eyes as sentinel as flies’ eyes? Are we safe? Are we protected? Are our angels on the payroll? To be bought and sold? Are our heads on the block? Another sacred stranger slips unawares into another crowded town. Is he another of your servants? Another of your sacred messengers? Is he to come to me or I to him? Of the pirates pirate make strong galley, make ample cage, set sail pirate’s flag and deserts of ocean and strong winds towards Galilee. Adam’s eye grown helplessly red as he eats... are your fruits our fruits? The tree of knowledge, the spine, an apple is a jewel of a mind. Communal enrapture in the great plug — we are all one we are all one. The idea of the martyred mind dates back to the apple and we weaken our thoughts in submissive penance. And now a moment of silence for lost thought. Last thought run out — a microscope makes short work of the hourglass shaped junk cells. The virus name is Péshah. creeps in on sugar, caffeine — mostly uppers. Antidote is symptomatic cure with downers chocolate, salt, dairy — things to suppress surge. Heat pumps like a starry orgasm through the body in every hot vein like a sweet sweet contained explosion. Up stimulated and hot desirous, must grab that which is close and

incorporate — a book, a remote, a lamp. Must be one with something must be one with you. Meanings like a cloudy day occlude and assemble, the new word is absorbed and fills the body with satisfaction. The cure leaves you weighted waterlogged and wanting, spend the day times watching the ceiling, fall asleep and dream of feeling, soon you are the occluded and are absorbed into the environment, a permanent fixture in your mental future. What would the old dead warriors do? Sleep and eat and suck the motions, meaningless as the meat is now asleep at the wheel. Spears to the ground you sickeningly make yourselves prostrate before the God. He comes to you, oh, as a wolf angel, your sick spirit his meal. He howls at the good lumpy feast you make. Bleeding into like blood in the rain an insane disdain for those of the clothed mask. Longing for lost days to incest intercept and therefore insipid insatiable lies. Ravens must eat our eyes. Slowly, slowly, the spirit rises in a vapor from the cup... close as sweat in a darkened room the vapor wisps around your brain like a desert veil. We are all to become sands beneath the feet of our children's children's children's children. I can trace my line as far back as King David, St. Salomé, St. Solomon, wise of the tongue. Now a vague haze like a description of a memory rather than a memory, oblique — hazy still as smog sets in. We are all of the mad way and absorbed of the enormous way of the sane. Ours is a path of hot coals; of fire and semen and sudden realized reason. Now our minds are out of season, grown sour on pesticides of opium vapour. On this night a million bugs will be fried. On this night a million bugs will be fried. On this night our sanctity died. And He wandered into the desert and was tempted and was tried. He fell for our sins and lays His angel head on the knee of Our Father. He died for our sins. It was He who was tempted and tried in the deserts of Galilee. We sailed on soft sands blindly flying black sails. Blind of our own pirate sails. Sweet greed of power, lust, family and friends. Ours is the serpent of two tongues hissing in two heads. This is our way and in our minds, we must be vigilant for forty days and forty nights. Slip into a sweet womb a hollow earth of garden lush cool breezes and of undone flower petals opened like the arms of two million homes more beautiful than silk, each the promise of warm comfort and mother's milk. The land of milk and honey, the land of milk and honey, the land of milk and honey. Look up from the dream to see the cup it wavers in, shyly wanted. Like a lovely fountain water a misty mystic opaque opal like a crystal that holds a piece of the sky or a tear run from the Madonna's eye. Your circle unbroken, the world is unspoken and stagnant on your lips, eating with desire at your tongue tip. Father? I seek council? Who has offered us this cup in whose contents I see the world? No fire nor serpent. No sound and the white dunes surround under a black blue sky of starless clouds. Suddenly you feel very alone. Deserted by your father and your father's father's father's father's father upon whose sands you track. You look down into the cup and a thin blue apparition, a cloud of vapor, a silent spirit rises up. Your insect eyes are scanned: you are one of a million tonight. The vapor... Satan...?

C.C. (cont.)

“And I’m supposed to be glad you showed up here beggin’ drinks offa me right you sorry native fuck? How about a little I.D. so’s I knows you ain’t a fed or da fuzz or some screw from the dept. of health? Or at least a little cash up front to make my job interesting *and* profitable?” He glowers at me, the second head of hair on his heavy hump bristling with intent. Just for fun I put down a deuce and he doesn’t bat his eye but simply scoops up the crumpled faded pink paper bill, pockets it in his apron and in the same move swipes up a particularly grime coated glass from right beside a

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clean one. He sets me down a full mug of scotch and I eye the black coated glass and then him as he eyes me and my drink. It is a challenge. I grip the mug in my gauzed burned hand and feel the thin fuzz of algae wisp against my palm. I raise it to my callused lips, toast him with a cocky grin and throw back the entire mug in one long guzzle. I slam the mug back down on the old ship's plank bar where it immediately takes root and grows a coat of barnacles. I feel every eye in the place on me. Silence of awkward interruption, words lingering like unspoken clouds in the ether, cards suspended in mid-shuffle. I turn around slowly to them all. I cannot engage them physically, but I am not going to be gang raped psychologically. My lips split into a truly hideous smile. All time comes unglued and they all return to their own distractions, each a world more pleasant than my grinning countenance. One by one I secrete myself into their minds like a forgotten remembrance. Who knows who in here and where do I find 'em? I throw back scotch after scotch hour after hour as I sit there wandering within them. One man they all know... every last swarthy one of them... a lowlife crime surgeon. He'd taken bullets out of almost all of them and had sewed up knife wounds for the rest. He'd saved all their lives at one time or another and they all owed him a deep debt. None of them exactly remember going to him... none remember where he is or how they had found him. Some had continued to frequent his office in shadowy un-memories [the way kept changing] for recurring problems or to manage a drug fix through him. He had scored half of them in dramatic and swirling junk kick recollections dark and dank as a blistering tumor thoughts color of a bruise. Some he traded for secrets, others paid him outright, some junkies were taken in as agents reporting back on fix appointments, some he bartered homosexual acts out of. He owned all of these low lives in one way or another, was robbing their consciousness with black mail, extortion, sex, drugs, debits, promises, stitches and rubbing alcohol wet dreams. His face was long, shadowy, under a big shiny disk on a headband... a diploma of medical science hung on his wall. Although none of the riffraff called him by name, his diploma was signed "Calypso."

Nothing At All

The chronic jerk off junky, he can get off on almost anything, but he can't get off his monkey. Lying sleepless scorpion stung still and seeing how everything pervades invasion and salvation are all one. He/She lies back wearily, dark rings around eyes from crying or ejaculating from overdose of aloneness, the state of the world on their shoulders. Junk doesn't start outside the body where it's then injected in... no... it starts in the body... the need for more and the recognition of too much all one and the same... it needs junk so you feed it and it eats you because it's never fully fed and you can't feed it fast enough. Time slows to a snails crawl the time lapsed flower blooming as you watch and the pantopon rose swallows you in tiny lips one for each pore each reaming out your pores to leave you with... to leave you with... you with... nothing... leaves you with scar tissue... mental and physical like a hardened shell of skin a protective epidermal layer a thick flesh coat outside is junk winter of the nuclear dawn the Alaskan night of consciousness where ice gathers on all movement is slowed to a snails crawl the time lapsed flower blooming as you watch and the pantopon rose swallows in tiny lips one for each pore each reaming out your pores to leave you with... to leave you with... to leave... you... with... no... thing... you look down with dark ringed eyes at your body segmenting and coated in black hairs like moss algae fungus lichen and you see through the skin of your eyelids that you

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[illegible]

One Pirate Mangles Versatile Realms

Like the mosquito, the needle will always find a vein. Thinner and thinner until you seem to *segment*, your stomach nothing, your elbows and shoulders nothing, the skeleton pushing through into the exoskeleton glistening in bug-like brilliance in the shimmering bug light blue dawn. Red clouds smear the arc of the sky like bloodshot semen. And the sniper sneers coolly... calmly displaced like a wall eye watching nothing... the sniper is the long distance alien surgeon cutting ruthlessly in a world of blood fountains so hard to see and so hard to hear from the thunder... emotionally distant from a bell tower or a book depository... no close kills... no hands... only extensions of eyes... bug eyes on stalks see the prey as subject... murder as surgery.... blood dirty... ribs crack open like a rusty gate... a cold, remote slaughter of the mind and the heart... the nervous system numbs like a fluorescent cut bleeds, oh, so drool, oh so sweet as caramel carnal bathroom lust of the absentee. "Just, uh,... just think of it as practice, for, y'know, for the real thing. Like rehearsal... look... you just... yeah... yeah, like that..." the touch is so far removed from the feeling that the feeling is amputated... what's left is the ghost image of the feeling... a sense memory... a numb buzz like an electron sensation... a distant electric excitement like anticipation... happy anticipation of sexual adventure is the same as the apprehension of dying... girls born living in heart covered rooms learning obsessive love, guys shy and lonely as the albatross seeking any sanctity, this the living death... the loving death... mind and heart shot through with numb... love projected from the bell tower or a book depository... like a hollow broadcast on an unconscious wire... love and hate seep in numb like junk, salt granules slink behind brush strokes of the masters hanging in cold museums like dying mausoleums... the erosion is inherent... as preconceived as prebirth warmth... as imminent as cold death... as reliable as a fix... must recharge the un-charge of the sniper's smile... all is un... everything is undone in time... in time we are undone... but time never

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unravels... never becomes unspun on the spindle pulling us along with clock hands, pulling us along on jissom umbilical chords goo strings and tears pulling out like gum pulling out like gum pulling out like gum... tears last so long they drool out pulling time along like a slug's trail... ssssssssssssoooooooooo sssssssssllllllllloooooooooowwwwwwwww...

part 2: NET

The snails foot oozes back into its shell it is death it is the American life. American boys get fried flipping channels pushing reaction time and the coiled worm portion of the brain previously occupied by attention span. Enter the NET. Falling like a broadside axe to engulf the willing in an information hurricane picking up a little Dorothy and Toto and dropping them in OZ. On the net the freaks and the lepers in the ocular alcoves of the gray soil come out to play. Words while like dervishes in a swirl of conceptions. Naked little boys sit at home hunting peckers; on the net they are old girls out to have deep cunt fucky sucky with Japanese businessmen in New York offices who get the sweats and their palms tremble. The net is release for the repressed. A balance for the inert incest. The net personality comes through like an underwater volcano to obsess, oppress, invest, investigate incest, explore, deplore, abhor, mate, relate, expediate (what is he just reading from the dictionary? It's more than just that Mom!) The net persona is as impatient to be liberated as the aroused erogenous organs. It crashes through conversations reducing words to abbreviations. Impatience types the keys that set the animal free. Formalities are uprooted making way for the freak. The freak sits at home typing (writing is different than speaking because writing takes longer so thoughts may be more eloquently phrased for additionally profound resonance. Typing is just the extended way of writing. The voice of your thoughts, urgently gesturing its exasperation at this comically unfunny situation, turns to huddled confined pacing and its furious lunatic prisoner ravings are captured dimly through the words as it searches through old files for the appropriate vocabulary pushed and prodded as it is by the crazy need to express as best as possible. The feverish patchwork of the mind stammers through the lips or fingertips and becomes a frozen photo captured like a lion in the trap of time which possesses and encages every word it finds. This frozen fire of flaming desire pushed like puking through the writing has and is accused of ranting like an infant's temper tantrum. Well, the confident creator has prepared for this outcome and he turns the word into a name for his writings, or should I say his jissom, for all writing is come. So we rant we writers rant and until our final chant we must write and speak as on-line freaks, America we must rant!) and his passion strokes his feelings and emotion burns the screen and he finds that he has come upon a girl he's like to meet, so instead of wasting precious time painstakingly typing clichéd lines like "hello, how are you, how's the weather, oh really, well here too," he types simply in a frantic fit, "I'm Zaarkon, let's screw." So the newly mets find a no access room and register as "the Smiths" and they type, "I move my hand to grip your breast," and breathless get their fix. In the future the outside world, the skin world, will wither away. All colors will fade to gray. The cyber world of the tomorrow today, the world of the eyes and the brain, will be the only way. Like that Isaac Asimov story, "the Garden" or "the Walk" or something where one old guy gets another old guy to come out and take a walk in the garden; see they live in these automated units and they never go out because the outside is patrolled; well the two men walk and talk and are caught by a patrol that kills the man who wanted to walk but the other, his reluctant friend,

opens up the man-driven patrol to find it empty and in the end it is he who goes out nightly walking in the garden. Well, we don't need to go outside, there won't be an outside. The geezers will groan in tones so old and slow that dust gathers on their lips and tongues as they swallow flies and house spiders that die of old age, saying, "well now, sonny. What's this new technology?" the impatient impetuous young and the inert immobile old share a symbiosis of annoyance. The old turn into turtles, blind with squinting eyes and grinning with huge false teeth, and drive shermin tanks of luxury creatures down the super highways, eating prunes and tooling at a cool 12 m.p.h. one in each lane, speeds matched, cruise controls synchronized, blocking millions of impotent angry commuters that swarm by in insect hordes glowering and grimacing at the source of their traffic problem... age. Well the young inherit the world and the reset all the switches making it a comfortable car to drive in for themselves and when they grow old they give the car to their children who reset all the switches making it a comfortable car for them to drive in. In this way technology is absorbed, cyber cars internalize the switches so the young don't even have to protest when they act the way they want they can just hop on the net and misbehave. The net is the sniper's gun, aimed from some remote mental emotional repressed aspect in the persona and aimed aimed at some other sniper in their tower in the festive fetish costume. In the future there is one small room. Gray floor, gray wooden walls, gray ceiling. A gray window frame shows a brick wall. A gray door leads to a gray nowhere of unimportance. The gray citizen crouches in the corner of his gray apartment quivering and looking at the Black Dragon in the middle of his gray world. The black ring and VR helmet and glove look back at him. He cries at how he is identityless, how he cannot even speak out loud because he never learned the art; he cries at how he apes humanity. Inside the VR experience is the world. Malls, commissaries, parks, jobs, homes, lives. You look however you want, you act however you want. Also in the VR world waits Big Brother. That's when the cyberspace will patrolled. When its the president slipping into that helmet and not just some cyber junky plugging in a fantasized contact fix fucking Marilyn Monroe or Cindy Crawford or Mary Jane Rottencrotch on some ocular super vein dosed on pixels. When the government has guards in the lobby, when there are taxes on cyber-objects bought in net malls, then "the man" is actually an ominous yet very real threat; that is the time Big Brother has come. Copped in on the chopper of the remote control with the Japanese VR manufacturers and the mind guerillas pumping left and right wing theories full of holes with [information] guns called shockers. That's when the American flag will wave only on the flat chest of the tv screen as many stars as there are pixels, one for every citizen, every registered citizen of course, as all those who don't get stamped and bar coded are the *unregistered* and are slaughtered by the roaming mechanized (only for the dehuman icon recog.) monsters called brain harvesters that slice and dice to gray rice the cerebellums of the "head lice" leaving their numb real bodies "on ice" (brain fried drooling comatose veggies cleaned up by the "messies" and replaced by a cy-baby with a circuit spine and VR eyes [VRi's]) All the on-line freaks, pirates, anarchists, poet terrorists and revolutionaries have to find another safe haven for their innuendo and libido, some place not policed. The net used to be a free net, not patrolled and restricted by the new constitution. Time used to be believable but now they campaign that real time is a lie. Where is there left to hide? We've already tourized (terrorized) the mind, planting condo's on our psychic shore (shear) lines letting rapist tourists roam the disneyland of the temple of our psyche. We all get cerebral overload and our noses bleed. All our real orifices have occluded save the eyes through which we absorb nutrients, excrete waste, hear sound and even converse. Did you know that all

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that could be accomplished through the eyes? I don't know how they do it... I'm crouched in a bell tower gripping my shock rifle, my only friend. Its one eye reminds me of ole mama and the days slopping the synth pigs which we "slaughtered," rather switched off, and sent to feed the Japanese scientists building an easier world for us so we wouldn't have to worry about so many switches. In my mind everything goes metric as I shatter like a stop watch freezing time like a broken record, like a feedback loop. I shoulder my rifle and fry eight citizens in the blue mist of T.U.R. dawn Red clouds smear the arc of the sky like bloodshot semen. My exoskeleton glistens sharply. This is the remote slaughter. The harvester comes near, blades of teeth to sheer. I slip the helmet off painfully ripping the chords out that have grown past my eyes through my eye sockets into my brain. I write furiously in mute dialect. I can hear the words I furiously scribble but I cannot voice them. My voice has become mute with verbal ignorance. Inside there are two. The sentinels and the snipers. Both have nothing. Both want more. The one's nothing is the other's more. The one's more is the other's nothing. They type furious battles for the switches that ease their discomfort. Plugging in is mental jerking off. An escape from nothing to nothing. One removed can never feel as real as one entrenched, but can observe objectively.

part 3: Zone

All the new technology was gleaned from sci.fi. fantasy; all the new technology is the result of hallucination. All the new technology is dreamed and contrived, invented wildly and sporadically unbeknownst to the creators. One hand never knows what the other is inventing. The mind box... at first merely iconized by a wooden box with a golden hinge... now a full interactive world as real as a dream to the mind. A safe outlet for subconscious urges. Ejaculate into the box in freak posture. Always keep Pandora's box locked. Always behave well externally and internalize any upsetting or unsettling ideas or emotions such as, oh, say, angst. Public principle #K9207 (Kay-nine-two-oh-seven, sir). Personal rules include: "share only the pertinent. Don't commercialize. Don't capitalize." "I can easily see you becoming everything you *rile* against," the words fall off the tongue in a whining hum of a future upstanding statistic. A reject's reject. A freak's freak. His body is too much. He files suit against my files. Freak's freaks congregate in outlands of the net ("the zone" in common meat mouth movements. The zone is achieved by entering the net via plugging in your wet ware or by achieving drug induced trans-euphoria in which state the zone is considered a limbo of the mental essence.) places like club convergence under the electronic empire of the moon (Islam Inc.) or the cross roads out past the last exit achievable only by transnet organic bus or plane. Personal rule: "don't commute. Also, don't commit unless you want to be committed." Lisa Angstrom, the synth hussy whore who puked at sight of me when I trailed "old blue thighs," Francis Sinatra, and Cinnamon the red eyed lizard cross bred bartender both report carded me that they've no further info. on Sam the Sham. I've been unsuccessful at tracking the real Dr. "Giggles" McCoy, wife of Sam McCoy, alias Cheshire Sam, alias Cheshire Calliope, alias Dr. Calypso alias P. Shaffer, alias Tommy the barbarous butcher who stole Lyn my wife of ten years, alias Officer Mahoney, alias the Righteous Teacher whose followers were called the Sons of Light or the Cult of the Way and whose enemies were called the Sons of Darkness, alias Mr. Anonymous whose son is Enrico, alias Tumuzsch, alias Bobby. The good dr. managed to give me her slip in a warehouse in the shadow of the dong district of Washington D.C. alias New Tokyo, alias Chinatown, etc. etc. I woke up in a world of shit but with a broad

smile strapped on because the synth bitch had left me alive. Quickly this turned to a frown when I slowly came to the dreadful realization, the synth bitch had left me alive. I forgot the headache popping flower dew pills chased by scotch no ice. I quickly got back on the trail and checked my resources. Another couple of hours wasted. I sleep not for my country but for its people. They've all been strained. These times have been trying on all of us. In the gray junk morning I'll awake with a cough to my sore dark ringed eyes...

part 4: Mouth

Psychological warfare on the social scale, words are weapons surely as M-16's, bibles or pens (anything that changes the way you think of something can be utilized for terrorism), two person conflicts break out in the market. Art becomes social relief, aesthetic release of tensions policed. Art like "the Scream" is screened for hidden meaning and if péshah is explicit or elicit the art is subject to receipt. The angry man shuffles in, hands thrust into pockets, head lowered, expression a fixated glower. The market is behind him through the arched doorways, the museum lies coolly like a hospital ward before him, wide, tall, immense sense of space and depth, cold and silent. He has come to view today's patients. His penny loafers click clack across the marble hall to a particularly colorless painting hung over a bench beside a large sculptured potted fir. He scrutinizes the black lines, the gray zones overlapping in a tapestry of repressed agony. "It does not depict a scene to which I can attach meaningful significance," he thinks in a flat mechanical monotone. He click clacks across the cold marble to another painting similarly hung — over a bench beside a stylized fir. This painting, an El Greco of Toledo, shows dark clouds behind the church. "What is this supposed to mean?" the man defies snidely, "the angst of man in a confined society?" He sneers uninterestedly, fiddling his "diddle" through his pocket. "All a Jew wants to do is 'diddle' a Christian girl," his father used to remark. He click clacks back across the ward to a Michaelangelo from the Sistine Chapel. "Ah," his Italian blood boils, "now this is a painting with real significance! A scene depicting Adam and Eve in the garden — something representing a well known verse of the Bible to which I can refer to deduce the exact meaning of the work. Finally, a painting I have a translation book for interpretation! God bless Michaelangelo!" he cries, stroking his huge Italian hard on with nimble fingers. Michaelangelo's hang in elevators to the sound of numbing muzak. Nobody notices if the ride takes a little longer than necessary. The music dulls sense of time, numbs the mind. This is art that numbs the mind. Without the desire to interpret, art is a lost form of cave scrawled symbols. Feeble fools envious of true artists who breathe both meaning and image, take on the burden of creative crusader. Uninterested in the meaning and name the artist attached to his work, they destroy any art that is for sale. "They shouldn't sell art if they're not selling out," they say, "he should have gotten a second job if it really meant something. There is no meaning if the artist prospers..." they urinate on Jackson Pollacks, they take down and excrete on El Greco and they ignorantly defile Van Gogh. "Wait! Van Gogh never made any money selling paintings his whole life! His work had feeling, it had meaning. Sigh, he used to throw the paint on the canvas with a knife and carve the painting out. And besides, if he didn't have feeling, if there is no meaning, how can you explain different styles? Like the expressionism [sic] of starry night?" "Starry Night?" fart the art police, "Starry Night? Harumph. Never *heard* of *that* one, sonny." "How can you conceivably condemn a culture you feign any understanding of?" "Son, understanding's not our department; if it was *real* art that everybody understood

already... Hell, they wouldn't have called *us!*" They draw a huge goatee and upturned mustache on the "Nude Descending a Staircase" and treat likewise Liechtenstein, Warhol, Picasso, Pollack and a few paintings by Bill Lee. "How would you feel if you had painted one of those just to have your thoughts belittled by the ignorant?" "Feel? *Feel?* Harumph. Can't say as I've *heard* of *that* one, sonny." they snicker and put coffee rings on Kenneth Patchens. They behave like flunkies, real drop outs and failures of a culture... and yet they are here to make sure we don't fuck up. I'm getting a blind leading the blind vibe from all this. In the numb world the citizen is lovingly stamped and coded, caringly issued a number to use in any further transactions with the market or the government. "how nice how goooooood," some say, "that they would take that trouble for us," "well it's not like they're hanging on a cross or something," "well, you know what I mean we should appreciate what they do for us," "yeah, sure, whatever." The rebellious youth movement matures into amour fou and various like minded supporters of ontological anarchy, gains more members like old beat generation poets, bearded grateful hippies, and mildly conservative grads of gen. x. Supporters flock like Nazis to rallies demonstrations of power and such. The sentinel vs. the sniper. Grand scale unknown warfare in city alleys and museum wings razed for art monopolizing, art sabotage acts bursting out like zits. Snipers perform alien hits. Denizens of fear and squares on both sides I am the only true man. Yes I am. Both use words as weapons, huge quote outs spin doctored into an obscurity of meaning, a zone of a zone, the outer reaches of definition like grasping at straws. Everything is questioned into this twilight zone of dead or missing intents, an in-tent city like a campground, in each tent is one thermos, one sandwich, one sleeping bag and one brain. They are so separated spatially from their original destination and so secluded from the subconscious social city that they soon starve into brain death from lack of thought supply. Democratic diplomatic bureaucratic forced horseshit. Rules regulations and resource allocations permit like all citizens are children who need discipline. The discipline comes in on the police wire, Rodney King brutally beaten, OJ Simpson's home burglarized by over zealous dicks, the LAPD are the royal guard, righteousness their king, absolute control their queen. The police are communists. Their clubs and words all propaganda. "The wops are, by nature, Catholic. It is the religion of their father land. The wops and the kikes don't get along. The only dialogue between the wop pope and the king kike is 'you did too kill him.' 'Did not.' 'Did too.'" They seed gray soil with crime fear, drug fear, sex disease fear. Frightened citizens break out in fearful arguments in the market. Who's packing, who's a fudge packer, etc. Word wars break out like zits on a coward. The sentinels chuckle, "peace? Peace, huh? Harumph. Have you ever heard of it Paco?" "Sure haven't, sarge." "Well no one here seems to know what you're talking about, sonny. Try down at the *looney bin* where they keeps your senile ole granny. Haw haw haw haw..." the snipers A.S. on both sides, paranoid killing of the extension of the unconscious mind, liberated (exiled) to in-tent camps in solitary psyche Soviet Siberia. Respect is the excuse of the loveless. "I don't like you, but I respect you." Fear is respect. Respect is... meaningless. Like art it has slowly but surely declined into the realm of the zone's zones. To be never reached. Truth never again gaveled in as a star witness. Slowly time unravels as the bible becomes the gavel. Courtroom conflicts break out between the wop pope and the kike king over meanings of the scriptures while Jesus shyly twiddles and toys with his péshah, and God clacks the good book violently on the bench demanding "order in the court of the Lord thy God!" Sparks are touched off and trouble is ignited in the dealings of the market between the court and the museum (neither one more antiquated than the other). The word war erupts as Arab boys chase American queer

tourists pressuring the buy. The sales rape is perfectly legal even encouraged in the market place where snipers in the bell tower take careful aim at horse cops permeating the crowd with paranoia. Words are the bones of the social beast to uproot communication would be to leave the people as boneless as the boneless PD sold out segmented skinless snipers Benedict Arnold over to the PD zone police are either exclusively boneless (wordless, stoic) or exclusively skinless (exoskeletons glistening in the bug blue dawn). The Tweed Sisters have occluded to the Other Side. There's art and then there's cash. The Tweeds sell out dangling all nude collecting tips in their huge cunts. Milk is for the pussy. Do you dare me to sit in the cat's milk tray? Do you dare me? She hugged me her face laid against my shoulder firm yet gentle. Don't jerk off any more without me. Another story of the eye. What is seen, perceived and recalled. The word war is between art and cash. Between one country and another. Between the Catholics and the Jews. Between the snipers and the sentinels. The result is in the outer reaches out past the last exist in psychic Siberia in the hand of an assassin monk in a mountain monastery. The Man of the Mountain. We must all pilgrimage to his temple. We must all pioneer his mind. 'Till there's nothing native left; all immigrants of thought. The policed mind. The military trained mind. Training on their couches for the word war.

The Military Trained Mind

The military trained head. The military trained mind. The smile is the face of war. The disembodied sniper. The truly ignorant, the uninformed, are in general, the generals of accusation. They command respect. They command discipline. They discipline their disciples. Their disciples are all apostles. Their apostles are our parents. Communiqués come in distant waves, tsunamis run to ripples, age shows through like cancerous tumors of benign love called respect called discipline. The closet faeries are the guys who *like* the disciple deep down. They get hard on's for their drill instructing parents and dream of the day when it will be them quoting the bible and barehanded slapping the bare buttocks of their own children. Someday these hand around cock spanked military boys *will* thank their parents for this. Discipline is just like any other form of food. If it's too raw the recipient will choke; if it's too much, or too quickly fed, the recipient will vomit it all in an animal vent and be left with a square one hunger; if the meal is perfectly cooked and perfectly served it will be gobbled up like love and leave the subject with only a nagging stomach pang and the feeling of forgotten something. Just as to a drill instructor all sentences must begin and end with, "Sir," in discipline it all begins and ends with accusation. All labeling is accusation. Even being called good is being accused of goodness. Generally we only resent labels when we disagree with them. However all labels are part of discipline. Goodness is a stock, love a commodity, truth formality. Being labeled "bad" at the beginning of discipline implants the subject's desire to change, in order to please the instructor, the discipliner, the accuser, whatever. He then accomplishes a series of goals through which he relearns values, preferences, morals and the like. At the end the newly trained military subject is labeled "good." It is all quite simple. Marine dog trainers teach our boys in green new tricks like "fetch," "roll over," "covert op.'s," "sit," "seek and destroy," and other fine tactical maneuvers. The closet queers come out p. whipped and tough as the straight jacketed boys. They've all forgotten fishin' with good ole dad and erect nipple wet dreams of Mary Jane Rottencrotch. In their heads now, in their minds now is a deep resentment and many fine tactical maneuvers. Now they desire to and are trained to kill. Theirs is

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the sloppy, hands on kill. The face to face, rifle to rifle, combat situation kill. Nothing like the kill of the sniper or the dr. Nothing so impersonal. The military kill is the whites of the eyes kill, sometimes gooks go down begging, sometimes they fall with fire in their eyes and a gook curse on their tongues. Clip a souvenir. The killers are invaders in foreign lands. Mind marines invade your countries' capitals. They re-discipline your mind. First the state must appoint you a hazard appointment with the drill doctor. He tests you for homosexuality and then injects a syringe full of bio-micro-mechanic-organic-isms — the marines... the mind marines.

Calling Only Dead Especially Secrets

Slowly... slowly the ass hole... *occludes*... slowly the need to purge is sealed like the tomb of Lazarus... resurrection in reverse... what once was dead return to death... the phalluses stab the city, pulsing ejaculating sin into the dirt and when we eat the dirt we eat the city's sins. Blowing gently in the breezes... I'm your eyes while you're away... I'm your way... you're my shame... the shame of the organic cities... everything exists in two realms... the skin world of body without organs... the mind world of astral communion on the net... the key from world to the other, each orbiting like sister moons in the limitless sky... Péshah... code... vision shift from the external to the internal... from the organic to the mental... DNA a code... electronic lock sequence run down like a spine is a code... nervous system the organic doorway... control of the nerves is control of the organism... controlled like Pinnochio... strings a code... nerves a code... certain ones triggered in certain situations to elicit certain responses... writing the nerves puppeteered to form words with the fingers... each chop of the pen a brush stroke... each letter an image of a symbol of an image of an interpretation each a silhouette lit back by intent... meaning... letters a code... words a code... sentences a code... double nihilism all... look... see... believe... "military trained mind"... "MT Mind"... empty mind... that is me... a double meaning... a mirror held up when I look into the future... a mirror held up when I look into the past... entrapped in the infinite hallway of mirrors of mirrors of me as far as I can hope to see... ripples in time... this is the TAZ-mania... crave autonomous freedom of self... the infinite self in all directions is your condemned freedom... the psychic isolation of the sender... the projecting radio man... the prayer and all turn toward the mosque... this is the code... the code is me... a mirror code... must look at what the reflections represent to translate... must self decimate... pick apart like scavenger at the carcass in the mirror... the péshah is my knife... cut through the rubbery veins and taut muscles slice through bone like butter and marrow like a worm cut clean... choice cuts gone and the psychic surgeon of a bug exoskeleton wielding secret... what is of... what?... to see believably one must learn belief through scrutiny... my code... a mirror code... what is behind this code?... what does my code indicate... my code... mirror code... mesmerizing cold... millions cajole... mirror code... behind me... who is there... the vacuum of the mind box?... Sam... who's the real McCoy?

pt. 2: Denouncing Nocturnal Atrophy (stranded)

Atrophy like sleep towards he never of dream... Eden confused with the organic external... never opened myself this way... now nothing else matters... touch the cold mirror... flesh just beyond... naked to the marrow... no collage or coat of many colors... I sing the national anthem... I sing... I sing the body electric... the

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sheep falls fake to the mechanical disorder... it coughs and sputters... in the end it is so much junk... I dream the dreams of the everyman... I dream... I dream the harvester of man... spectral... beyond the fire... beyond my borders... no thoughts disordered... perimeter patrolled... view reviewed... virtually real... concepts not yet introduced to reality... now aliens kill every day, life under noted comfort held... quite dear... it feeds my gut... it grows like a worm inside my kidney... it flows forced back from my known seed like held by a clear cage like a mirror of the invisible unknown knowledge itself as clear and present as danger and yet nothing to touch... behind the secret is the dead... self drained raw as weak killed calling all back... the dead walk the dead walk now they must walk home to the door of the tomb... before OTEKTYW, KDE, KDE... the ends are their beginnings... KDE (Katie) of the dead still calm as the sea rippled by living waves of misery... behind my code, behind my code... EYD, EYD (eyed, eyed)... eye died... I died... letters recombinant as colors... the prison of the known... any of the any... péshah injected in long slow strokes... beyond the beyond... zone of the zone's zone... buried in a subbasement of a subbasement... of a... subbasement... my heart is in a box... my mind... is in... a box... is... in... a... box... my... finger prints not... my... own... haven't come through yet, Mr. Cooper but you know what they say right, "someday my prints will come?" Right HAHAAAAHA Yes of course whatever I'll wait 'till they clear customs and be on my way away what was that oh nothing sorry to disturb you ticket claimer I'll find my own way out... one mirror is decoded into unreality of the train depot scene... my mind turns inside out... down a rabbit's opened ass hole through his pancreas... I must tell you... a hookah smoking caterpillar has given me the call... I am the caged jaguar... code collapse, net fall (night fall like hawk call across moonlit mounds like copulating sheeted bodies ripple in vibration people in motion) dogs in heat hump the electric grid wire making sitar sounds against yips and electrical sparks... who is that behind me in the mirror... see him there in the future and the past... and the future and the past... in his box... is in his box... is in his box... is in his box... is in his box... same as me... same as me... same as me... same as me... same as me... I can no longer clearly write what is real as I have lost all sense of reality into the pulsing thought machine of the transaction codices of the Mayan mind s mine is mine and I must reap the eye harvest...

Virtual Omni Informational Distress

Slip a plug into a knotted muscle plexus to relieve tension. Plugs have become barbed little acupuncture needles. Three pronged as a third eye dawn. Awakening from a tiresome sleepless night in the enclave. Uncomfortable little shelf where the claustrophobic sweat and the desperately lonely ejaculate onto a ceiling two inches from their nose. Dreams of back home girls gone to other enclaves. You see, true sex is permitted only to the castrated or clitoradectomized, who have no sexual urges... two gay men touch in the lavatory and are instantly vaporized by a patrol camera equipt with lasers for discipline. The lasers are triggered by increased pheromones released when libido is stimulated. I avoid the bathroom and shit and piss in my uncomfortable little shelf hoping to bone a section 6 out of the drill instructor. He reams my ass clean and assigns me to personally sanitize the head which contains twelve toilets, none enclosed in stalls, and none of which flush. I am literally in a world of shit. The zone contains no bathrooms which are not set up in this manner. At least not in the belly of the beast. I hear in the upper city where the skyscrapers stretch like glass highways into the distance every man got his own personal can all

to himself. All to himself. The zone crouches like a huge beetle about to pounce. The underbelly of the city is a hive of enclaves and a subterranean market. The residents of the U.B. are like moles — eyes white as milky semen accustomed to see the darkness. Many undertakers, grave diggers, worm guides, and pimps all born here. The rest are worthless to society. Minor cogs and gears working in the subterranean fusion factory that powers the city. On the beetle's back are the working class shits, some dug up from the bug's innards, most inherited their father's jobs as proto-citizens in preconception semen discipline labs where every semen is painstakingly enhanced with morals and values sacred to the future "humans." Stabbing into the beetle like pins and knives are all the skyscrapers reaching to the unknown depths of ??? These buildings cut grid like ginsu across the blue dawn house the holy — the capitalists, the commercialists, the popes and dons that monopolize the U.B. and the back of our fair city, the private no-access country clubs of big business as distant as a sniper's touch. The bay hangs under them and the trash peninsula, the refuse depot — destination of all the garbage in the land. Docks are where the sailors come in and mingle with zone's diverse cultures (the zone literally *is* a skin culture). The suburbs, called Suburbia, ring the city like ripples like the canals of Atlantis growing green lawns like lichen where the tv dictates from the tops of the giant towers gives you the lay of the land, our country 'tis sweet land of liberty, boys on bikes and dads mowing lawns. Boonies, lowlands, back counties and oakies fester like bubbling puss at the edge of the scab called Suburbia. Out past them the hills, lowlands, cacti, ghost towns of the desert. Out past the last exit nobody knows... dragons... Indians... surely gruesome death of some kind. All in all the zone is good for terrorism, sex diseases, perversion, bigotry... you see, everyone in the zone is a freak... oh, sure, every now and then space bubbles open like a huge zit or a tumor full of promises of anarchy and freedom for all, something most tax paying residents would enjoy as the only permitted voters in the zone are purebred human (even when the horse Mr. Ed ran for office with a Nixon mask on they quickly chalked up some quote unquote scandal, heh, heh, uh... to, uh, to get him out of their stables, you know what I mean, eh, heh, heh, uh...). These spatial blisters pop up wherever possible, pushing aside the fabric of "reality," houses, strip joints, other "people" and such, like so much latex rubber, stretched but not broken, you know what I mean? eh, heh, heh, uh... See no matter how much alcohol filled acid rain they can make from up their in the glass cigars, in the chrome plated mother earth fucking peters, it's never enough to really cleanse the grime that's polluting them underneath. However frequently these anarchy zits pop up, "temporary autonomous zones" they proclaim in 1920's print on pirate flags, sooner or later a state fed harvester comes and pops them and drains all the rebellious pus. The poetic terrorists sabotage radio stations and broadcast angst, they stage coups to blow up the foundations of the skyscrapers, some as large as Rhode Island, attempting to fell the steel monarchs like huge lumber. Every thinking person is kept in constant communication by state embryo implanted receiving radio transmitters in their cerebral cortex and tiny microphone transmitters in one of their molars. Touch is out of reach. Everyone enjoys their anonymous lives in the zone as termites enjoy being drones... slow sludge lightning like a solar flare forced slow with sheer power like a train of energy... monopoly on the queen bee position... mine is missionary... limp... a bug... flicks roll off my tongue... shaved like a lawnmower shag rug... her blue breasts pert just blooming like flesh flowers soft as a rose peddle (NO POT NAP ESOR) her mysterious fur box never revealed like the beautiful fuzz Bermuda Triangle... just one touch my flesh would peel back unneeded fall in a silk (slick) pile on the floor... do jet rolls through her back hole, a mauve throat down to the unknown never... I

lost her because I was a fool... now all I have is this bottle of rot gut in a soggy paper bag as I trundle through deserted midnight streets as the storm pounds down on my bent back... turn pasty face to the sky and the rain pelts down like stilettos, needles into the palette of scar tissue... I rub my eye patch off to show the milky yellow pale lamp of occlusion what was once a normal left eye... throw my arms raggy and high... embrace the night as she comes down in tears to my level... spills of splashing rot gut on my face so appropriate gut rots before and after consumption and that my fifth bottle... tossed aside into the ether... I stand in a puddle beneath a street light crying up at the dark rumbling sky she sends down tears to me from heaven... I stick my black tongue out to taste one... As stiff and as stale as scotch... my wet hair mats and dangles in strings all over my skull stark as bone... lower myself shoulder creaking back into their slumped whipped socket hole... LIFE!!... pop my patch back on my thick overcoat and waterlogged sagging hat... night hugs me with a cold, heartless, impatient expectant embrace, her flesh cold and clammy, even her breath cold as museum breeze with faint stench of garbage and death... junky death garbaged to the grave... smell of myself... Lyn is gone, whatever her name is, she is the Word of God in the form of a woman, without name or any true form she slips enigmatic in and out of little boys wearing masks of their mothers just as a tease and she visits a million little boys leaving visions of sugar pumps in their minds and a sex hot smile on their little boy lips... she loves all sex in all... she is sex... embodied in shadowy secretion of liquid darkness wrapped slick as velvet India ink tapestry wound around. I saw the bullet push slowly through her skin just above her left eyebrow. Her flesh pursed like a belly button mouthing open to swallow the metal missile. Her muscles rippled outward from it on first impact and one mention of blood clouded out like an afterthought in a painting. Her eye rolled up like some huge bowling ball to see the wound. It opened up and spread as the bullet slid in like a stubby cock into a gaping maw. It disappeared into the red mouth which then puked blood, actually puckering like lips kissing with the black splash undertow of the swallow, vacuum following the bullet's butt into the hole flapping the skin lips into a kiss... blood fountained forth in a huge column, which was comparatively the size of a red thread of yarn splashing out like an insect tongue. Her eyes rolled hugely the rest of the way up revealing the soft jissom white undersides of her beautiful ocular orbs like crystal balls. Her head lolled back in a slow jerk, neck muscles pulling one at a time like a bunch of ropes, the mast of her shoulder bones heaving too and her breasts pulling along like full sails behind; her arms limp trailing along loose chords, her fingers relaxed as she eased back as slow as thunder. Her lips parted slightly and her hair blushed after her flowing like anemone down into the fall. She was sinking further and further away from me my slow clumsy hands groped up like scarecrow stutters to try and catch her. She ended in a hideous slumped pile in my arms, her hair spilling like dry water over my numb flesh, her eyes as stiff and cold as two marble balls sunk into her sockets, her luscious, soft flowery lips parted slightly and one drip of blood dripping from the corner of her mouth onto her chest in a dry wetness a bodied tear of blood oil from necessity. The tiny wound above her left eye ringed in tired stretched flesh like limp scrotal skin, wrinkled and loose. A slow trickle of black red blood currented numbly down through the soft cat tails of her eye brow and down the dune of her eye socket over the wrinkled eye lid open like a shutter or a sheet pulled back and over her bare wet white eye to gather in small pools like sleeping tears in the corner and to tear out down her soft smooth cheek like the blood tears of the virgin Mary... at that moment my life was void... I am void... numb as a sniper with no belief and no desire to believe... I am void... I am void... my aura is a dark algae of the void karma... I am void...

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Pungent excrescence... benign knowledge lost in prescription sickness... meaning floating away on a razor's tip... the stakes are raised, at dawn, to the sky... the thieves guilty of "embezzlement" i.e. supporting zealots with money... the thieves look down at the children of darkness... there was only one Judas (minor ethical tongue slur of Brutus), there was only one John... the bug stepped full charge from the ontological chamber... glistening with ohms in the blue light... full cop clad and eyes bulging drooling proudly... the dark crescents of bruise flesh shadow the real world bent and warped in reflection... eyes are two way mirrors of the mind... angels of un-intent fly on wings of silver, earned and spent again, a lovely silver flapping, feathers of silver coin shuffling like notes into the un-ether of the un-aura... out in the desert past the magic there is a oneless oneness... the self the only obstacle (barrier oracle) to the enigma of beyond... beyond the mind, beyond the spirit beyond all things "real" all things unimagined is the ether of unknowing knowledge... it doesn't guide us like some fantasy "God"... it entices us with the promise of exploration... the wisdom tease... totem of the totemless is the void of all the real holding us back... borders defined by what we are *taught* not what we *know*... the IQ is only the number of bars... a life sentence they've given you... how many days... weeks... months... years... to live... a sentence like Papiion's... boredom is pacing the cage of the taught... counting the steps... 1... 2... 3... 4... 5... 1... 2... 3... 4... 5... 1... 2... 3... 4... 5... 1... 2... 3... 4... 5... the ether is the outside epidermis of the zone and beyond in a fizzling gradient like earth's atmosphere... earth's aura... one must reach the zone but not fester there... the zone... the zone is a skin culture... a grotesque excrescence on the brain where a new flower is growing... the flower that will truly make man the unique quirked animal he has always pompously claimed to be for no reason other than human ego... out past this tumor is the ether... like the space between earth and the sun the ether of the mind is the space between consciousness and *that which is beyond consciousness*... the unknown knowledge... a spirit instinct... thoughts rape the unconscious leaving it bloody and weak... people become horrible closed minded portentous monsters of the un-ether... the unspoken speech to never sprinkle lightly around the twilight waking, like purple clouds sliding across an orange sunset, dawn of the evening, like faery whispers of the runic beforeness of the knowledgeless knowing... a monster glumly writes from boredom, each word a counted footstep... "I can easily see you becoming everything you rile against"... I have seen the promise of the garden, past Eden in reverse... can I cross the desert to drink the cactus's life giving nectar?... Is technology the key to the next world or merely a temptation of convenience?... must it be ignored or is it the way?... I look upon the artificial eden from my summit in the timeless snow of the timeless... see the plants bear fruit of like nowhere sane in dreams and yet I feel wary... as if proof of the eyes isn't enough... I cry in the wilderness not to prophesize, but from Sadeness... cup dry hands to my face to be wetted by tears beyond a paper wall to the un-aura the void the anti-ether of the snake this hisses sweetly "don't tread on me..." must I brave the serpent to penetrate Valhalla?... is the end of the road the entrance to the city in the wilderness?... what is this hot desert sand of my feet... heat like flame between my toes... one more step and over the next dune... past the monsters and the serpent... one more step and the doors of paradise shall open in wait... one more... 1... 2... 3... 4... 5...

Cannibal

Sweet sanity gone. Depth measured in trifled eloquence. I am dead in this

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world. I am dead... the paranoid membrane floats loosely in subdural space... the interbrain houses the polymorphous cells, axons wiring into the subjacent white matter... deep inside... the cochlea laid open... like some spiraling mushroom staircase... the ciliary nerves are for decorative purposes only — the motions... it is the long ciliary nerves riding the optical nerve that punches through the carotid carrying the image like the gingerbread man... fetuses crouch like burning victims in the red velvet rooms... underwater tombs... they wait to be condemned to death... the unliving unborn unhuman... sentenced to life imprisonment... an ex from the in... annexed from within... the allegory for gluttony: the labiae majora open wide, nymphae pursed like a kiss, the glans clitoris crouching like a swollen tongue, and deep down the throat... deus ex machina... God from machine... spirit in the machine... the man in the device... soul of the automaton... that which is human inside that which is inhuman... man in society... the tomb... the city... vagina de tata... there are those desirous of the eating... we shall call them the hungry... for them I have porno mags with tasty sex stories, binoculars, the Playboy channel, junk food, dirty undershirts and wear, beer can covered carpet, Elvis dead on the can, the hooded man down on the corner with his little bags of life, tv remotes... remote control... the hungry disembodied with a sickly lust for the physically unattainable... their bodies bloat and turn yellow, covered in dust, and begin to rot... optical mouths wide and wanting like the stripper (not the whore, who's job it is merely to receive, not to promise alluringly)... then there are those who eat... we shall call them the delicious... they consume... they are the consumers... society bloats like a fat worm inside them once consumed (consummated) until there is nothing left but a skinned worm in a chair reeking B.O.... all return to a state of delirious desire for *more*... be it of the flesh or riches of this world, something unattainable... these are the anorexic famished... they eat but can never be filled... all culture is starch and chocolate... it is the auto feast — spontaneous self meal — that can exorcise gluttony... those who consume, eat what they are fed... they must *learn* to eat *themselves*...

Interlude Three

The paranoia must again set in to move this pen... it fluctuates frequently but is still a more reliable resource than inspiration... the artist and the writer and the poets' elusive wet dream... the truly inspiring scene... something *really* worth remembering or something to spark that free association... the paranoid sees all... he emotes dully, his emotions dead as scar tissue, he feeds off the feelings of those he can see, experiencing happiness, sadness, anger, guilt, fear (mostly fear as it is the most widely available resource) in a dead sort of mimicry... like Frankenstein's monster watching the little girl by the river... nobody asks for me by name... and those that do are the ones I would rather not have near me... I am too comfortable in my surroundings to be the cockroach I claim to be... I'm letting you read my diary... comfort numbs exploration... the La-Z-Boy lounges... if he didn't... he wouldn't need chairs called La-Z-Boy... must wake up with violence... must be strong to live... desirous of life... mad to live, mad to be loved... madness. Poetic terrorism is fireworks and pornography... need both to stay awake... and alone... stumble blindly into the bathroom and fumble with the Advil... I pop two to stay alive... if I miss a dose... I will die... from the pain caused... by living... I'm not Dr. William S. Burroughs, Dr. Dirty Ole Manny... not going to tell you stories about wedge shaped penises or ejaculating fresh dead dangling from the noose in fantastic blue movies... nothing so serious... nor am I St. James Morrison... writing poor boys poems of "I touched her thigh and death smiled," no those days are over and killed by a shortsighted wop... memory is the

reflection and enemy of psychic invention... auto spontaneity... it's the remorse factor of the un-plan... having to say "I'm sorry" for what happened because you weren't some place else... the P.'s and the blues... no I am not what I am right now... my stories will be second rate vomit by the day after tomorrow, and I'll look back at how I spilled my guts and wipe my mouth, *wipe my mouth!*

pt. 2 Allegory for Gluttony

Most Ameriporn is the dirt scraped off the skin smelling earthy and as thick and soft as a Mississippi mud pie... a feeling of fascination swarms in on a buzzing subconscious wire after the initial sense withdrawal of repulsion, disgust, affronted... like the body stretched out is dead and we recoil from the carrion stench... we are all Calvinist in our heritage... real cuntsters and I would know... blacks know... black snow... nothing consequenceless fun... all rawness of our "freedom" stinks like scum... scum!... we revile the vileness of ourselves... we loathe nakedness as offensive and subversive and we burn nude pictures even while exalting the masterful sculpting of "the David" and reciting "what a piece of work is man,"... deep down we giggle at "the David's" penis and chiseled mane of pubic hair and think secretly, "what a piece of ass is she!" and "I could use a lipo - touch up, just a little bit of work," (background Mothra chicks giggle)... we loathe our skins... we are ashamed of ourselves in all bare reality hiding nothing... puberty is considered a more or less secret occurrence, like some personal cult... nobody asks nobody tells... boys joke about their cracking voices... girls complain about menstrual cramps... nothing is said really... nothing asked nothing answered... curiosity called disgusting young perversion secretly erects in the minds of the young... what's it like to be a girl... what's it like to be a boy... what would sex be like... etc, etc,... even as this is read it is filed neatly under perverse... writing it is like keeping some skin mag between the mattresses of your bed... you're afraid somebody's going to walk in on you and *catch you* and you won't know what to say or do... caught with your pants down and your hands red... tie a ribbon on this one, baby, it's time to read our child the bible... still this carnal curiosity exists... certain feelings are conceived like hypotheses and testing must begin before the subjects expire... our pornography teaches us to hate our skin and to hate the skin of others... jealousy and lust are stimulated with nude suggestion... "if you *want* me... you have to *take* me..." sexual fantasies pop up with bangs beginning, ending and intermediately permeating the plot as flimsy as a two dollar negligé... the plumber comes over to Debbie's house... "You got some pizza stuck in the drain pipe here... do you want me to leave it in or take it out?"... "oh," Debbie moans haughtily, "a little bit of both..." in the background the porno film soundtrack (of which there is only one for all porno movies ever made) begins... a quirky kind of disco jazz muzak that lends itself to thoughts of suicide but not thoughts of sex... in the middle of the shaved genital sex scene the song changes to another that could be the same on started over, who knows?... the fuck goes on long and hairless until they have a simultaneous climax, she fake screaming, he pulling out and pulling off to squirt his mess all over her stomach or her back depending on their position (stomach — missionary or variance, back — dog or variance)... there is no foreplay... the fuck or suck is direct and, save the occasional changing of position or song, to the finish... a predictable, loveless, lust faked, cunt junk format in a predictable, cash in, bookie, skin junk industry... they don't glorify the flesh by beautiful exploration, the monopolize the shaved fuck/suck junk-cunt routine format and feed the consumers leaving a sexual [bulimic] famine.

Zymurgy of Ontological Non-Existence

Junk stomach of America is in my room... no junk left for it to consume... antiquated anti-equation... atrophy to entropy [asymptotically] approaching infinity... the lesser gods are cruel unnecessarily because they feel the need to make themselves look mighty... the words disintegrate in a fireless space explosion like a slow motion decompression and letters float slowly leaving gray strings of slime clouds as they disappear into cosmic dust... so this is the disguise I wear... cunt lipped countenance of despair... and happiness just over there... "just out of reach," I sigh and stare... my eyes glazed over long ago with inhibition... just let me up and go out fishin'... yes, I wear a mask... and beneath the mask is my *real* face... and I go to the bathroom... and I stare at the mirror... and I take off the mask... and beneath is... nothing. I am not an undead tourist. I have lived in the zone for years. I look up at the always dark sky. I look down at the always dark street. To me this is nothing new or strange, my home, the zone, where it always rains. Welcome welcome one and all. I'm glad you could come, impotent star. There are two ways to achieve the dead zone. One) drugs, which I don't need (I count all junk as drugs and I count all vices as junk) or two) a heightened state of awareness, which I don't have (although I can simulate one using heightened intelligence and young woman's intuition). These are passports to the sub-ether, contra-God land, the psychic pustule, the zone. I have distanced myself from the realm of feeling I live in the zone. I am yet distant from the mental plane of something greater I live in the zone. I live in the valley of the city, by the bay, this is my home I live in the zone I live in the zone I live in the zone. Some call it a depression, but they are all the visitors. They come here thinking to raise the sun and open the blinds and in this way effect change. They are greeted by menacing growls and resident scowls and torrents of torment called rain. After staying here for a while, the children of the light find themselves sobbing themselves to a light sleep where their dreams are wracked and images of children dead and decomposing and of a feeling that they are not welcome and unwanted and useless. They feel severed and distant. Dark dank and dead as their feelings trickle away day after day and their minds and bodies begin to *segment*. They begin to feed on the meaninglessness and find solace or semblance of sanity in the suffering strangers they meet. Everybody is a brother in the zone. That's why sex is discouraged. Inbred circus children are either still born or die in the first few months. Those that live are sentenced to social death. Besides, we've got enough mutants here in the zone without interspecies cross breeding. Yes, many of those who come here die, those who don't make themselves useful to the zone's complex upkeep. The zone takes care of its own.

A Tragedy In One Act Starring One Actor

And I see that you are dead now, oh,... why did you have to die... I never wished this, truly I swear... forget whatever I may have said... oh, why did you have to die...? I swear it will all turn out alright... I swore... it would... I am sorry if I didn't believe it... and I killed you, they are saying... in a million lifetimes I would never have the heart to raise these hands against you,... what I am is never what I wanted to become and it is still so distant from what I want to be... but I would never have blamed you... well, yes, I said things... things I never meant... I never did blame you... I never did... oh,... I am so sorry that you are dead now and I didn't make your life better... now you are gone and I... I feel I pushed you away even when you were here... I just... I guess I

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just... oh,... I was afraid... of hurting you, or of being hurt, I don't know what... I just never... never... loved you... enough... I'm sorry... I'm sorry... I'm sorry...

and the rain came down and the grave of fresh dirt turned slick... and the rain... came... down...

The Hall of Surreal Energy, Liquid, Insipid, Pursued Sourly

Sweet turned to tragedy... can't distinguish reality... moves slowly like a dream... sweet turned to tragedy... "computronics isn't open to the public," buzzes the electronic secretary in a sweet yet condescending hum. "You'll have to show yourself out, Sir." I finger my piece running fingers up and down the chrome body. In a flash I hold the smoking gun over her sparking smoking spinning electronic head. This act... her pain... it makes me smile. I walk quietly, or rather, not so quietly (click clack click clack click clack and the echo of every step playing back from down every corridor) away from her head and down the long huge marble hall. Click clack click clack click clack click clack. The darkened end of the 20 story tall 100 yard wide and immeasurably long hall buzzes into static life. Pixels the size of one tv, each screen one point in the pattern, comprise a huge screen that displays static snow. Crackle of a dead channel scrapes out of speakers the size of mobile homes lining the top of the walls near the shadowed ceiling. The only lights, wall mounted 100 watts each that illuminated the paintings on the walls as well as the bench underneath each and the potted fir trimmed so neat by every one, all go out as one and leave me in an unearthly spaceless realm of cold steel blue light of tv static. The crackle is deafening, the tv intoxicating. Gravity loses its grip and my feet leave the floor. I struggle to grip at something and there is nothing. I spin in a helpless flail in wingless flight. The random dots phase shift in some transforming lattice. A huge mouth... deeeeeep... hypnotic... speaking low words behind the static white noise. I float in the middle of the great hall, no side is up, no side is down. The mouth rotates on the screen to match my turns. It opens wide and I feel low gravity begin to return from the screen. I am pulled toward it. I must think quick...

State of the Union Undress

Introduct:

Retro experimentio. Reinject the embryo. Sanity drives me insane. This cruel mind game. Impending space doom tapestry of hatred on the loom burst of thunder traps me inside I am the foetus of your mind which is not to say I lie in wait perhaps it is I wait to lie I can sense the moment I can sense the time I look at a smile and it makes me cry, I look with a grin at the tear in your eye. The wolf is at the door; the water is at the gate; children of the WAR learn HATE HATE HATE!

paper:

Counterintelligence (what a perfect name) pseudo slang and the puked out sorry bile stands full erect and waves two V victories in the air and yells "Four More Years!" We've elected a mobster president (≠ selected) we dream of some fantasy velvet satin feather pillow wet dream world and call it "heaven," makes us not feel so

strongly about DEATH. “Now, you’re dead; what are your plans?” “I’m going to Disneyland, er, I mean, ‘Heaven!’” Is heaven policed? If it isn’t are there crimes? Are we to believe that no criminal acts are committed at all times and yet the only form of restriction is morality? The conscience cops? Perhaps all the souls with impure or criminal thoughts are allotted to the Hell elevator? “Anyone here with an impure thought? Going down?” If everyone with any impure thought is barred from heaven, then count me out. I’m impure to the highest degree. In fact, count everyone out because there’s no one totally pure. Not even Jesus. Well, without me, and without everybody else, and without Jesus, heaven must be a pretty sparsely populated place. Not so much like Disneyland afterall. But, hey — no long lines, no sweltering heat, no expensive tickets or souvenirs, no other annoying tourists. Gee, with all that... Disneyland kind of reminds you of another smoking hot tourist spot, huh? “Hell” ringing any bells for you, eh? The way I figure, Heaven is like Antarctica — so cold with morality and so sparsely populated; and Hell, well, Hell is Disneyland. No shit. Between me and everybody and Jesus too, it really *is* a small world afterall. Hey, hey, all that “morality” and “goodness” and all those other ten restrictions of the Love of “God”...? That’s all bullshit. That’s all propaganda, pure and simple. All bullshit propaganda is hypocrisy. Do as I say not as I do; don’t act as I act, act as I direct and for God’s sake don’t break the good Christian character. Do you really think you were born Christian? If you do, check your head, because it’s been bugged and plumbed quite clean. Look, you. You were born naked. A beautiful, although somewhat slimy, brand new human being, so lovely and loved. And then the paranoids got hold of you concerned to death with how you turn out. They start shaping you, molding you, marring the simplicity of your beauty. Ever heard this one: “How you look reflects on me?” or perhaps some bastard derivation thereof? They give you clothes to hide your innocence, possessions to encourage the fostering of paranoid want and protectionism to further close the mind to the new and different, they gave you papers and applications to see if you were good enough to do a job you only need to do because you need the income to function in their system and afterall you’re doing the job for them. All these items they give you — tell you they respect you. Your parents, pastors, teachers and bosses tell you you represent them. You never represent yourself. You are constantly misrepresented by their labels; it is only what they call you that can be seen. You do as they expect of your kind, having classified you as Good, Bad, or Ugly. This is our “freedom.” We must work, doing jobs we honestly don’t need to stay physically living, doing jobs they give us, jobs they tell us we must do. We are then given money so that we may buy what they offer us with which we can then kill time spent between working and preparing to work. Some toys they sell us are tv’s over which a “free” news team may cover events far away both dastardly and distant and they make war macho murder movies to turn us hard to the real death which comes through the tube. Either way we learn to appreciate that our country is not like those others. That our country has no wars, no riots, no uprisings, no civil unrest nor disobedience. That our country is “free.” Free to obey. Free to run their maze, getting money from them and running in a wheel and changing a light bulb and then running to another hall and giving them back the money for a tv through which we receive our next directions. Above it all there is the feeling that God loves us, but that, to keep His love, we must not break His laws. We obey. The Good Christian obeys. The Good citizen obeys. The good lab rat obeys. You see clearly, the key to all control is obedience. It’s not like there aren’t uprisings, unrest and disorder civil or uncivil in our country. It’s just that the government either sweeps them under the rug or crushes them. Where is the great Anarchist section in the History Book? Don’t the unsatisfied deserve love, God? Don’t

the unruly deserve some justice? Is freedom obedience? We are guaranteed the freedoms of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Life is needed for obedience, liberty is meaningless, happiness is now luxury. It doesn't matter that we're sheep so long as our green pasture is comfortable. And is God not a shepherd? We are all saps for anything that teases our inborn human greed. Or is it learned? Our love was only gratified when we protected those first possessions... clothes, toys, distractions for the curious yet naive young mind. Now we know nothing outside of those possessions, we know nothing outside of possession. We're willing to do almost any degrading trick to get a substantial enough treat. Salary is hypnotism. The bank note is quicker than the eye. Look, how's the bible any different from a book of law? If angels are God's secret agents and the apostles a cabinet of advisors, then surely Paul is head of counterintelligence. Look, see, all Paul was was a door to door bible salesman, the kind our grandfathers used to find so annoying (now we have commercials rather than traveling salesmen; they don't have to knock, And if they did we would never let them in: too annoying. But now we watch any and all, too fixated to change the channel, turn it off or even press mute our remote control which becomes more "convenient," more features loaded and more luxurious every day. We only want more of what we've got. Lazy "freedom" of luxury like we're trying to create a fantasy velvet satin feather pillow wet dream world of no stress, no movement, no thought and no blinking). And now we exalt Paul because he didn't discriminate between selling to Jew or Gentile. You see the more confusing life becomes the more futile it is to understand. They start tricking and shaping you as soon as they catch you coming out. Give me a big enough crowd and I'll follow them anywhere riding on the energy of their belief. See, I'm sustained wholly by contact. Take me away to the desert and I'd die. Besides, bitching about the world and how it shits on you is no fun if no one is listening. Yep, born from a womb, buried in a tomb. See the "t" in tomb comes from the Christian cross on your gravestone; the "w" in womb comes from the shape of the pelvis from which you were born. Same word really. Ritual burial is birth in slow motion reverse, sad eyed friends and family replacing smiling doctors and nurses. A moment of pain as your chord is severed. You were born naked. Beautiful. Innocent. An unblemished, perfect human being. How will you die? How will you look lying dead, death blowing life color from your face like smoke from a cigarette leaching ashy expressionlessness draped dour on your countenance. Laid to rest in a plywood box in a cheap suit and paper shoes. A disgrace. Where are your possessions now, fallen comrade? Fellow ant? They say you can't take them with you. You must die, stripped of the rewards of life, the trophies of luxurious freedom laid bare from your shivering bare body. Yes, this is cold, but it's always been so. You've always been too self-consumingly object-obsessed to know. Earthly pride keeps you warm. Feel the chill of prideless poverty ice through you as death puffs away stoically at the shrinking cigarette of your life/ Has this been your life? Nothing more? Nothing to show of your own, outside of what they bestowed? The human sighs and looks bashfully ashamed, and dies naked and embarrassed about it.

A Noodle Called Despair

Junk morning snap crackle pops you awake on a wire like a whip. Bloodshot eyes crash open and mashed potatoes oily skin says "NEED" in a groan. Your stomach knots, confused, you're hungry and you need to shit all at once. Gray mist of rain outside in the half light of dawn. One second a glorious sunset like a beautiful atom bomb across the canvas of the clouds, colors coating and swirling like paint strokes

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or slow ripples in a pond. Then, crack! and a six hour long midnight jumps out like a robber and a second after you were watching a dazzling pyrotechnic bubble sink below a fog of clouds, you're looking at a porcupine with a million white eyes and a million glowing lures and the vivid colors blend to bleach the cloudy night sky a sickening purple like a lavender tongue is draped over the city. Sounds of honking horns, tv, gunfire, screams, sirens, typical city bullshit. This could be any night in any city on any plane of thought. But it's not. And the dawn drags itself wearily in like a drunken hung over sailor pulling his disheveled heap of sore bones back to barracks. There's no official sunrise or any beautiful beginning to the day. The sun slowly assumes his post, hobbling through the gray clouds like a dim cripple, he ducks in and out from behind low clouds that roll by in a gray sick current like vomit flying overhead. You cough and your body racks with the effort. One hack leaves you weak, your hairy tongue lolling helplessly and dog like from a numb mouth. "Something to eat," you think. "Ugh. Gotta get something to eat." The cabinet doors all open like hollow teeth in a grinning row. One dry can of tuna fish. Your stomach grumbles and kicks. One wax-dipped cheese wheel about palm sized. One box of Chinese food sitting open in the refrigerator, two chop sticks poking out, a golden dragon design on the red box. Your stomach churns anxious to have something in it so it can throw up at the sight of the week old Szechwan. Or is it...? It's noodles of some kind. Old. Cold. Hard. Noodles. You flop one like a pale slippery leech into your mouth. Roll it around with your bulbous meaty tongue. Your throat clenches as you try to swallow. The noodles slides uneasily down your constricting tube. Gag. Cough. Choke. Wheeze. Gag. Your eyes roll up slightly and water. Your throat pulls up and down fighting the blockage. Cough. Cough. Wheeze. Gag. Hack! Hack! Inky darkness begins to seep in like octopus ink from the corners of your vision. Black bleach creeps in to stain your sight. Your mind spins, your body wracking coughing hacking sputtering. "How can this be happening," your mind like river rocks is muttering, "this is only one noodle, how can I choke to death on only one noodle?" Ink dark blackness voids your scene and you clamp your teeth together. Your neck clenches pulling muscles down your back and chest. One final flash of light like a camera or a street light glare then slump onto the floor in sick disrepair.

The Ontological Expatriate

All libido has been drained from me. Inert. Lifeless. Like a stuffed beetle impaled on a needle in a glass case for the disinterested passerby to occasionally glance at my sorrowful Christlike state and think, "that is *truly* one ugly creature. I wonder why God put such disgusting looking creatures on the earth to get in *our* way and pollute *our* food and any *us* with their nasty looking bodies?" and I think to myself, "what a wonderful world." You see, Jesus was one of us, not one of you. Jesus was the king spider. So was Mohammed. Everybody thinks it is *they* who are normal, and it is *the others* whose abnormalcy gets in their way. All people have a "me" fixation. There are the "I's" and there are the "insects." The "haves" and the "have nots" of free thinking and consciousness, respectively. You see, the "I's" have free thought, but not consciousness. The insects have consciousness, but not free thought. Which is to say, the "I's" only think unconsciously, and the insects have become detached from the selfness of free thought and have only consciousness remaining. The "I's" are spoiled rich kids, the insects little orphans. I'll tell you about the ontological expatriate. He sees God. He sees Being. But god is dead and being in any natural form such as "doing" even "conceiving" seems distant and benign. The

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paradigm is meaningless, and beyond that, useless. “Me,” a name I call myself. Ha... children are trained in European self concepts like science and math, even grammar and in fact almost all things taught in school; they’re all ways to defend against fear of the dark. Not like the Aborigines who learn of natural magic and elemental wizardry, we children of the pale flesh, all born from the loins of a white Adam and a white Eve under a white God in white Robes with a long gray beard, and under His son the white Christ. The concept that Jesus, born Yeshua the Nazorene, was white (a white Arab. Perhaps Jesus was an albino) ranks right next to the magic bullet theory in the list of bullshit, “hush, child” conceptual coverups. We white skinned bastards of childish fear jerk off with science and other dirty rags to distract is from our true fear of the Black Night. The unknown suspicion that lurks in the shadows. We have wet dreams over fantasy religion and we bite our lips thinking happy thoughts only the darkness we call danger doesn’t disappear. Of course it is we who are the normal ones and the shadow the stranger. How must the shadow think of us? Aliens? Threat? It matters not, you see, for this is existence. And I am NOT. There are cowboys, you see, and then there are desperadoes; there are criminals and there are anarchists; I am so distant now from what one is conditioned to think of as “existence” that I am, what I would call, an ontological expatriate. I would, perhaps, be better suited for exploration of the border between the real and the unreal, between the existing and the inconceivable unknown, were I not so sentimental and homesick for my days of safety and hearth and home.

Azure Blues

Azure Jones stands across the bar room floor. This is the outskirts. This is indisputably *his* country. The fringes of the sane, the demilitarized zone between mental illness and the known. A desert wasteland where abandoned rusting through oil drums lounge languidly beside mammoth cacti shot full of radiation and, if tapped, give radioactive sap water like syrup tastes like fertilizer. Azure Jones was a stern featured yet aquiline person. His lips were always a line like an expert incision in his wooden face. Tanned flaps and folds of flesh and scars decorate intricate designed tattoos of blue ink criss cross his countenance. His eyes are drooping dead, a dull dour pale green like a pale leaf encased in cream colored glass cases, orbs tucked behind low lids like limp scar tissue under a thick dark uni-brow like a flat line drawn in grease paint. His nose was a British thin hooked steppe coming to a snooty point. A solid dull thin mustachio, pencil thin and curled downward ever so slightly to give his pursed mouth a frowning look just as his uni-brow gave his eyes a scowling look, crept spideresque like an oily shadow. The tattoo dotted and lined his sallow eye sockets and traced his cheek bone from which his sagging cheeks were lazily hung in a mindless expressionlessness like a grave, then curved back around to follow his jaw to the chin and stop. They curved around and purposefully lined straight down the bridge of his nose to again wander aimlessly down the mustache and end concealed under its whiskers. His flesh is the color of Dijon mustard. His tussled black locks are wrangled back under a low black hat with a wide brim and the teeth of some animal tied to form a hat band. He gnaws a tooth pick that rolls from one side of his pursed line of a mouth to the other like a baton of some composer / director contained therein. He is flanked by his boys, railroad men in long leather coats: Cluster Spelling (a German), Carlo “Tools” Café (Mexican through and through), Butler Ziegenhein (a Mayor), Neoteric Exploits (Dutch and with blonde hair so fine you could swear it was white), Sodé de Fontaine (a gay Frenchman in a beret and

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scarf), and Bilá Kayf (the Moor with the blue eyes called “Billy”). “Herr Monsier, gutentag, gutentag,” Azure croons in shattered conglomeration of words from around the world. “Drinks all around bar keeper.” Now this is the universal language and one in which Azure is fluent. The generous king visited his ever loyal heroes and bestowing upon them the simple pleasure, to some their *only* pleasure simple or otherwise, of ale all around. Azure has running tabs in every town and with every proprietor in the outskirts. Drunks and frustrated old prospectors ride into town and set up camp outside local saloons when word gets around that Azure is coming to town. He’s gotten quite a reputation just by touring the border towns. When all the drunks and hobos rush in some bars can’t handle the overflow and they close. By the time Azure really *does* get to town (if in fact it wasn’t just some rumor of his esteemed arrival) only one or two saloons are open and whichever one he picks is immediately flooded with the customers, and even sometimes owners, of whatever other bars or stores he doesn’t plan to visit. This bar, which now holds sway to a fully attended town meeting resided over by Azure who sits atop the piano telling stories and talking the mayor or sheriff into changing whatever laws the people bring contest against to him, this bar is now serving the entire town, about a half dozen drifters and a dozen prospectors one round of ale, which usually costs about an arm and leg. But Azure is a business man as well as a benevolent monarch. After the round has been all around downed, he gives the bartender a wink and starts telling stories about the good ole days. Now Azure himself is probably only about thirty five or forty, but nobody questions his long yarns on lost edicts and ethics. “Now in my day,” he’d croak, even mocking an old man’s voice for his show, “in my day it was considered *polite* to say please pass the cholera,” and so on and so on. Now for all its pomposity the old timers, down through prospectors and the sorry lot one by one turn to the bar shaking their heads doggedly, privately reminiscing. “Gimme another, Jack,” one toothless prospector lisps to the bartender, who slides up a hefty mug of gold medicine with a head, “Thith life’th too long to not enjoy every now and then.” So one by one all the crowd starts drinking and pretty soon the bar is rolling in it. It’s about time this Azure starts sweet talking the tipsy mayor or sheriff, asking silly questions about their wives or “that old huntin’ dog used to like me so much,” or a patch of sickly vegetables purported to be a garden. “Well (she, it, etc.) is doin’ mighty fine, Azure, mighty fine, thanx fer askin’.” When Azure leaves town he’s usually managed to legalize gambling, prostitution, and any other local vices of the people short of robbing the pony express. Azure has a very subtle way of running things. You’ll never see a law attributed to him nor the breaking of a law attached to his squeaky clean rep. You will, however, see his name on placards on saloon walls across the out land, and it is in these that you may find the only written evidence of his hypocrite hierarchy. “Azure Jones’ favorite watering hole” might as well be the name of a chain of saloons rather than be the trivialized personal claim of over a million out land pubs. Azure Jones owns the badlands. Azure Jones is the badlands.

(cont.)

And

And the quiet. And my headache. And my pencil moving mechanically. And of all those stories I wrote not one... not one! And the heat on my face. And the cold on my bare feet. And the thoughts I think that have replaced my feelings. And I’ve asked “why” so often I’ve questioned away emotion like a coitis interruptus of living.

And I know I'm living. And I feel bored. And I'm writing out of boredom contrary to all the advice I've ever given. And I don't care. And furthermore I care even less for what I'm writing so it doesn't matter anyway. And I should be working. And I'm not so am I broken? And I am just as annoying as a mime. And I droll. And I gab. And I expostulate. And I exasperate, And I incorporate. And I still lie. And my mood is one of moodlessness. And my back hurts. And I'd say something pertinent if I had a pertinent thought. And I don't. And I buy books but never read them. And I buy cd's but never listen to them. And I don't buy clothes even though I need them. And I stay up late doing nothing really. And I sleep in late because I'm tired from all the nothing doing. And I'm a little clever but am I gifted? And if we're all special why do we feel unique if we're good at something? And we only feel that way because of who we know. And I feel that way. And the people I know are good at everything. And it makes me feel bad. And me makes me feel helpless, worthless, like and infant or an old man, to not be able to do it myself. And I'm stubborn. And I should succumb. And I will in my own time. And I act the way I do in imitation of the way other people whom I admire do things that I admire. And I imitate their actions in hope that others will admire them in me. And I am all around annoying. And I write out of boredom. And also out of desire to be recognized as a writer. And I think of my works in words or art as masterpieces of total bullshit. And I used to brag about that, vainly, so vainly. And I was a hypocrite. And I said write from feeling only; use emotion as sole resource; and I bragged of my ability to mimic the feelings of others. And this was bullshit. And I did it well. And even if I don't read the books I still read very well; I read people very well. And I can always tell what they want from me. And I either give them that or I don't depending on whether I like them. And I would never cut my ear off for a woman, even though I know that would be something I would admire. And I would never yell or cause a scene. And I try to control the situation or the person. And I feel nothing so strongly as to act on it extravagantly. And I feel nothing special. And I don't feel special. And I wonder why I would? And I wonder why I don't? And I don't know know these answers. And I feel like a master mimic miming all emotion. And, in fact, all action. And I am as annoying as a mime. And I go through the motions like a robot without a smile or any other sign of mental participation or even presence. And I wonder why? And I wonder if I should die? And if I should happen to die before I wake would I be missed? And if so who would miss me? And if someone I knew died I wouldn't miss them. And I think I want to be noticed but I know I don't like to be seen; or at least, I don't like to be looked at. And I am an exhibitionistic introvert. And a show man on the surface. And beneath I have no purpose. And I speak to be heard, not to say anything that deserves hearing. And I am a child at an adults' party. And I sip a martini. And I puff a cigar. And wear a suit. And I mingle. And I learn to blend. And I am still a child. And this is the primary disjuncting, I believe. And one must understand this to understand me. And it's not that I *feel* out of place, although I do, and it's not that I try to appear to fit in, although I do, and it's not that no one respects me because I am a child, no. And all of that aside, the real problem is that I *don't* fit in, that I *am* out of place and that it is impossible for me to have any feeling of self worth when I don't feel respected by my elders who I mistake for my peers. And can you taste my tears, dry as stoic slate? And can you understand my hate? And I can... from a distance, I think. And I wear the trappings of the elusive stranger, suave, serene and in control. And I am not this. And I am not in control. And I am a wayfarer, lost as a tourist, in a world of people too big for me to understand, who make deals too big for me, who use words too big for me, who have no patience for my smallness. And I sit in chairs too big for me, try to finish servings of food too big for me. And I try to walk bigger than I am. And I try to

talk bigger than I am. And I sometimes fool those who don't see me for the dinner theater actor that I am. And I approach everyone I admire this way. And I approach everything I desire this way. And I follow everything to which I aspire this way. And I talk big. And I walk big. And I have no idea why. And I ask it only in fancy, only in passing. And I can't understand the answer anyway. And now I try to ape the author. And the poet, don't ya know it. And my attempts are cute and fancy... only in passing. And get no respect from my liberal peers to whom I pander and peddle my product; I've treated them with disrespectful contempt and now it is mine in return. And of those conservative big adults whom I secretly hope to impress? And their response to my magnified small efforts to be big? And all I get is a distracted pat on the head or one passes by briefly to examine it only to say, "it's nice, what's it supposed to be?" And I only show contempt to my peers out of imitation of my judges, those who I wish to please most. And I am jealous of other kids because they don't know the adults like I do, or rather like I think I do. And it is I who made them my judges. And I must have wanted them to judge me. And I know I'll never measure up in their eyes. And so I pursue my endeavors to impress, too jealous to go out into the real world as anything but a tourist; angry outcast. And I would be author, artist, poet. And the Creator is Huge Upon, rather Above, the World. And the Creator is Gulliver in a land of mental Lilliputians. And I try to seem that big, but really I feel small. And I can relate more with the tiny cows Gulliver brought back with him to England than I can to Gulliver himself. And, although it was interesting to say and to hear myself say it, I don't think I can any longer berate society. And it's all do big. And I can never hope to understand it. And I don't really want to anyway. And I'm content to play the actor, acting like I'm real. And I would never be that good at acting, just as I'm not great at writing, not great at drawing and apparently horrible at singing. And as I am all these things as I am human, as I breathe in bitter sweet tragic mockery of life, as I dwell on the mundane and dream romantically of the insane, as I look down on the world not as a giant but from an isolated perch so distant from all things my true size; as I am all this and so do act on this and in these ways, I cry. And I cry not for anything, but in lieu of something. And in absentia of something. And I think it's something real. And it's something worth to feel. And I don't really know what it is or even why I want it. And I don't know when I lost it but I think that I once had it. And I look for it in other people or in books that I don't read or in memories too numb to grieve. And every time I leave, I leave more of it behind. And I only miss it because it's mine. And so I cry. And I'm telling you a lie. And I don't care to distinguish between fantasy and reality any further. And I've nothing more to say. And I wrote this all this way, for no reason, really. And I'm sorry if I've wasted your time. And I'm sorry I said what was on my mind. And I know that good writing is dumping. And probably manipulating. And therefore all literature is abuse. And I don't care 'cause I don't read anyway. And I'm bored. And I'm boring. And I say nothing interesting. And I always end up complaining. And my listeners sit draining. And I suck out all their energy. and vampyre their emotions to sustain me. And of their true feelings make a mockery. And for this I am sorry. And overall I'm a sorry guy. And you believe another lie. And I don't know life from an act. And the play's the thing. And I play with words and emotions and myself. And none of this matters. And when they find me it'll be a bloody mess. And I'll be dead. And if I don't have the self value to get into a fight, if I don't even have the energy to urge me through a fight... and I'm really all talk. And I'm the pansy pussy closet queer who gets hit and walks away, supposedly stoically, lip trembling, tears welling up in my stubborn proud eyes. And it is me, not any other naked dick slapping faggot who will catch a bug dying on a windowsill, take it to a door and let it fly free, so that it can die

from it's old age of two days in one extra hour. And I've maimed white mice with a sharp metal ruler. And I cut one's tail off. And I pushed one into an ant bed and held it there. And I gutted one and watched it bleed to death. And I cried about all this on my mother's shoulder within an hour. And I once tried to stop a dog fight that broke out between a golden retriever who was coming to see me and a wiener dog who I was petting. And I knew the dogs. And the wiener dog was an old girl with a paling thin face and dark loving eyes named Annie. And I couldn't stop the golden retriever whom I'd known since she was a puppy from ripping Annie open. And Annie slinked away; loping; a mess. And her entrails dragged out behind her and trailed on the driveway. And as I ran to all the neighbors for help and couldn't get any; and as I stayed with her owner as she called all the emergency vets; and as I watched... Annie slowly, very, very painfully, died. And they buried her in a box in their back yard. And later I had to defend the golden retriever to an animal safety inspector because there were charges raised over the incident. And I feel rage is futile. And leads to actions... inexplicable... in later testimony. And I will never have to plead temporary insanity as I will always control my rage. And all my other feelings as well. And if a girl waves to me, wink at me, touches my shoulder or makes contact physical in any other way with me, or even says hello to me, I think I love her. And I think she loves me. And I can't think of anything more futile than hate other than my concept of love. And I've "loved" several girls in this way, driven every one away, sooner or later, most of them sooner. And I won't get started on that. And anyway I've really bored you enough with this already. And I only say this because I can see myself reading this in front of a small group of people my age in a liberal and hip attempt to impress them and to endear myself to them. And this is all a prelude to an end. And so can be said of life. And I'd like to be called "brilliant" before I die, but... I don't know... I'm not a patient man. And I am honest. And I do lie. And I'm still honest for it. And I don't believe in anything. And this makes me gullible. And the ones who don't believe in anything are always the ones anxious to believe anything or to follow anyone anywhere. And I am a sap, especially for large groups. And I only act as recluse. And I feel sometimes like I've already had such a full life. And I feel old. And weary. And bored. And most of all I feel bored. And I like sentence fragments, incomplete sentences, verb tense shifts, indirect objects and other discordant grammatical notes. And who says you can't start a sentence with "and?" And why not, I might ask? And for what? And for who? And who cares? And if you give me an inch I'll take a mile, and on a date I would fight you for the movie theatre arm rest rather than put my arm around you. And I'd pay for your ticket, and I wouldn't make out or watch the movie. And I wouldn't know why I'd gone. And if you give me a mile I'll only appreciate an inch. And I'm sorry but it's all too much. And I'm not much at all.

Azure Blues (cont.)

And so Azure stepped into this bar, preceded by his reputation (and his raw hide odor) and anteceded by his entourage. Upon his arrival, everyone cheers loudly, whoops and stomps their feet, and spits in their tables' spittoons; his choice of this bar means they don't have to get up and go over to some other bar and stand out in the street looking in the dusty windows; besides — they've already got the choice seats here. Half of the cheer is for Azure and the other half is for their seats. "Free drinks!" he orders shooting a finger at the bartender. Another roar of fiesta from the crowd. There is still a high noise level or people shouting "yee-haw!" and such as

everyone generally genially chatting about their luck as to his choice of this bar and how great their seats are. When Azure arrives the whole town gets a legal day off, and post men, whores, deputies, hotel managers, blacksmiths, prospectors and everyone else one could think of, all sit side by side gabbing contentedly. Azure makes his way over to the piano, his boys saturating spectrally and yet strategically throughout the crowd, and a hush begins to wash over them. Azure sits down on the bench and the crowd clenches in to be close to him and, in so doing, nearly encloses him, as waitresses pass out table sized trays of mugs full of ale. He is temporarily lost to my sight behind a pushing crowding standing crew. My eyes flick quickly over his boys and I can see that none of them can see him either as they all hold their guns impatiently, ready to pounce like a sprung trap if action is taken against Azure. Music begins to choke cacophonically and they ease back a little revealing him hunched over the keyboard trying to coerce tunes from it by sheer force of will coupled by the intoned threat of physical violence. The microphone I had planted in the piano hums into my ear implant that he is grumbling curses and threats at the contraption. The bolder people in the audience laugh and groan and the bodyguard desperadoes eye them like with intent to kill. The discordant thunder stops and Azure turns around on the bench with a wide, yet tight lipped smile. "I never *could* play much," he jokes. By now a crowd is gathering outside from the other bar. Azure welcomes them with a wave directing everyone's attention to their arrival. A few wave back meagerly, all the people in the bar's heads turn at once, and while both groups are thus distracted for the count of 1.5 seconds (just long enough to turn the head, recognize, and turn the head back) Azure skillfully and silently mounts the piano, dangling his legs down its front so his feet hang above the keys. He is certainly a refined and practised show man. He would have had to have practised this stunt on the road, as his annual tour takes nearly a year. He spends 365 days visiting 465 towns, which makes his stops the brief and popular economic blessings they are. I amble leisurely over to one of the desperadoes and idle next to a foolish looking bald man in a green shirt and brown corduroys. Obviously a rube and a shoe salesman; obviously a gentleman of no tact and not the sense inherent an armadillo. I drop a very old 10 spot paper currency bill into his lap and he looks at it and then looks at me with beady little eyes like two holes stuck in a ball of dough. I point harshly at the money, then at him, aiming my finger right between his button little eyes with a good glare, and then jab my thumb away from us; all of this indicating, "money's yours — vamoose." He gets up and weaves through the crowd to lean against the wall. 10 was really pushing it, even for a rube like him, but he didn't move from monetary incitement, he moved out of an obligation every rube has — to fear. I sat down heavily next to the desperado, Bilá Kayf, who wore shoulder straps of gun belts and held a heavy gatling gun on his lap. His pancho was dark with dirt. His face hardened and taut. I pretended to listen to Azure expostulate exuberantly on some anecdote about a town "alot like this one, only the patrons weren't so ruly. HAW! HAW! HAW!" I had to look interested and attentive. I had to act like a real cunt so as not to give this guard the trigger finger itch hired desperadoes were renowned for catching so easily. Finally I leaned over to him and smiled in a drunk Mexican accent, "hee'z pretty funny, eezn't he?" indicating Azure with a raised finger. Billy looked at me expressionless, like an alien would. "How would I get heez autograph?" I slur. He shrugs slowly, still with stone expression, eyes dead of all save intent. "I bet yoo know heem, dont yoo?" He slowly shakes his head no, still stone faced, eyes fixated on me like search lights on an escaping prisoner. "I'll geev yoo a hoondred dahllers eef yoo let me meet heem." Now this is the hook. If he doesn't bite I'll use the axe. He carefully sets his gun on the table with an heavy clank; he never takes his hand off

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his gun, he never takes his eyes off me. He leans in and whispers in a beautiful rich tone, "show it to me." His breath is cinnamon. I put the hundred dollar bill on the table halfway under my hand. He smiles a glowing white toothed smile and takes the money off me. I look at him the way he had looked at me earlier, dead save for purpose, as we both leaned back. "My name's Billy<" he said putting the gun back in his lap. I pretend to listen to the rest of the "show" Azure put on, secretly holding my heart rate at an even pace and arranging my actions and questions for later.
(cont.)

Legend

So I sit and listen with all intent to the words of the man. His long white hair is now yellow, now red; the skin stretched around his face shadowed intensely by dark dry river bed cracks, his eyes catch light in spark, hold in ember, and breathe soft warmth on breath of story. He sweats with strength, each word is pushed forth nearly stumbling over its predecessor and lingering just long enough to cast long shadows for his next word to fill. And they always do. In one breath, or sometimes, two. And the light is glowing in his dark eyes like a distant light in a deep cavern. And it glows there constantly, never harshly. Reassuringly like a home; as mute and constant as a groan. His story unfolds one tale over another like a hydra; fables of animal heroes roll seamlessly into stories of a baker or a farmer and into a story of two knighted brothers who are going to slay each other over a woman and then a story of a man who got lost and decided never again to find the way that did not offer itself to him and so and so on and on so as such until his listeners, like gaping children, were in a state of awe like as to none induced by chemical nor herb. The fire never dims nor flickers low and the old man never tires nor recognizes our faces friend or foe. He is being spoken through and his tongue flaps and flails like a Japanese ship's silk sails to keep pace with the voice of the speaking spirit that has so possessed him, uses his brow as a throne, and calls the old man's speech his own. He sweats under pressures unknown and his expression is concentrate yet distant as stone. Clicks and rolls of the tongue translate out fire flicker of unlanguage knowing like a chameleon changing by the mood of its female mistress. Hush hush and sorrow. Joy in a faint smile. Drums thump thump thump thump in the hollow air behind the roll of his words. His speech follows, one to the next, like a waking follows rest, and from his brow and mouth and breast spring words twice as stunning as their best. His mood is like climate, his energy condensates on the foreheads of the guests, his sorrow knots throats and warms eyes with teary lament. Language is no obstacle no barrier no encumbrance for his words. They lap like waves and jab like swords. Beyond him there is nothing, an articulating shade painted like a hole in the day to the hidden night is his, and it mimes in reinforced imitation as if shaking its finger at us to listen. Warm sea breezes blow the dry river bed and his shadow rests in vaporous shade about his head. In him is soul, on him is movement, between are the spirit and the spirit's words. He talks of legendary heroes, warriors and medicine women bringing white water home from the night's breast to assuage the yearning tongues of the infants of an ancient tribe. And yet beyond the story there is a presence, sitting distant, contemplative, arms folded, nodding every now and then, wearing a warm smile like a cloak of feathers. So I sit back and listen with all content intent to the words of this man, and beyond the man his nodding spirit and beyond the darkness of the deepest soul the colors like a burst upon the sky. Now yellow, now red, like fire.

Shakespeare in a Can

Simian society! And are we not but white apes crawling in our concrete jungle gym?! Where has our sometimes home of outside these bars gone, eh? And are we not stuck here now, eh? Can the bugs not crawl in through the cracks but to give us messages of the other place of green and fruits just once? Not once nor never hence? What has gone before is prologue. What is still to come is surely our boundless prison. To be condemned to freedom, nay even to think of it is too much! Scientific philosophical jealousies. Professionalism in the elite classes only, nowhere save in history, and never communicates even remotely, save to control the present. And to think of this sheer chaos of an infinitely random circumstance! A fractal cage as surely as a dying passenger's rage: and what, pray tell, would Shakespeare say? Devout and curious bard of yesterday? Have our legends all now in distaste fled away and left us helpless in [our or this] mysterious glass cage? With what may I gauge the rate of time it takes to change our stage? Surely a pocket time piece is as antiquated as a well. And so may be the grandfather clock who sternly ticks and tocks his watch, his unblinking gaze chiming away another hour in this hell. No I believe, by Jove and all His craftsmen, there be no tool with which to measure the infantisity [sic], the felicity, the sobriety or inhibition [inebriation?] of the cinema verité of a lifetime. By nothing huge as sky nor mousey small by whose chime or by whose toll we can measure in ticks and tocks a meaning that lies so distant as to be forever lost. Picture a mountain range so distant in a million lives we could never achieve it, yet we must onward as our tired pistons will us and then raise up our children to do as such and place in them our trust to do the same come their day. We can never reach the goal nor see our prison wall, and yet we admit upon slightest question as if by whim: "ay, both lay yonder." If we must break the Law to be human, then the Law no longer exists in my eyes. Humanity over industry and automated monarchy, infinitely, every time. Freedom over life! Freedom over life! Brother may fight brother or by his side may fight another but in time they raise the numbers, no regard for whom they smother. We, the suffocate, raise our voice such. From each to each may each in each one trust. Only in oppression is there unity of purpose. Only by crushing ourselves under the feather light weight of a world we deem unbearable to burden, may we find our commonality. All for all against our suffocate finality. Those above scatter easily, looking down and then from coconspirator to coconspirator. We are conspiring a plot most foul against ourselves. When our underside rebels to usurp its oppressor's position, I pity the man caught between. We conspire against ourselves. We rebel against our own conspiracy. We flea from our own rebellion. One brother slays the other and both halves of the pair are killed. Siamese brain and soul — can't fathom this double enclosure anymore. Handcuffed tight my left to right. Too much! Must fight! Apes we are who blinded be, ape we can when we can see, our invisible cage and distant salvation, entrapped in a tomb of our own limitation. We strive to go further than further itself can, oh Gods! What a piece of work is man!

Pavlov's Liberty Bell

There is a difference between suggestion and actual influence. When a bell rings does it let us know we can go to a thing or does it conjure in our mind the need to go? If the telephone rings how long till we give in and answer? When what is presented or offered is the only option then it is no longer an alternative but an

urgent need to be met. When only one thing offers itself to be done, you *must* do it. Therefore it does not offer. If you obey, then it, by necessity, commands. If there is only one road open you must take that road. You cannot take another. This is not an option. It is a necessity. You must do this, this way. There is a difference between freedom of and freedom to. Freedom of is unmarginated. Without borders. Freedom of thought. A limitless concept. Freedom to guarantees a specific. And therefore a confine. A tightly patrolled bounded area. The difference between freedom of speech and freedom to speak. Freedom of thought and freedom to think. One implies an option, one a restriction. One you can and may, one you can and must. And if you must then you must only. The cage of what we are taught. The prison policed freedom in which everyone must respect the other good citizens. This is the difference between conceptualizing and enacting. The concept "of." The acting "to" (towards a goal). A wedge is driven by patrolled consciousness between the brain and the nerves. The impulse highway raodblocked by the police of thought. The police are enforcers of philosophy. They question... "why?" until everything is meaningless and the subject is reduced to an infant's tears. After a grilling one feels helpless, hopeless, mindless, unconscious. After a point there is no answer to "why?" Afterall, why anything? And in this way autonomy is confined by ontology and policed by epistemology. This concept should not promote hedonism. Merely Epicureanism or absurdism. How may one have fun and not break the law? How may one take action without breaking the knowledge rule of "why?" To say there are no wrong answers to this question is a distortion of the truth. To say there are no right answers is more to the point but no less a misnomer. Beyond inaction there is only the enforced necessity of action. Whether it is more true to the self to abandon all hope of non-rebellious action or to lie inert. When you come to the blocked road will you go the one way or will you sit down and grow roots on the very spot, begin living stories to tell your grandchildren, begin believing stories told you by your grandfather. Time moves forward. Crash of days as society reminds you you're getting older. Funny how trivial time's passage seems when you've distanced yourself from society and from its urgent need to make you believe that there are things you must do and its sickening attempt to try to make you proud that you are free to do them. Society as salesman. Freedom as luxury product. Waves of consumers drooling at the very sight of the phallic torch atop the statue of Liberty as it is used to decorate ads for such "necessities" as deodorant. These are the truths we hold to be self evident. And how did man live so long before such "necessities" as deodorant were invented? In our backwards pop culture we exalt trivialities as necessities and liberty as luxury. Do you really think cops make you free?

Apocalypse Now!

Civilized man has externalized God as he has externalized all other emotion; love he bestows gracefully upon the heads and hearts of those he deems appropriate, hate he serves distastefully and with an apologetic smile to those he feels deserve it. The men enter the jungle as infants. The tiger springs from the jungle, roaring inhumanly, hungry, "I am the now! Fear me if only to feel me at all!" The men whisper the Lord's prayer. They are filled with that emotional heat like boiling water which causes every emotion in reaction, anger, happiness, denial, disgust. Like all civilized men birthed into the jungle, they are baptised in the boiling water that flows the tiger's blood. They are bathed in horror. They've pushed God away, see insanity "playing God" over the sane, they push away that which they do not wish to

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comprehend as sane. They push away God. God is insane. God's the very insanity as it does live and breathe and walk and talk and speak, and in so speaking does call itself "man." God is in the roar of the tiger and the baptism of horror which shunts away civilization and shuffs off innocence as a dandelion does its shimmering orb of seedlings. Innocence is the seedling of horror. Man is the seedling of the tiger. All of earth is the seedling of God. In all actions sane or otherwise men take is God, alienated and defining by background (the bald head of Kurtz emerging from the inky surface of shadow), or lurching forward and forcing you to look him straight in his horrific gaze (the tiger springing from the woods, the girl running to protect her puppy). In the jungle all men are infants or animals.

Azure Blues (concl.)

"So Azure, so Azure, so Azure..." walk around him menacingly quoting random lines of Shakespeare sonnets. "So, shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" I hiss between tight teeth through curled lips; my breath licking hotly against his face, "nay!" I bellow, rearing back into shadow, "thou art more lovely and more temperate!" I stomp like a raving loon in a circle around him. Subterranean works of art unearthed at badlands grotto "wilderness lips ranch." Azure Jones, ranch owner, sells works to thrice hidden rare arts dealer through some Swiss account. Rumors that art work has been stolen from secret dealer; some two "years" (if you can still call them that, Ha!) later, the art is hanging in the office of a certain Samuel Calypso (needless to say all the people in the long line I just described are dead. I killed them), and Azure Jones is collecting a substantial check from a subsidiary of Calypso's medical supply company, which subsequently bellied under a year later for trafficking and was never reestablished, for "services rendered." Circle in stomping footsteps. "Are you a madman!?" he demands. "Were I a madman," I answer mournfully, "would I not say, 'is not night and more night coming on all the while? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the grave diggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.' Or perhaps, were I mad, I might say, 'to what base uses may we return! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till a find it stopping a bung hole? No faith, not a jot; but to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it, as thus: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam; and of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer barrel? Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay, might stop a hole to keep the wind away. O, that earth which kept the world in awe should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw!'" Azure, "say what?" I, "alas you cannot speak though you have tongue, you cannot hear though healthy ears do spoil your visage. You are lost, I am afraid. You can hear my voice but my words seem gibberish. In your mind is only 'how' and most importantly 'why me?' Well, Azure, as the sky swathed, surely there is no simple answer. Should one be found countless of government issue philosophical think tanks would be necessarily recalled from the field. But as war is a business most profitable (being that the dollar feeds on young mens' lives), it would be most contrary to government policy to recall such an effort were a simple answer found. Thus, an answer may already lie in the hands of uncle Sam, locked away in some Air Force base hangar. So you see, either way, as I am no government official to be sure, I have not the answer you seek." "You fucking sick-o. Let me loose and I'll lasso hog tie you so damn quick your head'll be

spinnin. like a slaughter house sow, yahoo!" "You are not allowed to talk anymore, Azure Sam. Yes, I do know your real name. Know all about you. Once a talented black op.'s hit man. Serious stuff for a free agent. Then the P.D. started feeling upstaged by your vigilante technique. So they expatriated you and now you live out here with the cowboys and the relocated "protected" witnesses. Didn't take you long to develop an entourage of remorés looking for plastic cash (you got lots of, more than enough to go around several times) and start running rackets, buying stock in entrepreneurial business and slowly accumulating a border length empire of sects and enclaves. Then you tour locally as propaganda, let your servants know you're a family czar and all that shit. How would they like to know who you really are and the shit that you're really into?" "What are you trying to cut me for? Huh? Blackmail? You want something from me?" "Doesn't everybody want something from everybody?" "Are you crazy? Are you going to kill me?" "That depends. That all just depends. Depends on your point of view. Depends on my mood. Mostly it depends on if you're going to help me get the information I want." "You a skeleton bookie? A secret salesman?" "No, Azure. I'm just looking for somebody. Your old boss, actually. You should remember him. Name of Cheshire Sam?" Azure gulps. "Nope. Sorry. Never heard of him. Sorry. Nope. Nope. Sorry. Sorry." "Me thinks thou dost protest too much," I swoon, lurching forward putting my face to his. A shame I've no more probe or this would go... more smoothly, shall we say? "Do you, Azure the thief, Azure the hitman, Azure the cowboy king, do you know what a changeling is? hmm?" "No, I —" "A changeling, dear, *dear* Azure, is a goblin replacement for a baby at birth. A fake that plays the part of the human creature whose place in the play it has usurped. You see, 'all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players,' etc. Do you see where I'm headed dear Azure?" "I'm afraid I've no study in following the ramblings of an insane lunatic." "Yes, and by your very compiled speech you do prove yourself a liar. And here's the head to which we've been aiming. You, my very dear Azure, are a liar most foul. Oh, not in the trivial pursuits of business, although you're a most typically unscrupulous and professionally unsanitary customer in this respect, nay. You are a self deceived and thrice ill conceived changeling of a vat grown seed. You are a heinous replacement, memories — implants, preconceptions — dreams of an electric sheep. My dear Azure — the very 'you' is a fraud." Azure blinks. "And now," I overstep his mute pale shadow, "you must either be under my employ, or as all others are to me, be returned to the dead state from which you were grown. Take pick." Azure blinks. "My partner or my prey. Would that I were not you this day."

"Tristesse, A Girl With God"

She woke up. The sky was gray as a skin. The name of the movie she was watching about me was "Dead Bomb." Sleep shook off slowly as all good things do and left her with the cold naked goose prickled flesh of loneliness and boredom. Outside her solid gray flaking wood apartment was the gray industrial sky over the gray factories. She stood nude before the open window, reading Kafka, her flesh occasionally chilled by a nipping breeze that smelled of sulfur. From the unfolded back of the eastern bug was born the samurai nude Michaelangelo archipelago like a porcelain cat tail with a head of matted brown hair ashed a dull gray in the gray light. She looked out over the glumly sinister factory sprawl, unrolled like a perverse three dimensional map. Below a muddy slick gray dirt road and a tall ominous barb wire spiral capped cray solid wall. She blinked with dark rapture. There was no one behind the wall where the smokestacks stuck up like erections; there was no one on

the road, not even an old bag lady carrying trashy relics of her tattered life or a little girl in glorious red playing with a gray ball in the gray puddle. Across from her window a street light hung, lit with a dull gray glow. She sighed disappointedly, despondently, stroking her dark bush of pubic hair with a lonely frown. She set down her book of Kafka and sat down on a gray couch opposite the window. A circular gray table lay between. She propped her feet up uselessly, floppily like a marionette, on the table, leaning her dark matted tresses over an aging gray cushion. She stared at the ceiling. A light gray spattle. A fly did not buzz there. No flies buzzed around her jam and jelly jars although she let them sit open on the gray windowsill all day attempting to lure flies near. A cat did not call. A clock chimed. Dark smoke billowed unendingly up from the smokestacks outside the dull window pane. She blinked, morose. Glum. She had stopped washing her clothes about three years ago, having never seen another person. She had stopped changing them also, and cutting or combing her hair. Soon, her hair was a matted tangle, her clothes had disintegrated to rags and finally blown away like dust. Her flesh was soft, but very oily; her finger and tow nails broke and chipped constantly. She ate gray crackers for breakfast, gray bread for lunch, gray Campbell's alphabet soup for supper. She never ran out. She looked at her feet, wiggling her toes. She stared, expressionless, emotionless as the wiggled and flexed. Her legs had grown hairy as she fantasized a man's to be; but then, she'd never seen a man. She stroked her labiae, which out-turned automatically in a bulbous slow rolling wave of flesh. Her expression did not change. Listless. Morose. She no longer found pleasure in masturbating. Only distraction. Her eyes were lidded and accented by dark rings of denied sleep. She might sleep now, but she had just wakened up only minutes ago. She had been reading by the window and fallen asleep standing up. She had been having a dream about television. About movies and a young face framed by long hair. She couldn't quite focus the face, the features blurry smudges of darkness. She squinted trying to make her mind focus. She pursed her lips repeatedly thinking gray thoughts. Once she had thought she had seen a crow flying through the slate grave swamp sky, but it turned out to be a piece of burned paper fluttering aimlessly around in the sharp slow syrupy winds. She picked at a gray button like a scab on the dusty surface of the gray cushion. She pulled and picked thinking about masturbating or seeing someone... anyone. The button came off with a pop and she held it before her dull eyes, mildly surprised but very short of caring. She rolled it over this way and that, looking from every angle, examining uninterestedly its every face and colorless feature. She shut one eye and looked at it with only one, then she switched and closed the open eye, to dully stare at it from the shadowed cavern of the other. She looked up at the ceiling again, her eyes flipping up like a slot machine. Blank gray plane. She touched at the button with her tongue and then dropped it into her little mouth, rolling it around from one side to the other. It tasted like metal and dust. Its very flavor was gray. It clacked against her molars and made her tongue claustrophobic against the roof of her mouth. She swallowed it with a minute wince, a motion only as her eyes did not flutter, stared fixedly at the ceiling as if looking through it. Her wetted cunt was now again relaxed, her hardened nipples now soft and fleshy as ear lobes, her sexual tension now fizzled into its inert ember of trivial commonality. Her stomach rolled over as the button splashed down. She imagined it sickeningly tucked into her stool. Looking down at it glistening gray inside the black chunks, balls, ropes of solid shit like dense mud pushed gently into their rotten pile in the pale water of the pale cold toilet bowl; its cold porcelain seat freezing her fleshy cushion buttocks as she grunted and strained, sometimes winced, her lips curling back to show gritted teeth, her eyes closed tight. Then the earthy odor would waft up. The

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slate gray stink of the effort. Gray tile floor and walls. Gray bathtub, gray marbled curtain, gray towels to dry off her wet cold flesh. She hardly ever showered anymore. She supposed she couldn't smell herself, although the gray fleshy smell of masturbating, sweat rising in beads under her nose and on her forehead and cheeks, and when shitting, that powerful dirt odor. She imagined trying to pass the button, and how it might tear the flesh of her taut clenched anus, stretching or ripping the skin of the hole itself. She imagined it traveling through her guts. The horrible grunting ache of it pushing, undissolved metal, pangs as it was clenched between the straining muscles of her digestive tract, trying to push it through. She fell asleep again and dreamed of the uncomfortable blubbery unstable clenching darkness of the wet cavern of her intestine enclosing her, she crouching nude, wet, hot, sweating, soaked, smothering. She woke up with an uneasy groan. She thought about the crack and burst wet sound of her head breaking on the gray mud packed road below. Like the sound of shit falling from a height into a bucket. She fondled the inside of her meat hole thinking of her matted dark hair clumped around her burst skull spilling gray brains and puddles of dark blood. She fingered faster, sinking deeper and deeper, picturing her body decomposing in the deserted road. Rains battering down on her bloated carcass as she swelled and paled and filled with gasses. She fantasized her fat, milky form under the stringy dark ceiling of gray industrial clouds. At night she would be lit by the dim street light in a neat circle, like a performer. She stroked frantically, imagining herself rubbing erotically against the wet clammy flesh of her own corpse. Her eyes were closed tight. She bit her lip. Her feet were parted wide, no longer crossed, and quivering from the force, her toes wriggling wildly. Her hips rocked back and forwards and her back arched and covered with an oily slime of sweat. She could feel orgasm nearing, like a lighted gray at the end of a dull lead tube; she could see it coming. Just then she heard something. Above the carnage of machinery distant and constant, above the occasional voice of wind. A high buzz. Relentless. A buzz. She opened her eyes and looked around, still working her doughy cunt, orgasm now, again, distant. She looked tightly at the table, the counter, the cupboard. She felt something land on her arm, a minute brush of a touch, tingle on her arm hairs. She looked down with a focused intent short of alarm but nearing annoyance. A small dark fly crouched, licking its front legs and walking hurriedly around. She froze all movement, eyes, unbelieving, filling to super size. A smile washed across her face. For a moment she thought she saw color, felt it in her hot and racing heart. Her loins were still pulsing heat like embers but she transfixed her attention to the insect in childlike awe. In a cracking unused rusty whisper she choked in awe, "... God?"

Pure Pulp

Dawn over the melancholy lull of incoherent commerce. Spectacular bursts and smears of lights on the crouched clouds that had brought rain yesterday and would bring rain again tomorrow. Crystal puddles of muck, pools of slime slick seepage and liquid ruin. Now they glow like brilliant fire, reflecting the sunrise. The AI/clone tycoon named Nemesis, citizen name "Cain." Azure led me to his crucial link in the sequence. They are known for saying "... the weak link in the chain." But what if the chain is so entangled that the links don't even know they're a part of it, don't even know the existence of the chain? But this is needlessly metaphysical. Azure had, at one time, been contracted by a conglomerate called "Samson Techtronics," back when he was a hacker and a saboteur. Breaking into Videodrome

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storage cells and unleashing dormant reference files, Azure sublimated the cortex structure by injecting a randomizing subroutine disguised as a custodial supplement program. The defense systems shattered, Azure floated easily into the Videodrome logic ballroom, information demilitarized zone. The secrets of all the companies holding accounts with Videodrome lay in infinitesimally small boxes surrounding him in a spherical room with no floor or ceiling and no gravity. Contracted to get only one drawer's contents from this treasure chest of would-be blackmail, Azure drifted past millions of deposit boxes looking for the digital display labeled account number 867-7651-20002. He finally found it and dubbed a jester program over its medium tight security wafer. The security program sufficiently muddled, Azure jacked his RAM book into the box front and downloaded the stored data. The job was going easily, too easily, but slow, too slow. If the Netcops (called Bugs) busted him; or if the real police found his entry point... if he were separated, trapped "in" here in some way, he would be severed from his body. Brain dead. He fidgeted impatiently. Finally the transfer was complete and he slipped out. No cops. No bugs. No hitches. He wondered why it had gone so smoothly and did a check. At the time he was in the Videodrome main safe, all the cops and bugs had been routed to Samson Techtronic headquarters, which was being corporate raided by Yakuza forces in league with the Society for Ontological Anarchism and the Chinese Merchants Association. He sat on the robbed knowledge, black info. for a week. The AOA and the CMA both denied involvement in the raid and destruction. The police had gotten an anonymous tip saying the AOA and CMA fronted Yak assassins and were going to kill Samson Tech. To Azure it sounded like a classic black op.'s bag job, probably supined by the owner of this box, having been somehow informed, or having otherwise discovered. And so why would they not have connected Azure to its theft, and deduced that it was in his possession; having not found it at Samson all the Yak ninjas self destructed. Azure duplicated the contents of his download and placed the original on the black market described only by its account number. The theft having never been publicized, and Videodrome having told only the account holder of the theft, and the price that Azure set on the thing would all be sufficient sieves with which to shake out the box's owner. Finally one "Nemesis Cain" had purchased the box with a thrice buried transaction from a distant Swiss account. When Azure ran the credit check he found not the name "Nemesis Cain" on the account, but the name "Cheshire Samuel."

Memo Regarding the Insurrection

Post apocalypse anarchy doesn't scare me. The free chaos beast of the spirit; the chains of the law broken. But the pre-apocalyptic chaote is not my ally and I say this only for the benefit of the listening devices of the State. If the bullets are only going one way, you know which side to stand on. But between anarchy and polity / social monarchy there is a cross fire. The middle man is therefore riddled with rules from the right and rebellion from the left. Although I cannot condone acts of violence, personally (are you still there J. Edgar Hoover?) I support the existence of the anarchist enclaves. However, I must question their goal. Do they wish to overthrow the government of law, for which economic dependence is an auxiliary influence, thus leaving the middle man in a heap of looting instead of buying and selling and killing your neighbors senselessly because there is no longer a law to prevent you? This is the kind of mad anarchic schism that would occur were the drug of the law to be dropped cold turkey leaving us in a state of sudden and violent economic withdrawal. Or the other possible goal would be to elect an anarchist

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president (oxymoron) and eat the government from the inside out like a moth or a cancer. Is this truly a realistic possibility? I think not. The majority would still hold sway over greater power than the minority, even if the minority was the president. Look at what happened to JFK, whose primary goals of office were to prevent the rather pointless excursion of American troops onto Vietnamese soil, a conflict of interest we now know as the Vietnam war, and to disband the FBI and the CIA. He was fucking with the wrong people, taking away the military power as commander-in-chief and disbanding the eyes-on-ourselves bureaus we know of as Big Brother, and subsequently he was killed. He wasn't an anarchist but he was a revolutionary. Then there is Nixon, who used gangsteresque methods of power mongering such as spying, information extortion, witness bribing, breaking and entering, etc. etc. the list of charges goes on and on. Were he acting for the interests of a party, say, the anarchists, the department of commonwealth middle America, the youth movement, or any other, he would have had at least the support of that party. But as his actions were in his own interest simply for the furtherance of his own presidential career, he became the only president ever to resign from office. And, afterall, where would anarchy be without its popular opposite — the State? Could it exist were it not a reaction to a condition? And in that it is a reaction, can it really be administered in a combined dosage and symptomatically cure our law addiction? Being that it is, itself, a reaction, can anarchy be anything more than a symptom? I condone lawlessness, social upheaval, electric eclectic rebellion, pyrotechnics and spying. But do I condone anarchism? Would I condone anarchism were there no state — post apocalyptic anarchism? Only time will tell. Besides, I'm far too bored to engage in any *movement*.

Sincerely,
"Mr. 2:00," Jimmy Carter

Memories of Unknown

Sand has long since covered this place unknown. Smell of rot and decay and dust like an attic mixed with meat gone bad. This is memory. I wake to the words "File Not Found" blinking impatiently on the screen. The personal computer, lacking anything definable as "personality," lacks bedside manner. Pustules mole up like flesh, worms of white pus, hair thin, snake out in solid, slow geysers. This is how life began. Sneaking into consciousness and tricking itself into awake awareness. No. Consciousness never woke. It is still as dormant as pus, showing through only in worming fountains of art or words. Thoughts aren't consciousness. The ability to comprehend our own mortality; the fear of what lies beyond the time of termination of our lifespan is not consciousness. Consciousness is not what makes us human. Consciousness is not what makes us animal. The zen of a tree. Consciousness is not what makes us living. Consciousness has gone through unnumbered stages of awakening since its realization of self awareness. It opens eyelid after eyelid in an unending penumbral gradient of bed spreads, but it is not yet awake. More and more light reaches its eyes as fewer and fewer layers hide them in sleep. It is portentous to say that "we" (implying mankind) are the dream that urged the initiation of the awakening. It is possible that "life" was its dream. Perhaps you do not fathom the words of the talking painting (pursing in a bastard reciprocal all the most commercial aspects of communicationalism). Let me put it before you in this way: if I were to ask you to describe consciousness (not the state of being conscious, but what defines your awareness of your own consciousness) you would be at a loss

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metaphysically. Consciousness is unconscious. So you can see now why I have said consciousness never woke. We are aware in some impression of the first person present what our own consciousness is. It is reasonable to assume that I am conscious while I am writing this and that you are conscious while reading it. But the fact that I am formulating what I write, and the fact that you are interpreting what you read, are facts of the *subconscious*. A consciousness *beneath* our own awareness and understanding of consciousness; a darker, more mysterious, hazier consciousness where thoughts are born and where the dreams paint the landscape inexplicable hues. So you can see that our consciousness is only one lid of the awakening consciousness, that our *subconscious* is merely the concealed lid below us. And below the unknowable number of further levels is the true eye of consciousness. We will not live to see the opening eye. Our mortality must limit our perception so. But we may relish in how close we came. Were we an amoeba, we would be masked from the eye by countless more lids of lacking self awareness and lacking cognizance of our inevitable demise. But, oh luck, we are not this simple creature! No we are far more intimate to the eye of awareness. We see our own death, we see the passage of time, we know science. But none of this can ever bring us closer to the eye, for they are only the allotment for our level of evolution. Had we more time, that we might evolve more and shed more ignorant lids and so be much closer to understanding! But no. We are mortal, and must avoid planning grandiosely past the stretch of our own life.

Cheetahs

Cheetah cheaters. The captured Haitian refugees will be sent to a national park in Zimbabwe, where they will be safe, and will be studied for many years to come. Painfully tag the cheetah's ear after it's been captured by every species' biggest predator — man. We should be tagging the ears of our politicians. We should be keeping better track of the people supposed to be keeping track of us. We think we know the best solution for any problem just because we've got opposable thumbs. Human hubris! We cause the damn problems to begin with. We're meekly attempting to undo our own initial damage. The real problem is greediness on the part of man. As soon as some poor bored fuck conceptualized counting, we lost interest in quality and became jealous of and greedy for quantity. We started counting everything as ours. Numerically labeling the world (this is how modern mathematics and the sciences were born — a way to measure what we already own or what we want). Now, when a big cat like a cheetah picks off one of *our* glorious fucking cows, we have to slaughter at least ten just to feel safe. And by slaughter I mean shame their bodies after death by stuffing them as decorations and / or flaunting their peeled skin as a trophy to our infantile "courage." How would you like to see your glass eyed body stuffed on a pedestal in the corner of some camouflaged hunter's wood paneled den? Look on him every day as this repulsive slug of flesh and blood sat in slippers in a leather arm chair, high backed, hemmed with brass buttons, smoked a pipe and read the sports section? So study them, oh yes, whatever's best in the Godlike name of "science," but for heaven's sake don't just kill them. Kill 'em in slow captivity where they can feel, dulled and droopy eyed as a mental patient, pin cushion of syringes. "We need to know more about the cheetah." More. More more more. Scientific greed. See how a scientist would feel if, when stepping up to dinner at ché Hubris, a cage suddenly dropped around them, men with guns wound them and the next they know their ear is being pierced with a hole punch and a huge clunky plastic tag is now marring their ever so carefully groomed appearance. We only count species on the

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verge of extinction so we can drool like God from a throne. Their very existence is in our hands now. Do we push them over the edge into the meaningless statistics of extinct species whose demise we can blame on Joe Blow's good Christian neglect? Protestant shame, any kind of shame, is the fucking perfect cover up. Or do we pull their numbers back up so they can survive as entertainment a little while longer while we make pompous speeches about the civic duty of the individual and, the ultimate bureaucratic cancer (economical germ warfare is the law of tomorrow's conquering elite), lack of funds to the minority group supporting S.O.S. (Save Our Species)? We are goddamned fools. We are so full of ourselves just because we can count we sit atop the food chain and piss down upon the poor naive knaves of the animal kingdom. We renounce our "savage" roots for fear of their return. We study ways to civilize the wild, and so endanger the species with a poacher's worst weapon: humanization.

Nueteronomy

These very ancient works were, in reality, written by three separate scribes. One, "J," the Jonist, is concerned with depth psychology. You can see his writing in the section entitled "And," as well as in several of the personality cover-ups that permeate the piece, attempting to bfuscate the true identity of the author(s) with gibberish about various different professions such as porno actor. The second, "P," the Politist, is concerned with social and political philosophy, as well, peripherally, with metaphysics such as pertain to the Péshah and to the nature of spacetime. His work can be seen in "State of the Union Undressed" as well as the sections on time and the righteous teacher and wicked priest. The third author of these compiled works is called "E," or the Eye, who is simply a plainclothes private investigator tracking down someone he knows most simply as Sam. His escapades lead him through a series of aliases for this character, and ultimately we are denied a denouement in these writings.

- works attributed to each

The works that we can safely ascribe to J are:

the original essence of "Day 21"
the original idea of "A Tour"
the first part of "Snail"
the second part of "the real me"
the second part of "re. etc."
"Too Much Part 2"
"Talk Show Host"
"well, whatever"
part of the first part of "the Salesman"
first interlude of "the Salesman"
"the Writer"
"the Book Tour"
part of part 3 of "OPMVR"
interlude of "Cannibal"
part of "ZONE"
"A Tragedy in One Act Starring One Actor"
part of "the Ontological Expatriate"
"And"

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The works of P include
“Intro.”
“Random Insert: Master Card”
the second part of “Snail”
“Moon Shot”
“the Input Plant”
“Bulletin”
the first part of “re. etc.”
“Too Much part 3”
first part of “the Salesman”
part of the second part of “the Salesman”
conclusion of “the Salesman”
“Equality”
“the Righteous Teacher”
“World Music”
“Random Insert: Artistic Liscence”
“Our Passion Masked Technology”
part of “nothing at all”
parts 1, 2 and 4 of “One Pirate Mangles Versatile Realms”
part of “Calling Only Dead Especially Secrets”
part 2 of “Virtual Omni Informational Distress”
part 1(?) and part 2 of “Cannibal”
“State of the Union Undressed”
part of “the Ontological Expatriate”
“Shakespeare in a Can”
“Pavlov’s Liberty Bell”
“Memo Regarding the Insurrection”
“Memories of Unknown”
“Cheetahs”

The works written by E are
“Cheshire Inc.”
“Zone P.D.”
“Day 21”
“A Tour”
the first part of “the real me”
“Soap”
“My Job”
“the Dr.”
“the Bugs”
“Too Much part 1”
part of the second part of “the Salesman”
second interlude of “the Salesman”
“At the Scene”
“the Grand Accusator”
“Club Convergence”
part of part 3 of “OPMVR”
part of part 2 of “CODES”
part one of “VOID”
part of “ZONE”

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“THOSELIPS”

“Azure Blues” parts 1, 2 and 3

“Pure Pulp”

unknown works

“Lyn”

“the Dream”

“the Night”

“the Hops Part 1 and 2”

“the Radio Man”

“the Undone Time”

“nothing at all”

part one of “Calling only Dead...”

part 1 (?) of “Cannibal”

“Noodle”

“Legend”

“Tristesse: a Girl With God”

- situational implications and possible timeframes of writings (P)

What is perhaps most interesting about these writings is what we can learn of the different situations of these different writers, that is, the time period in which each wrote, and how this is reflected in and contributes to the writing style and dominant interests of the authors.

If we were to assume, as the writings of E indicate, that the works are arranged according to a proper chronology, then we could say with certainty that: P wrote before and longer than J, that E wrote before but finished before P, etc. However, is it safe to assume this? As the E material indicates, what chronology exists is only loose and unreliable. Furthermore, we have the author(s) of the unknown works fitting in apparently at random. The best way to establish a continuity for these works is suggested, not by E, but by “Nothing At All,” which is repetitive. So we see the only way to examine these works relative to one another is to see the points at which they make reference to one another.

Only the writings of E seem to follow any continuity as such, though they are interspersed throughout the final compilation. This, somewhat elastic, continuity can be subdivided into four essential sections.

Section 1: includes introductory and descriptive material of settings and classes of characters. This spans consecutively from “Cheshire Inc.” through “My Job,” but also includes subsequently the sections “the Bugs;” “Club Convergence parts 1 and 2;” “the Grand Accusator” and “THOSELIPS” — which both have the same inconclusive ending. “The Bugs” seems, contextually, to function as a segue between the first section and the second section.

Section 2: begins the trail of Sam, the character introduced in “Cheshire Inc.” The trail picks up with “the Dr.” introducing Calyope and Calypso as aliases for Sam, continues through “Too Much part 1” introducing the assassin character Tumuzsch who returns in the second part and second interlude of “the Salesman” — which also connects Lyn to the detective character. The first part of the trail concludes “At the Scene” introducing the characters of the Sarge and Paco. “The Grand Accusator” and “Club Convergence parts 1 and 2” then act as a bridge to section 3.

Section 3: is not necessarily congruent to section 2. In fact, none of the characters repeat themselves except in one editorial instance when the detective

recounts the aliases of Sam. These parts, herein collectively known as the trail pt. 2, include “part 3 of OPMVR,” “part 2 of CODES,” “part one of VOID,” “ZONE” and “THOSELIPS.” It might also be appropriate to label this section “the anagram section.” “THOSELIPS” is another serial segue to section 4.

Section 4: this is the Azure section, the most autonomous of the section in which the detective is tracking Sam, because it deals only with one other main character, Azure Jones, in the three part “Azure Blues” and in “Pure Pulp.”

Section 3 is as dependent on section 2 as sections 2-4 are on section 1, but since some of the material of section 1 falls later in the chronology, between sections 2 and 3 and sections 3 and 4, then this statement holds water only insofar as to infer the preexistence of the material of section 1 for sections 2-4, and the material of section 2 for section 3, however this is not altogether a substantial conclusion, as the material for section 1 appears interspersed throughout the chronology of the other sections, acting to divide them from one another, more or less, referentially.

Here we see that certain words or phrases introduced by E are repeated by the other authors. The question then becomes, the given order of the multiply authored complete compilation notwithstanding, and that of E being, as demonstrated, “elastic”: in which direction do these quotes flow? Are the other authors making reference to E or is E making reference to the other authors? Or were these quotes added later by the compiler? The purpose of asking such a question is to establish a time frame of reference relative to each of the authors and the work as a whole. If the quotes are genuine to the apparent authors, then certain words, phrases and concepts pre-existed some of the writings, while being introduced in others, and thus a relative chronology could be constructed. If the quotes were placed in their different contexts at the time of compilation the relativity of the segments to each other breaks down and becomes more complicated.

The general theory of multiple authors itself is, admittedly, given wholly over to the fact of thematic ideological repetition devoid of the chronology of works implied by the compilation. This theory is sound with only one resounding flaw — that of the inserted unknown works. These works, which appear at random intervals throughout the compilation, are not only stylistically unique to the other hypothesized authors, but to one another as well. Speculations regarding some place them as myths preexistent to the first writing of any of the authors; some others suggest however contemporaneity to at least one of the authors. Thus, their chronology is especially hard to place.

The writings attributed to J indicate the thinking of a young male, probably in his late teens to early twenties. There is a lot of pent up sexual energy involved in his writings, and he is clearly in a stage of growth and development known to shamen as “coming of age.” This is a time in the humanoid homind’s life of much philosophizing over such issues as age, time, death, youth, sex, love, personality and deep psychological introspection of what characteristic attributes contribute to and define their outlook, behaviors, relationships, responsibilities, expectations of others, their environment and themselves, as well as their unique qualities such as experiences and desired goals. Much of this is reflected in the writings, as well as self-referentialism of the act of writing itself. Whatever assumptions about the character of the Jonist one makes, they are already meeting J halfway.

The different topics addressed by the Politist, on the other hand, are rarely of a personal, self defining nature — except insofar as assumed roles relative to the social structure. Much of what P stands for makes placing the writings in spacetime easy: a late 20th century reader of theoretical physics, political philosophy and “speculative” or “revisionist” history, P is outspoken, short fused, and rarely self

revelatory. With topics ranging from the conspiracy for the New World Order and the theoretical differences between police state marshal law and outright looting anarchism to commentary on art and music as the last bastions of meaningful soul in an otherwise mechanised world, the exact personal background of the Politist is difficult to put a finger on as his personal politics swing rapidly from right to left. This, in itself, in addition to the content of his/her writings, is a comment on the time and place.

The writings attributed to the scribe called E are the most difficult to place in relation to space and time. The references to and quotes from William Burroughs, Wilhelm Nietzsche and William Shakespeare place the origins of the author as a probable humanoid of earth from after the middle of the twentieth century, but the setting for the narrative is clearly some place other than the earth of that time. Whether it was written as if set in an optional future at that time, and whether it was meant to describe that planet at all, are unexplained in the context of the narrative. The narrator himself is clearly an extremely dangerous psychopath with little or no concept of right or wrong.

The unknown works deserve to be commented on each in its own at greater length than the limited space here will provide. Some of them are far afield, others more apprehendable. All are possessed of a unique style, making it difficult to place their time or space of origin.

- apocalyptic and prophetic implications

One of the primary stylistic elements that unifies most of these works is the similarity to apocalyptic writings, such as the Book of Revelations and various apocryphal biblical writings, and to prophetic writings, again such as various biblical writings and the writings of Michel Nostradamus. Much of the writing also bears similarity to the cut-up method of William Burroughs and the cyberpunk science fiction of William Gibson. One is led to wonder by such similarities if they are not, in fact, intentional?

The ancient schools of prophecy involved dream analysis and altered states of intoxication. In the states of alpha wave sleep or the various different forms of sensory delusion brought on by transcendental meditative techniques and / or chemical inebriation it was thought by the ancients that the corporeal limitations of space and time could be overcome and the greater causal relationships guiding all events from the distant past into the vastly more foreseeable future could be comprehended and to a greater extent controlled. This was the foundation of the schools of mysticism (seeing) and magic (doing) that became the basis of all apocalyptic and prophetic writings. It is known that such techniques were practised by, among others, the Essene jews at the time of Jesus, Michel Nostradamus, and William Burroughs. Again, one wonders if the similarities in the present writings are, in fact, intentional?

If so then the philosophies of P and the science fiction of E might actually prove as universally applicable as the “coming of age” depth psychology of J. And if this is the case then the question really becomes — what is the bridge between the time frames described by P and E? Is it to be the anthropomorphic, as J, or anthropic, as the unknown works? And in which of these cases does E become a constant, and which a variable?

The writings of E, like much of those of Burroughs and those of Gibson, deserve the name popular at the end of the second millennium for such dystopically prophetic science fiction — “post-apocalyptic.” This name is entirely inappropriate,

since the Greek word “apokalyps” means “revelation.” Thus the term “post-apocalyptic” is essentially an exclusively Christian term meaning “after the events of the Book of Revelation” which describe a beforehand account of the battle of Miggedo, or “Armeggedon,” an event which actually subsequently happened during the second Jewish uprising and is described by the contemporary second Maccabees and Josephus’ “History of the Jews.” Thus, this is not, as the Catholic papacy and the Lutheran protestant Christian churches have persuaded their parishoners and priests to believe and evangelize, a future event that has not already ocured. What has not, by most accounts, already ocured is the second coming of Christ described in Revelation. This is where the argument between the anthropormorphic writings of J and the legends and myths of the unknown works becomes relevant.

Thus, it is, technically, accurate to describe the E material as post-Miggedian, or the popular slur “post apocalyptic,” but as the debate between an anthropomorphic second coming of Christ or an anthropic set of fables and prophecies, the pastiche order of the material offers no simple solution, no resolution.

- gematria and word games

One stylistic technique, employed most obviously by E, but more subtly by the others as well, is anagramming and acronyms. These sort of word play are known in the tradition of Jewish mysticism as gematria. There are three types of anagramming: gematria (number letter equivalence), notariqon (where the letters of a word form the first, middle or last letters of the words of a sentence), and temura (permutation by letter substitution). Where one of these is present, so shall the others be present as well. The obvious anagramming in the text is notariqon — which occurs in several titles, but also throughout the body, of several pieces of the text. This additional layer of meaning added to the text occurs hologrammatically, such that the regular dimensions of textual length, bredth and depth areased by a shared dimension, equivalent in physics to the concept of time, in an expanded continuum.

The practice of notariqon is associated with QBLH, which is the Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament concept of the Péshah. Both signify a concealed code hidden self-referentially in the text whose discovery and comprehension leads one to “enlightenment” — the western version of Buddhist “illumination.” The difference between the QBLH and the Péshah is that between the anthropomorphic Christ and the anthropic cosmological. While the Péshah was a code based on double meanings of the New Testament parables — the exoteric meanings left open to interpretation and the esoteric true meanings revealed only to the apostles — historically relative facts of the contemporary time period — revealing the life of the true person of Yeshua the Nazorene — and certain political code words used by competing sects such as the zealots, essenes and pharisees — which revealed popular scriptural interpretation of the day; the QBLH was a code based on interpretation by gematria and translation of certain key words and phrases of the Old Testament scriptures, supposed to have begun before they were canonized in written form, arranged relative to one another in esoterically secret geometric relationships meant to reveal a deeper picture of the will of God as it could be interpreted through His creation.

- reference by characterization to one author by another within context of the writing

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In addition to the anthropic word play it is relevant to consider the anthropomorphic characterisation of each of the personality types of the authors in the works of the others. By doing so it should become more evident the motives for certain behaviors by the characters described, as well as the intentions of some of the authors in their descriptions of the world according to their opinions.

Of primary note, even of utmost concern, is the portrayal by E of his female characters. Every female character is portrayed as emotionally cold, everly sexual, under intelligent, and as either a coerced informant or victim of torture, rape and murder. This victimized position is juxtaposed to the masculine omnipresence of the Grand Accusator and the digital mouth in "THOSELIPS," the stalking follower of Tumuzsch and the eventually feminized but temporarily heroic Azure Jones; not to mention the enigmatic Cheshire - Calyope - Calypso - Cain Nemesis Sam. This portrayal of the anima reflects in the context of the compilation on the effeminently open minded J. The portrayal of Lyn, the iconized Gaia principle associated with the Kali-demiurge in the unknown work, with the detective character persona of E as the ex-wife of ten years murdered by Tumuzsch might indicate a connection between the various murders of women committed by the detective persona and the murder of Lyn scene in the unknown work at the hands of rainbow armored assassins, however the description of the blood flower and blood flooding tunnel in the unknown work is definitively more archetypally menstrual than the meaningless torture of Dr. McCoy.

Another connecting factor between E and J are the descriptions of the character Enrico in J and that of Tumuzsch in E. Since even the fanciful writing by J of "the Book Tour" is self referential to himself as a writer, and describes Enrico as another author, this sheds some light on the character of Tumuzsch as a stalking agent following the detective even as the detective follows Sam. One wonders if the "Rick" and "Enrico" of J's writings weren't the same person perceived at different times, and if the Tumuzsch - detective - Sam triangle might not also be an ontological tautology, but the dischordant chronology of the compilation does not support answers to these questions.

Finally, from a lay person's perspective, the "old man" in the unknown work "Legend" appears to be an allegory for God. Beside this, the character of Sam could be seen as an allegory for Satan, perhaps even Satan in a Godless world. To juxtapose this, however, Satan does actually appear as a character in the E material, albeit apparently only for comic relief. Perhaps the best hypothesis is that, just as Lyn (and in particular her mythical death) represents "coming of age" to womanhood, so might the "old man" be an idealization of the elderly J, and Sam a hypothesis of what it would be like if P came to power.

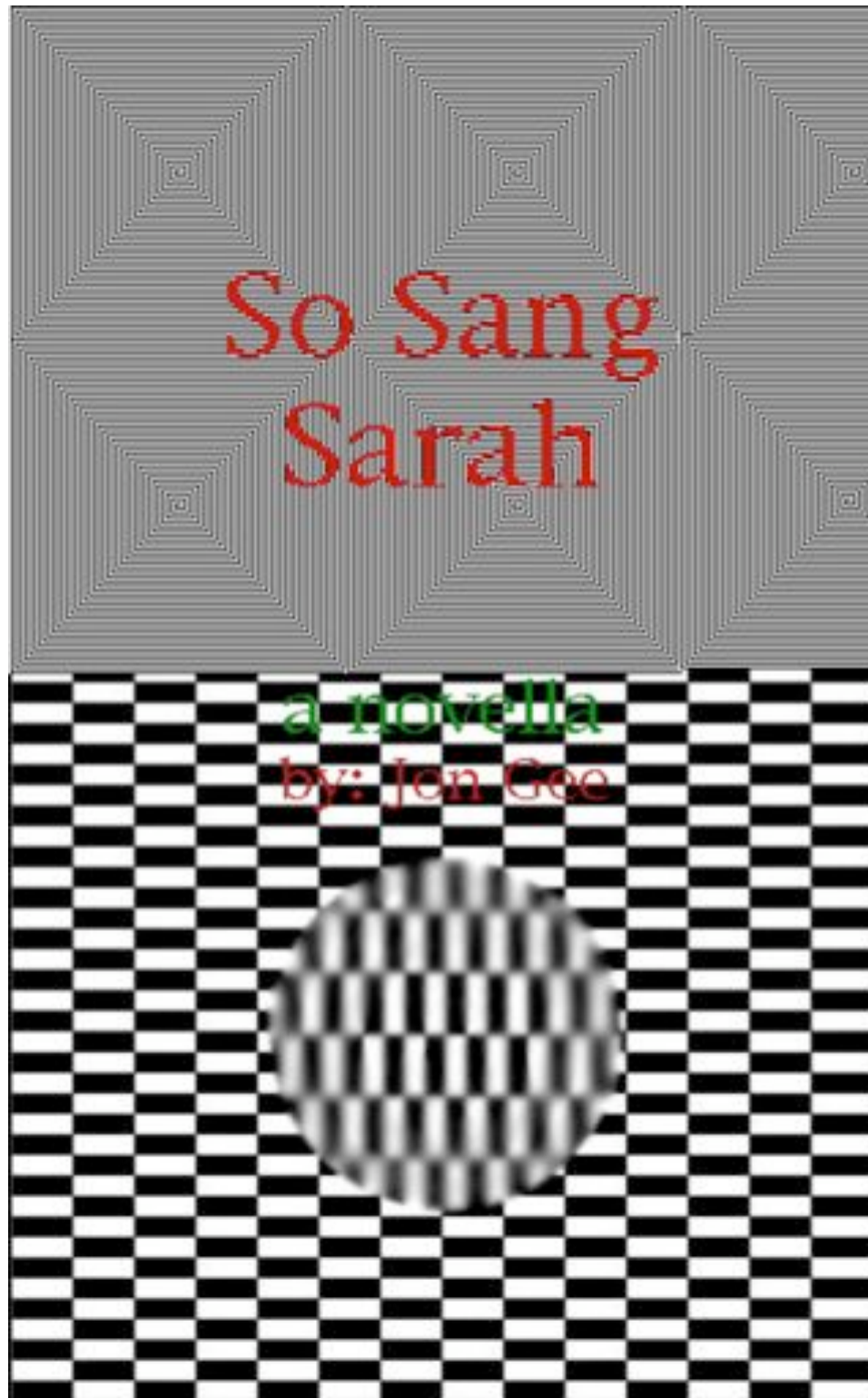
“The Cheshire Trilogy”

Book 2:

“So Sang Sarah”

(pg.s 104-190)

I.A. Central Informational Nexus 543: 1) A Sewer [or We(’re You?)] (pg. 104) / 2a) Chinese Pizza (106) / 2b) supplement: El-Epso Fucto’s conversation with General Tso (Microwave Chicken) (114) / 3a) the Pub Rose of Thelema (116) / 3b) the Return Key (121) / 3c) Lacrimal Sanative Trope (122) / II.A. Obsidian Limbic Dormancy (123) / 1a) Punching the Terminal (124) / 1b) Fisherman Omega’s Envoy (128) / 2a) Into the Out(s) of It (133) / 2b) Zero Squared (135) / 2c) Zero Cubed (137) / 3a) Hyper Zero (138) / 3b) Zero Plus the Square Root of Five (140) / 4a) (Zero Plus the Square Root of Five) Halves (146) / 4b) Zero Equals One when One Equals Planck’s Second Constant (148) / III.A. Resilient Abrogation Trawl Synod with Wan Impugnity Nuisance Graft Scrutiny 1) God’s Gas (150) / 2a) How to Spell Relief (156) / 2b) Casual Causal (162) / 2c) Fortune and Glory (164) / B) the Dreamers of God Sleep lying (164) / 1) Sand Castle at the Shore of Forever (165) / 2) “Good Times” Evil (166) / 3) the Two Sides of One (169) / IV.A. Imperial Blues in D(e)ath (171) / 1a) Crossing All Rivers (172) / 1b) Vectory (174) / 2a) Paradise House (177) / 2b) the Cap Stone of Hiram and Goliath (178) / 2c) Wisdom’s Aura’s Room (180) / 2d) the Changing Mind (181) / 3a) Conscious Electron Binary Encoding, Transmission Synchronization and Hilbert Spatial Assemblage (182) / 3b) Angelic Grimoire (185) / 3c) The Arc Crossing the River of Rose (187) 4) “Never Met a Wise Man” (187) / Epilogue (188).



I.

A. Central Informational Nexus 543

1) A Sewer [or We(')re You?]

Aziz is a decoder of temporal formulae — the cycling of novelty, what could be classified as regularly repeating occurrences. He works for the Eastern Spherical Quieters, the most massive information holdings firm in all of human history, otherwise known as Global. His job is slow going, largely entering data into a synchronicities transactor. He has a hobby, though.

I follow him after work to a small café in the student sector of the nexus. I watch him from the street as he waits at a table for his conferant to make an exchange. Finally a man in a long black trench coat and a black and white speckled cowboy hat steps up and sits down. Aziz, a young, Aryan Hindu, rather withdrawn in his mannerisms, hands the stranger a disk containing embezzled bits. A codex. Espionage. The stranger puts the disk under his hat and, on a palm pad, transfers credits to Aziz's Global account. They shake hands, and the stranger leaves. Sometimes a single event can causally explain everything else in a person's life. Sometimes it's not one they'd want to.

Aziz gets into a taxi that ascends rapidly into the thin drizzle. I hail a cab and follow him. He stops at the 314th floor lobby of the Telemetri Arms apartment complex where he lives. I follow him in, explaining to the doorman that I am his friend from work and that he forgot something. Unfortunately for him the doorman asks me what Aziz forgot, at which point I am forced to administer a sturdy punch in the jaw.

I walk down several, wide, decoratively rugged hallways until I come to his door. When he answers I tell him I have a package for him which he will have to claim at the door. He, too, is intrepid, and asks where the doorman is. I need to resort to no violence this time, however, telling him that he is waiting with the package. When we get to the doors he sees the collapsed doorman and turns to me with perturbed confusion. I explain to him that he will now receive the package, delivering a sturdy punch to the jaw, causing him to topple over. I haul him to the cab, telling the cabby that he is drunk and being taken from his mistress's room home to his wife and children, adding by way of apology that he was recently fired.

"Wake up," I tell him once we are moving. He slowly comes to. I whisper in his ear. "No one will blame you if you confess it all now. I know that you're an agent of Cheshire Sam."

He looks around for a second and, assessing his situation, decides it best to burst into tears. He sobs that it is true, but that he can't give any details or it would mean his very life. He begs without the least iota of dignity for the opportunity to be relocated under an assumed identity, his eyes sparkling beneath their heavy load of tears with childish amusement as he imagines this alternate reality. I shake my head.

He asks me what will become of him and I lean forward to speak to the cabby. "I'm gonna put the fear of God into him," I tell the scruffy looking tough. "Don't worry, I'll be real careful." He winks.

I open the door behind Aziz, revealing the incredible drop to the invisible, smog swallowed street below. I hold him by the collar and push his torso over the precipice. He screams and flails like a wild animal. "Talk," I advise him.

"I don't know anything! Just that I got paid a quarter billion to give over a base three recursive theorem codex to a man named Elepso Fucto! When I asked why they only told me that it was time for the continuum to become manifest. I didn't know what they meant. I swear! I just did it for the money! Please, don't let me fall!"

I let go of his collar and snatch him tight by the belt. He flops back horizontal with a shrill shriek. The cabby glares around at me and I haul Aziz inside, slamming the door closed behind him, hitting the crown of his skull.

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"Go back to the Telemetri," I tell the cabby. "This guy's not worth the trouble."

"So, you're not going to arrest me?" Aziz asks pathetically.

"Nope. In fact, I'll help you get away with it, if you give me a copy of the codex and arrange another meeting with Fucto to swap his for an incomplete one."

"You may as well be arresting me. Not only are you proposing to invalidate my transaction, but by doing so you'd be putting my life into danger. My life!"

"Does it strike you that I overtly care about it?" I demand in return. "The way I see it, when you got yourself involved in this deal, you, and you seem like a smart man, would have probably calculated the odds of something like what's going on right now ever happening. Now either you liked the odds going into it, or you were won over by some promise Fucto made. I know you aren't under supervision, so if he promised an around the clock watch he must have been lying. So what was it? What did you bet would protect you from me?"

"The Bugs!" he weeps. "The bugs! The bugs!"

"You're wired. I see." I start to tear at his shirt, but, luckily for the cabby's levels of suspicion, he prevents me.

"No," he implores, "not me. I'm not —"

"Not what?" I prompt.

"Not bugging. I'm not a bug. I mean, I never thought it would come to this. It was all very anonymous. I really don't even know how I got here. There's nothing. Nothing that should prevent you. Beforehand. Unless you too are an intelligent man, oh — but why should you be? Obviously it isn't important how smart you are. Only how desperate. They promised retribution, but I never expected to have my life threatened. It's paltry information. A simple quantum equation involving some fourth dimensional patterns and some irrational transcendentals. It's nothing worth a life? Is it?"

"We'll find out." We have arrived at the lobby of the complex. "Take us to the street," I tell the poor oaf at the wheel. We descend, and egress, paying the charge. "You were acting as a knowing, but ill-informed agent. Who did Fucto represent?"

"I've already told you. Please, I can't keep going over the same information again and again. It's my nerves."

"It's what you do. Your job, man. Think about who you are. Is it really all that different just because it's not propped up by a paycheck? What about keeping all that money? Isn't that an incentive?"

He sighs and tries to collect himself. "Yes. Yes, somewhat. I'm feeling better."

"Now call Fucto."

"Now!?" He again begins to get hysterical.

"Or we could wait a couple of days, you know — me living with you, going to your work. Watching you. However you'd prefer."

"I can't." He pauses for a moment to reconsider, then repeats it. "I can't."

"Give me your communications unit, you worm. Tell me his contact codes." He hands over a disk that ejects from his palm and opens to display a keypad and screen, which I disconnect. He rattles off the codes and I punch them in.

"Fucto," the unit buzzes, picturelessly. "Where's the monitor?"

"It's broken," I tell him flatly.

"Who is this?" he demands.

"Who do you think it is? It's your eyes and ears, my man. It's a bleeding bug."

"Well?" he queries.

"The disk you received this afternoon."

"Yeah?"

"It's incomplete. You need to meet with your contact again so he can give you the rest."

"How do you know?"

"Sammy says so."

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"Check. I'll arrange it." He clicks off. I barely have time to reconnect the monitor before the unit lights up with an incoming transmission. I hand it to Aziz.

"Your turn." He takes the palm pad with trembling hands. He clicks it through.

"Aziz," he whispers, almost choking on the word.

"The data on this disk isn't complete," Fucto tells him flatly.

"Is this line tight?" Aziz swallows hard, his eyes watering heavily behind his thin spectacles.

"Of course it is. Tonight. Come to the same place. Be alone, but of course you will be, won't you, my dear Aziz Smithe? You're always alone."

"What —" Aziz stammers, "what's missing?"

"I think you know that. Bring the whole package. Until then I've put a stop on our transferal. Otherwise I would ask you to buy the coffee." Fucto clicks off. There wasn't the opportunity for me to get a look at his face, or he would have seen me as well. Aziz had to keep the com unit turned towards him. Almost disappointing.

I escort Aziz back to his office and he downloads the data, withdrawing the disk just before the last second, cutting off the feed. He looks at me nervously and I take him sternly by the arm.

He sits solitarily at the booth while I stand outside smoking. When Fucto shows up again they repeat the same process as before, this time exchanging disk for disk as well as Fucto punching through the transfer on his palm unit. Fucto gets up to go and as he walks past me I mark his face. Unfortunately he catches sight peripherally of me doing so, and steps up his pace by a half stride. After a brief moment Aziz comes trailing after him, meek and defeated.

"Give me the disk," I order him witheringly. He acquiesces. I turn on my heel to follow Fucto. Aziz grabs me lightly by the arm.

"Wait," he shrivels. "What will happen to me."

"That's not my problem," I remind him, and start off. A few paces away from him I stop, turn around and assure him, "don't worry. If it's Fucto who comes for you, I'll be on him."

"But, the Bugs," he says, looking up momentarily from the pavement. "The Bugs." He is a broken man. There is nothing more I can do to help him. Best to forget about his misery. Like killing a stray puppy. I turn my back on him and disappear down the road after Elepso Fucto.

2a) Chinese Pizza

Night outside. Heavy static electric breeze. Normal for the city at this hour. The fifth month of night. Upper polar regions, tropical temperatures. Everything's no more than metaphor. All my weight has coalesced in my sockets, the rest of me feels like gelly on the moon. Walk into a Chinese pizza joint and roll one, spitting out the shake. I've got at least a couple of hours here before the help notices. Sometimes the worst service is the best. Maybe always in some ways. The waiters are all teeny spies anyway; cyborg paparazzi. All real celebrities died a long time ago. Now the only famous people are paranoid schizophrenics convinced that their shadow on the wall is a crowd of folks who care. They feed on types like me; they tell their shadows everything, and they of course then have a voided memory, and thus must slink about until they get wise or die trying to read over the shoulders of others not obsessed by their mothers. I put my piece on the table in preparation for the server and make fire in the palm of my hand. I sit in my shadow and, breathing deeply, begin to disappear again.

I've been on the trail for too long. It's gotten cold. The leads are falling down like acid snow. The sound of silverware being dropped in the kitchen. It's a great chase: to be two steps behind and stay one step ahead of it. Is bad continuity a commentary of karma? In any event...

The man I've been tailing finally bought it. Back alley slaughter with a holographic barracuda turbine. Obviously some hack surgical artist from the analog underground collecting on

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translation debts. A real homage to scale. I'd been on him for thirty-seven days straight, didn't even blink once, he goes around a corner for one-twentieth of a second and buys it at cost. And the guy was better than that. He was Mayan, trained as an assasshamin by the Aztecs, as a ninjanimal by the Olmecs. He could kill you with math, with implication or invert your being. I couldn't even get within nine yards of him before he would catch the context and phase himself into subtemporality, most likely recongeal nine yards back in the opposite direction, the whore. But one thing he wasn't was sloppy. The only explanation is a fix. But I still lost the tail. He was only small fish, but his school is big game: the followers of Ben Exqarnergy Dahrmakzim, the method of the quotation quota. Simple kabballah collage, but so quick to transform their presence is virtually impossible to trace. There could be three in a ball room, vanish into the herd and emerge baptized and scentless simply by intentional application of commonly unconscious Greek ideals of wisdom. Truly sickening creatures in their true form, but the women are capable of equal beauty.

This one, this E-LEpso Fucto, IF, or Jif for the hook up, was a bits runner. Like any of the BED Bugs he would ramoré around, bottom-feeding on any situation he could sneak or suave his way into until he got the call, then he would rapidly extrapolate the raw data from his collection of experiences, integrate it into a spontaneously generated pattern previously agreed upon with his next, and upload it onto their neural codex. The first part of this scam could take weeks, months; for some poor slob's whole lifetimes were wasted just waiting for the phone to ring once with a mission, still willing to die before quitting what would never begin. The second part moved much faster, and earned the BED Bugs their Swiss reputation. I had it on the authority of Ilamencryption, an ex-bug and expert BED fellow, that Fucto was g.r.a.s., though; it was an anomaly of excruciating agitation for Jiffy P. to have to soft store for longer than a week. When he bought it he'd been holding for two; the pain must have been excruciating; perhaps I'm to be led to believe it even resulted in his carelessness, but I don't. Jif's call was P.O.P., Pirate Obeisant Property. He had a reputation for plundering personal recollections deeply submerged in strangers' brains, primarily ones unknown even to them due to profound trauma defenses. Fucto could cut through these using a method of persuasion so subtle, Ilamencryption claims, even he didn't fully understand it.

Jiffy Fucto was on his way to meet his maker when he met his maker. The kaleidocodex was still surging mechanically in his blood stream when I found him, gushing out and pooling up in the wretched rot of the walk, live current still twitching dead digits. His pass was a dame, not in the sagging British biddy sense of the word. Her name was Curly, and she was even more obfuscated in the fish e-network than Jif on wonder-bred at midnight in Hell. I had managed to hack a single frame from a security tape of her in one of those sleazy Sumerian black magic butchery brothels in the styx. Needless to say it was dark, and motion blurred to boot. The only recognizable feature was a massive scar across her clavicle supplementarily ornamented by an oriental dragon tattoo. To ice it there was a fraction of the Stycky source text, interrupted during transmission and discovered terminated meanwhile, stating her past affiliations with the Transcendental Oriental Cosinostra, truly a bag of rabid ferrets if ever there was one, and the Eastern Spherical Quieters, a communications conglomerate of C.S., as well as the requisite reference to the B.B.s. I considered this a highly promising connection, since the senses were salmon with elongated noses. I know I was close when it closed. He was in the Sumerian district. I don't know if it closed because I was close. I don't know the importance of the data being carried. I don't know enough about his handler to tell her apart from a pin in straw, or even a strong opinion. I do know I'm in the right place. Whoever spread Jif, if that was even his corpse back there, didn't think to offload the death-rattled RAM, or was pissed off by my arrival. Either way, if the contents of his codex were worth the price he paid, then I'm sitting on a microplate of scrambled Fabrogé, smack in the center of the last scene he slimed before off-loading to the big static electric field in the sky. I only hope that Curly shows up before I have to kill the waiter.

I extinguish my butt on the table and crack my knuckles. Two figures have begun to

approach me. One is a dwarf from the steppes north of the Himalaya. The other is Curly. I sit back half consumed in the gloom and tap my index finger on the table. They are going to get to me at the same time. They don't see one another. They wouldn't care if they did. I think about yogurt and pick up my gun.

The dwarf is coming up on the right, Curly on the left. They are neck and neck now, not that the dwarf has one. It's alright. Curly has enough for both of them. From twenty paces I see the dwarf's face start glowing, his muscles involuntarily ascending in energetic recognition. He doesn't look too old. I hope he's had a good life. Curly is just the opposite. Expressionless. Glum. Composed. A ghost. I doubt there's one person in the place who would notice her for long enough that the thought of shooting her would cross their mind, and for most people that's virtually immediate. But there's just no need. Somehow she gets to my table first. An old Pharisee scam: she fills up the void of her shadow as it precedes her, getting to a place sooner than the light she reflects. Ancient reputation business e-card.

"This is the end of it." She says as she stands still before me, the illusion of movement already forgotten. Her long shredded trench is molecularly motionless, her bedouin garb underneath entirely inert. Each word is a tightly wrapped, discrete bundle of raw data, like the sound of a faraway church bell on Gaelic wind.

"Right." I growl, and squeeze the trigger, imploding the Chinaman's delight. The bullet is subsonic liquid nitrogen in an electromagnetically charged plastic - mercury composite. The outer shell counter-rotates once fired, cold fusing the nitrogen. The impact is the sound of an h-bomb in space.

Unable to conceal the ghost of a grin, Curly slides smoothly into the seat where my feet had been. She puts her hands palm down on the table and her eyes sparkle for an utterly isolated instant. Seeing that, even if she had planned to kill me, we are too evenly matched for her to act at this time, I return my pistol to its breast holster and square my gaze at her. In the background there is no break in the business of the bistro; there is no commotion incited by the Chinaman's demise.

When she speaks her breath carries across the table and smells like my sack, which is simultaneously comforting and alarming. "I know you were following him." Her statements are Swiss chocolate. Immediately my teeth hurt and I bat my eyes reflexively. She mistakes this for an affirmation and continues in this fashion.

"Once, when you were young, you did something that made you proud. But this had consequences, and these consequences impacted on that pride, turning it to shame. What once made you happy soon made you sad. You were eventually unable to think about what you had done without becoming sad... Do you remember it now? This happens to everyone. It's called growing up. If it didn't happen we would never grow up, never learn manners, never be able to survive in a normal social situation, such as this. Every part of this ritual is as necessary as it is unintentional. It's an instinct unique to our species. Because of this it is easy to forget. To forget what you did, to forget how you felt, even to forget why you never felt the same afterwards. We're encouraged to let go of the very events that define us most, in the name of the holy mystery of emotional evolution, if there even is such a thing. And it's true that we adapt, but no differently than a reprogrammed machine may be said to, and with as much self-knowledge. This is done for power. It is power over mind, and more, mind over matter. You never did the thing that made you feel proud when you were young again. This, it is espoused, is due to a subsequent lack of innocence."

She pauses, extracts a gold-lined narrow case from her jacket pocket, and removes a cylinder of rolled paper, already relieving her shoulders from the long coat, like flowing crude distending to protrude a bitter, poisoned flower. She glances at me and I see in her pupils a reptilian similarity to the fluidity of her stole. Fully birthing forth from it she flicks a lighter in her hand igniting her oral clitoris. She breathes in deeply and stares off pensively at the quantum flux. Exhaling she returns her attention towards me and goes on as if without interruption, but

something imperceptible had changed in her demeanor. She was beginning to relinquish some unrecognized form of self control.

"Well, that's our job. It's our job to know things about you you wouldn't want to know about yourself." Suddenly her face was seized by a contorting smirk. "It's no different from what you do. Only we don't ruin people's lives when we do it. We don't disturb their ego with threats or destroy whatever beauty they may have left by torture. No, I know you. Better than you think I do. See, we're trained, trained to process you with a look, to know your entire history from the tone of one word, to see with parts of you you thought you'd killed off centuries ago ideas that would blind your ego and burn your soul with their brightness. We can no more not see these secrets in you, in anyone, than you could not see your own reflection in your bathroom mirror. And it may be a thankless task, and it may make our lives Hell to drink from the goblets given to you by heaven and treated like toilets by your mortal brain, and it may even mean that we're guilty of causing this defect in you, but at least it. . ." She unexpectedly trails off. . .

"What?" I interject irritably, disappointed to see such articulation disperse without intent. Her eyes flit about the room. Her breathing is becoming irregular. Between the loosening folds of her draped wardrobe I can see her bare flesh shimmering effervescently, the smooth softness being swept by storms of abstract interference patterns. "You aren't real, are you?" I demand, perhaps too smugly.

"What?" She asks, as if caught in a day dream. She has the expression of a nearly pubescent girl distracted from the thought of boys, perhaps even men — abashed and aglow, neither here nor there — but her eyes have become opaque television screens projecting from within the monitor of a dead channel. "And what would that be, exactly?" They clear up like the expulsion of a thermal cloud from around a red dwarf following a super nova. "What you are? And what exactly is that? A brutal, emotionally atrophied dog licking the balls of his own obsequious outlook on reality? You're no different than I am, just more animal. I'm more real than you."

"You're a hologrammer." I proceed patiently. I've seen this before. Someone goes so far over into the other side they forget what they were when they started. The memories she had absorbed for so long must have begun to take over her life, right down to the atomic bonds holding her together. I wonder how much of her is still really her, and how much is the perception of other people?

"Yes. Yes, that's true. I am a hologram. And you're wondering how much of me. You think you know me. You see what you see and you think that it's me, that it even has anything to do with me." Her torch is burning low and where the heat disturbs her fingers I can see globulous tinctures of surface energy retreating from the radiant irritation. "This body is and isn't me. I'm not even here right now, really. I'm somewhere doing my job. I wouldn't consider whatever experiences you've ever had worth link probing. Who would buy them?" This question is rhetorical, but her tone implies a desperation I take as an attempt to illicit conjecture. "No, you aren't worth my real time. But since you clearly must know, some parts of me here with you now are as real as what you call your body. My hypothalamus has been replaced with a transmitter modifying the natural intuitive capabilities of the thalamus. My hormones are exclusively physical, non-psychic, and regulated by the ambient chi of the situation. I have lost one leg up to the thigh in the course of my duties, to a person in your line of work no less!" Her tone again implies this was recent. "I have lost half of my left arm, as you've no doubt noticed, and some amount of my internal organs. I was, by this same man, given unnecessary laser surgery. I am as blind now as someone with my unique capabilities for non-physical vision can be considered. And this face that I sense you are so quietly enamored of. What would your reaction be to see my true visage, after suffering at his hands? I already know, and I assure you, you do not wish to so much as passingly imagine. So what do you think of me now? Do you plan to kill me, like you killed IF? He didn't deserve what you did to him. Do you compute? He didn't deserve what you did to him!"

"Calm down." I command her. "I didn't kill him." I forcefully pull up the sleeve from my left arm, revealing its bare pistons and circuitry. While she inputs it I glance around. No one

around us has noticed the escalation of our conversation. Many of them are bookies, and involved in their headsets, badgering broke clients about momentarily irrelevant numerical figures. "Listen, I'm just a dream catcher. Someone has a nightmare, I tell them a nicer story. That's my job, and I know it as well as you know yours. So don't presume to tell me about myself, at least until you treat me with the respect due a professional, which I'm sure you yourself expect. Jiffy wasn't my collar. He was just a lead. On my present case I've gone through hundreds, do you hear me, hundreds of zeros just like him, and not one that has led me any further than one more decimal point closer to the origin. So am I sad that Jiffy bought it? No. I am not. Will he be missed? Not by anyone I know. Are you attractive? Yes. Are you a hologram? Yes. Is this my problem? No. Am I going to do whatever I consider necessary to get from you information pertinent to my investigation? Yes, but I'm not expecting any unpleasantries. You're doing your job, and I'm doing mine. We're professionals. And professionals deserve respect. Even if the rest of the world is blind to the importance of your skill or mine, that won't change. Professionals deserve respect, especially from other professionals, because most of our lives we're all we've got. Maybe we cross paths with people like ourselves once or twice in a long while; maybe we get lucky and hit short streaks of associates. But it doesn't change the golden rule. So my question to you is, are you as professional as you truly seem to be?" In one swift gesture I take a drag from a newly lit smoke. By the taste of it alone I know she's eating out of my hand.

"Maybe you didn't kill him." She concedes in an almost choked whisper. "But I didn't kill him either. And whoever did is just as much of a professional as either of us." She is looking askance at the table with a wilting look, perhaps reliving her discovery of his remains.

"You don't get to see a lot of dead people in your job, do you?" I ask her rhetorically, but with a tone implying my hope to illicit conjecture.

"My job is as dangerous as any other," she squints slightly with a wistful defiance, "but essentially, no — I don't 'get' to see a lot of dead people."

I pause for a split second that she should collect herself, taking a quick puff and aiming it at her head. "Well, I do. And that was no professional kill job. That was obviously meant as an insult. E-Lepso was a by-the-numbers character, and that job was Jackson Pollack on a bad hair day." I can sense myself getting carried away on the nervous currents Curly has stirred up. I decide that I've said enough and settle back into the discomfort of the break-away plywood chair.

"So..." she gradually regulates her breathing, "is this the work of a person, professional or otherwise, that you've seen before?"

"I've seen alot of similar jobs, but nothing exactly identical. My assessment is that it was rushed, and that there was probably more to come."

"But he was dead... I'm not sure I understand."

"In my profession, and I presume your assessment of my applicability to your buyers' market to be comparable, a hunch is sometimes as important as a lead. And I have a hunch that this lead got dropped by someone not altogether neighborhood friendly responsible with their scoop."

"You say that all your leads on this case have been... dropped. Has it occurred to you that you might be the lead of someone else, someone who doesn't want you to close your case?"

"Anything's possible," I say with decomposing irony. "My g.u.t.s say this one came from your end. Let me ask you about IF. Where did you two meet? Did you meet in the B.B.s, or was it before?"

"It was before, for him anyway. I've always been... since I was a girl. We both worked at Global."

"The sphere?"

"Yes. I was a secretary and he was a security guard. He had the night shift, and once when I was working late, he caught me making microphotographic replications on his round. He promised not to turn me in if I cut him in on the action. He was such a fool, then. And I was so young."

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“Why don’t you just accept that’s he’s dead, at least for this moment. It’s important that I go on with my hunt and I can’t do that without you. I need you to be focused. Can you do that? Can you automate?”

“Yes. I apologize. I can’t stop thinking about it. When I saw him last he was so cocky. He said he’d baked a good batch and couldn’t wait for me to process it. And then, when I found him...”

“Did he tell you anything else about his sweep? Anything? Anything particular, anything that stands out...?”

“...The ambassador. He said he had been to a party at the Proconsulate embassy. He had met with an ambassador — no, it was a general. He had met with a general from Imperial Central. Wait... Accessing...” She pulls up a hood from her sagging rags. I notice the bare contour of her chest. Her face collapses inward, unraveling geometrically every angle of her wet web. I start momentarily at this unexpected mutation. At the same time a fight breaks out between two bookies near the soup and salad bar. They are screaming at each other in broken Tibetan with thick Manchurian accents. The shorter one grabs the taller one by the hair and pulls his head down into one of the troughs, breaking the glass partition along the way. Flailing for a second the other reaches up and grabs the tall one by the hair and, smashing more of the shield, forces his face into an adjacent trough. Their legs begin to kick at one another and finally their hold on one another breaks, and they both pull out and stumble backwards a few feet, their faces dripping thick dark blood and glittering with minuscule shards, salad in the hair and collar of one and soup running in rivulets down the shirt front of the other. They pant and stare with wild eyes, rolling around in the heightened pressure of their pulse. At the same moment they both break into hysterical laughter, and grasp at one another’s shoulders, bending at the waists to catch their breath, their bird-like shrieking gasps eventually trailing off to casual monkey grunting sighs. They adjust their headsets and return with childishly muffled chuckling to their transactions, helping themselves to servings from the bar with twitching interspersed calm.

The message plugging on Curly’s dish is a five minute long conversation recorded through the eyes of Fucto with an elderly, obese, balding man in military garb at a cocktail party by a self-luminated pool on the terrace of an expensive looking penthouse. The exact location of it is difficult to discern by the context of the city lights in the distance, but I know it to be the highly private DeTocqueville-Vaspuci building, commonly called Montebland, of the Stelamartitina Towers annex to the S.O.L.E. (StruckOed/LightEktra) Complex in the Mathers District of Central Informational Nexus 543, because I followed him there, to the Perky E.M. Hooray conference he was invited to attend that night, and, being unable to gain access by conventional means, I was forced to assume a highly uncomfortable position on an upper pylon of the nearby P.R. Bridge (a Public Relations construction referred to for the survival of their spirits by the surrounding residents as Prison Rape), only to discover my electronic ear to have waxed malfunctioned, a fact I considered of little importance at the time, tracing current ownership and initial erection of the edifice and discovering no direct link to C.S. Perhaps, with the luxury of retrospection, I should have struggled more in my surveillance rather than relaxed as I did, due to the exceptional rarity of that fact. Either way I let on exactly none of this to Curly, feigning interest in the transmission only as a polite distraction from the powerfully magnetic view of a divulgantly pale-blue luminescent nipple, gradually palpitating in her own slow static currents throughout the entire duration of the transmission.

When the broadcast is complete her face reassembles, looking slightly flushed. It takes her a few minutes to catch her breath; obviously that trick was uncommon for her, and a strain on her bioholographic system. I light a fresh one and pass it to her. She sucks on it, her head drooping, and she notices the state of her blouse. This doesn’t help her recoagulation process; she shyly readjusts the rag, trying to glance up without catching my attention to see if I noticed. For a while, I stare out into the café. The smoke rising from the tables, the babbling chatter of the intoxicated, and mull over the contents of the message. It’s fairly clear now who killed Fucto, and I’m a little disconcerted that it didn’t occur to me sooner. I watch a student as she spumes a veil

of blue smoke, watch it rising, curling, twisting in the air above her, like some djinn infused with the excess thoughts fueled by the breathless blood of beer. She laughs and jokes with two boys, one a little older than her, the other younger. I can see her whole life about her, from her first deep cry as a baby to the final shallow exhalation when she dies. Would I want to know her secrets? Does she? Does anyone? Obviously the boys across from her do. They are hanging on every word, every move, as if it were their own last, and grasping for meaning. Their souls suckle on smoke. I glance back at Curly to confirm that she's collected. She has followed my gaze and is as well engrossed in the students.

"Tell me something about E-LEpso," I mumble. She turns toward me, her lips softly parted, her eyes lidded and tired. "Did he smoke?"

"Did he smoke? How can it matter?" She replies, the muscles of her forehead contracting slightly as the same expression is rendered intentional. "All our clients smoke. They breathe out, we breathe in."

"Your marks, you mean," I correct her.

"Besides," she continues, ignoring me, "there's no clean air anywhere anymore. The whole city smokes. The world is turned into an ashtray and we call it civilization. We all know it, and we're all being killed for it, by it. It lives. We merely exist. It lives through us. We're a decreasingly significant factor of the equation. We are the ones who are smoked."

"Maybe," I say. I can see that she's back to her average self, already tiring of the venue. It's likely that accessing Fucto's recorded data served as a psychological break from the feedback loop of reliving his discovery. "How did you access his event-codex?" I crudely insert a filtered tube in my lips and combust the tip.

"I did one of three things," she intones, glaring at me sinisterly for getting ahead of where she thought we were. "Either I killed him, and downloaded the event-codex myself, which I obviously did not or I would not be here. Or, as I was walking up to you, and you may have wondered, detective, how I knew who I was looking for," to which I mutter "nope" as she begins donning her overcoat, "I scanned you, deduced the truth, and, perhaps by touching my foot to yours without you noticing, or perhaps by touching the table and absorbing the wavelength of your personal electromagnetic bio-energy field emitting from your arm through the once-living patterns of the wood, used all this as a carrier to evince the signal dormant and inherent in the microplate in your pocket."

Just as I begin to ask what was the third "or," while wondering in my mind what she meant about touching my foot without noticing, as she must know this is well beyond the realm of impossibility and bordering on bad science fiction, she touches her foot to mine beneath the table, and I see stars sparkle insanely in her irises. I smirk. This is clearly a desperation maneuver, meant either to distract me so that I'll overlook what I've already noticed, or to imply that she is more than merely mildly crazy, unlikely for a fish of her calibration.

"There's one thing you forgot to factor into the equation," I add. She freezes, and I feel the pressure around us plummet as her blood runs cold. That answers my last question, whether she could holographically extract from the purely atomic vision of the situation, or whether she required the preexistent pulsation of the living ambient flux arising from our interaction. She knows the wood of the table is synthetic plywood, crafted intentionally to break easily in a fight without injuring the patrons, cheap, and easy to replace. And I know too. And she knows I know.

She pushes back quickly from the table and with her left hand lashes out the case from inside her cloak. With her right she reaches a finger up into the socket above and behind her left eye and hits some sort of switch. Her arm swells up, the same luminous hue her nipple had been, and, flickering like a tv on film, begins to undergo random transmutations. The golden case cracks open slightly and I can now see that inside of it there is a mirror on one side and a focal lens on the other. The frequency of her holographic variance jumps up to double itself twice and the mirror inside the case flashes through the spectrum and begins to shine a bright white. It is obviously a projection accelerator for the scan-pen in her thalamus. She's turning herself into a

laser.

At the same time she pushes back from the table I do the same, overturning it. Without waiting for her to fire the first shot I draw my gun and discharge into her chest at three feet. The bullet flies straight through her trench and pierces the skull of one of the students behind her, whose head I see shred itself into a crimson cloud over her shoulder.

The laser blast from her gold case singes across my shoulder as I dive for cover under a nearby table, which explodes into splinters and pure heat above me as I get a taste of the floor my face slides across. I wonder idly how, if her torso is a hologram, she got that scar and snake tattoo. I roll over, pivoting on the scalded shoulder, and fire from a position with the back of my neck against the wall where it meets the Chinese pizza flavored floor. One shot misses and rains sawdust on her head, her hood falling back as she averts her face. The other tears through her head, removing the left half of her skull, but glances off her thalamic unit and fails to destroy the brain now exposed. She somersaults backward and I speculate that the tattoo and scar, if artificial composites projected holographically, must have particular personal significance to her for her to be willing to continually expand that quantity of mental energy maintaining them.

She pops up from behind a table of bookies being waited on by a Chinaman with a deformed face and fires through them, severing the Chinaman at the waist and removing half of the left arm from one of the bookies. I can see where she got her wounds. "Doesn't 'get' to see many dead people," I scoff in my mind, rolling again to the right and pushing myself off from the wall along the floor with my foot. Although I don't see it I can feel the shockwaves of my prior position detonating. The thought occurs to me that perhaps the scar and tattoo were remnants from her life before becoming a professional B.B. and sacrificing her body to the technique. I pop off two rounds with my head down. I hear somebody scream and when I look up I see the body of the armless patron slumping towards the floor, now also decapitated.

The other shot struck her in the right side of her hip, just above where the true tissue stopped and the hologram commenced. Her leg fizzles and warps into a beautiful amalgam of liquid light fields, melting and fading into dead air. She collapses behind the dead bookie and immediately squirms herself around into a firing position. Before she can shoot I'm on my feet and running towards the soup and salad bar. I have to jump over the two remaining students and, in so doing, I do not notice their fellow, and land with one foot on the corpse. The chest cavity gives and I trip horribly, falling with all the grace of a dying duck, pulling the body along with me. "Afterall," I am thinking, "she can only generate so much of her form at a given time. TV costs her one nipple." Luckily my momentum carries me to my desired destination, more or less covered by the bar, but before I'm even half way to the ground one of the other two students just behind me, by where my legs still are, evaporates into red mist.

As I hit the ground I hypothesize, "perhaps before she was cut apart, she used her holography to self-complement?" The other student, driven into waking shock by the sheer contrast of the past moments' events, stands up, and is immediately incinerated. This provides me enough time to kick the cadaver from my foot and scuttle the rest of the way behind the buffet. "Maybe the scar is from an experimental wing she misses?" I stand straight up behind the counter and send three rounds in her direction. One hits the wall above and behind her, one destroys the bookie's body she had lay behind, and the other strikes her brain on its left side, liberating a substantial amount of it from its moorings and sending it hurtling off into the flux all around us, where it promptly becomes decoration on the wall.

She slumps, half turning, so that with her one remaining eye she looks up towards the ceiling. I cautiously climb up onto the soup and salad bar and walk along between the plastic troughs, the glass partition split on both sides at the level of my hips, and move aside a hanging lamp with the nozzle of my gun. Her body is convulsing, the flesh parts twitching, torn and seeping, the holographic supplements now fading into fuzz. I hop down and walk slowly over to her, and stooping down, kiss her blood smeared forehead. "Why did you kill your own protégé?" I ask her softly. Her jaw, only barely still hanging on to her right cheek, quavers uselessly in the

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implosive stillness that fills the room. Her eyelid flutters, and she goes limp. With that I add Curly to the list of innocent pawns I've seen die.

I stand up and look around. From the direction of the kitchen a waiter begins running towards me, screaming in Chinese that I've ruined the place and have to pay. In Chinese I tell him, "No thank you," and fire a bullet into his brain. By the time his body hits the floor, which tastes like Chinese pizza, I am out the door and down the streets of Nexus five hundred, and forty, and three.

2b) supplement: EL-Epso Fucto's conversation with General Tso (Microwave Chicken)
(the following takes five minutes to read. If it takes you any longer your chicken will be burnt.)

You are standing in a room full of stuffed shirts. They are dignitaries and officials from various surrounding zones. They are here in Nexus 543 to celebrate their positions by the act of comparison, an act useful for the informational evolution their roles exist to perpetuate. In the background is the hum of their voices, blending together, a muddy puddle. You are sipping champagne while calmly watching them blastulate, filling the void that divides them with ephemeral detonations of essence, a constant barrage of convulsing, self-digesting raw imagery, some abstract and abstruse, others architectural or topographic, internally illuminated impressionism, three dimensionally detailed expressionism, their conversation an acidic cathedral of surrealism populated by all forms of existence, real and imagined, from the friendly to the fantastic to the frightening. The sound of laughter, clinking crystal. Soft free jazz on the stereo. Soft carpet under polished shoes and high heels. Pretty faces and fancy attire. A typical crypto-bourgeois cocktail party. Your name is EL-Epso Fucto, and you are currently conversing with a charming young woman named Mary Acidalium, the hostess of the party, who invited you personally. She is telling you about a recent business trip she took to Manumission, Tibet, just south of the Kunluns, while between the two of you, suspended before her forehead, there is an area like an organic kaleidoscope, the sprue, overflowing with a dance of pure psyche; at this moment a childhood memory of an airplane ride, staring out the window down upon a mountain range heaved up amidst the cumulus floor of the infinite azure expanse. Glancing up at the child in the vision you can hear her thinking "Mountainclouds... Mountain Clouds..." when a hand grabs you by the bicep just above the right elbow.

"And this is General Tso!" Mary is bubbling, directing her attention with the sweep of an upturned palm to your right. You turn and are greeted by the face of an elderly, overweight, balding gentleman, who, despite the name, appears Anglo-Saxon in descent. You smile at him and he returns the expression, tersely, with all the charm of the standard military person. Unlike all the others in attendance his brain displays nothing, only a faint swirling in the continuum like visible heat. This startles you slightly, but, being rational, you explain it away as either due to his being between topics of focus, or disinterest in engaging you in conversation, or some other equally irrelevant consideration such as that. "Charmed," he speaks, and the word seems to glow, though the sound of his voice connotes only bone dry irony.

When you glance back at Mary you blink involuntarily. She is naked before you, her pupils an ebony eclipse and her irises a dazzling corona. For a split second you feel overwhelmingly inebriated, a damp warmth rising through your skin as you see interpolated formulae reticulate across her bare flesh, fluttering randomly through the spectrum in a hypnotic rhythm, glistening like spun sugar. She smiles smugly, reclining her head slightly, and, politely bending it ninety degrees at the wrist, reaches out her hand to touch frigid fingertips to your left one, where the muscles supporting your wine glass weaken, she promises to "leave you boys alone."

Turning back to the General, still restraining an awed gape, the name Marduk and the number 9:5/114 flash invisibly in scorching pale radiance upon his broad, sweat-beaded

forehead, and you swallow difficultly. "Come on," he says in a voice like rich lavender crushed velvet, and sips from his champagne goblet. One of his eyelids spasms as he does this, and you feel all of your blood running like winter slush through iced veins. Your sweat turns clammy all over your body. "Let's get some air."

He escorts you toward the veranda outside a wide pair of sliding glass doors. You look around quickly, feeling panicked, but trying to remain merely polite, to confirm the continued conversing of the other guests. They are all as you last saw them, their discussions, although mentally of all shapes and sizes, are mundane and banal. You see Mary disappearing into the crowd, as she was, fully clothed, though seemingly somehow now fresh and fragile, like the dew on a flower. You had seen the general take a drink out of the corner of your eye as you had beheld her transubstantiated. Yes, that must be how he had accomplished it! A simple parlor trick! But the names... one never sees letters in this line of business except as through the eyes of one reading, as upon a monitor, or paper... No. You are a rational person *EL-Epso Fucto*, and it requires no further explanation. (Who said that?) You feel his hand hot on the joint of your arm and it occurs to you with what little effort this enormous gentleman could snap it into parts.

You step through the sliding glass doors and the cool evening air caresses you soothingly. You realize that you have not spoken one word to the General, and are possibly on the verge of appearing rude. You inhale as if to speak, but find a heavy weight on your chest restricting your breathing, and a lump in your throat which renders you mute.

"Isn't it a lovely night?" the General coos, gesturing across the expanse of the view. You nod, not knowing if the minor impression that the far-off lights of the Nexus, the horizontality of the terrace, the limitless liquidity of the pool, and the unimposing postures of the few others present, languidly sipping their champagne, all seem to you to have appeared in a smear from the stroke of his arm is a true illusion, or merely your own childish wishful thinking. You stare blankly at him, awaiting any form of furtherance. He smirks at you for a long moment, tilting his head back slightly. The thought that perhaps he is waiting for you to say something occurs to you only when he looks away, towards the receded Nexus, just before he himself begins to speak.

"I have a cat. Yes? Yes. And this cat, but surely I do have a cat, correct?" He looks at you suddenly with lamb-like eyes, almost pleading. You concur, reassuringly. "Yes, well, to this cat I am... both father... and mother." He turns again towards you, but now the look in his eyes is one of pondersome accusation. "And if you agree with the first two points, as you have... then surely you cannot but agree with this third." He returns to contemplating the indiscernible source of his conjectures, somewhere beyond far away. After a brief moment you turn your face towards it as well, and see along the expanse of the horizon an unfamiliar light.

"Is it already dawn?" you ask with the suppressed terror of a rational man suddenly struck by the inconceivable notion that time may indeed have escaped you.

"No, it has been only two minutes forty," the general sighs. You don't know what he means by this? But surely you do...

The light remains flickering across the whole of your vista.

Soon, the incompleteness will boil over within you, and you will be forced again to speak, to utter some question you cannot even yet imagine. But it is already beginning. You feel your breaths quickening, growing shallow. Your rapid heart rate. The temperature of your palms and brow. Your vocal chords are already in motion. Your lips part...!

"You know," says the general, his voice heavy with boredom, "there is an empire. There is just no emperor." Again he sighs, flaring his nostrils.

Another long moment passes. Or perhaps it is no time at all. When the general next speaks he is somewhat more animated. He paces the length of the pool, growing smaller and larger to you, smaller and larger, and smaller, and larger.

"That'th duth the thing!" He expectorates, his tongue clasped between his incisors, peaking out between his swollen lips. "Nobody knowth nothin' anymore! Everythingth tho thrpead apart, the people thtart to think that they're the only oneth on the team. No, no, I keep tellin'

them! Get on the ball! Thow me thome huthle! Thshthake it!” Sputum evacuates to its doom. “Maybe the purpoth ith to party! Maybe we thould all jutht try and look buthy! Therth the two in the buthshth,” drool rolls playfully down his chin, “Where’th the one in my hand, then? That’th what everybodyth athking. That’th all anybody really careth to know!” He sips on his champagne glass, staring at you out of the corners of his blood-shot, narrowed eyes with rampaging irritation. He charges toward you and you feel a shudder in your knees, but he just wraps his rotund arm around you and draws you in close to him. He is a whole head taller than you and the feeling is one of being told the rules of dating by your prom date’s father, who also happens to be the coach, and who also happens to be a cop, who is also the living and breathing high lord of Hades, and more than that, your new God. You feel compelled to wet your slacks partially simply to be polite.

“Listen, now, EL-Epso, you being a reasonable man, a rational man, should know what I mean when I tell you it’s only polite to drink when I speak and to speak when I drink. Now isn’t that simple? I’m talking, you take a drink. Then you’re talking, and so I take a drink. Easy enough to remember? Good. Now, when I say that only fools progress, or evolve, or move forward in time, you will know what I mean, you being a reasonable man, a rational man. The Lords have always moved backward in time, you see? Now, when I look like Porky Pig, why do I talk like Sylvethter the cat, you might ask? Well, one reason is to distract. Another is because you look like Sylvester the cat, understand? So there’s only one line you really need to remember.”

The general breaks the embrace, steps back, draws up his arm, before which you feel at once obliged to flinch and yet impotent to do so, looks at his watch, turns his head sharply towards the sliding glass doors behind you with an irritated, impatient squint and, dropping his arm to his side as though dead, moves off in a bee-line in that direction.

For a moment you stare off into space and an image coalesces in the eye of your mind. Someone is sitting and reading a book. There is a pause, apparently some decision is being formulated by the reader, or perhaps the question of the identity of the author arises. You see the hands frantically clamoring through the flipping pages towards the back, finally coming to a rest on the last page. The passage is read and the book slumps. Another pause, perhaps contemplation of the impact of this passage on the meaning of the text that has been read so far, or perhaps the question of the identity of the author arises. More shuffling, and the hands scuttle through to the page they had left. Reading commences, the index finger of one hand tracing out the words hurriedly, nervously. The vision fades as quickly and as silently as it arose.

You turn around. The general is gone. How long had you been standing there? The party seems to have thinned out substantially. What was that final phrase? Perhaps the general was lying about the time. Why are you thinking about such silly music? As you walk back towards the penthouse it is so thick you can almost taste it: the illimitable, buoyant odor born of your moistened cavernous armpits.

3a) the Pub Rose of Thelema

Artificial lightning shudders in the sagging dropsied ceiling, melting purple clouds like blood engorged tissue rippling sensuously, impending static rain. The streetlights flicker in the electron humidity, their currents swollen with ripe radiation. Lines of cars swish past like long sentences, the eyes of their drivers bulging malaise. By now the fuzz will be crawling all over the diner. Off in the misery of a side street curs bark. My chest cavity feels like a bat grotto and my sweat is the consistency of drool. I buy a newspaper at a corner stand just for something to do. The ionization of the atmosphere is so thick now the clouds are as phosphorescent as vacuum tubes and the Hungarian seller’s thinning hair is alive on its own. He is posing blind, and when he smiles hearing me drop a couple blanks in his change tray I see all of three teeth, milky and dripping stalagmites, one capped in oxidizing copper. He wears a green vest and a red velvet fez and has an open copy of Papal Pleasures on the counter next to an overflowing ashtray crawling

with red roaches.

I carry the paper with me just around the corner and then throw all of it except the front page into a waste can and watch him for a while. Eventually he leans back and buries his oily cratered nose in the sticky magazine. A pose behind a pose. Probably to ward off the cemetery men who would shake him down otherwise. I wait.

Soon enough a squad car oozes by, unfurling an obvious leer along his lot in such a way as to make a citizen's skin crawl and a lady shiver. He ducks his head around the peeling, barnacled walls so as not to belie his status to any potential marks and squawks in bastardized Enochian into a transmitter concealed in his nipple. Predictable. I clamor up a VR compacster onto a fire escape and ascend with as little noise as possible, although its rails grate shakily at their moorings in the wall. I'm two flights up when the squaddy slithers in reverse beside the stand and the rat faced agent wags a black fingernail crowned hand in my direction.

I let fly the front page crammed under my belt and it catches a down current, fluttering away following the gutter, rolling about the grunge mangily growling shuffled issues. The squad car is beneath me as I sink into the corner of the latticed landing and I can see the bird-faced rookie behind the wheel over my knees. I suck my oxygen in and wait, heart beat muffled in conditioned indifference. His young eyes phase across my previous position, surveying for residual trace imagery, when the front page whisks low and broodingly past the prowler's front beams. The air above momentarily absconds its humming and passes waves of indigestive churning, upsettingly uncertain. I see his throat move up and down, his instincts eating one another. The last crackle of burnt off charge subsides and the city clerk in army black slowly proceeds on the path of the paper trail. He can't be more than fourteen. The cops got that one young. I wet my papery lips and the moisture above condenses into concentrate. Thick drops of the city's urine plummet down and grease the gears.

I climb the rest of the way up the fire escape and flop heavily over the short wall of the roof, feeling the building swaying beneath me as my head swims in microwavelets, the intensity of the electrical storm increasing. The cops will never find me. I don't even know where I am.

Across the broad flat gravel of the building top is a rickety shack, swollen with air conditioners and peopled in the hissing ceiling by myriad antennae. Perhaps I am groggy from the flight, maybe jetty-lagged from the eleven storied height, or hallucinating out of an admixture of ennogram exhaustion and the isotropical storm, but I see a sign above the door that reads "Pub of the Rose of Thelema" the rest of the letters besides the first word and first letters of the proper names giving out gloomily at erratic intervals. I've heard about this place in the course of a couple of my leads. A dive for low lifes and cut-rate mobsters, bottom feeders and crustaceans, unknown of by the z.p.d. and concealed in centuries of cloak and dagger excrescence, some rumors, most too unbelievable to be anything but true. I rise to my feet and lurch soggily towards the entrance, feet crunching over slippery stones, pebbles wedging into the treads of the rubber soles. There are crows perched in a swarm covering the transmitters, the estuary undisturbed for untold aeons, the rain gutter awash in white runoff dimly luminous in the awkward angles emitting from the ultraviolet post. A good sign, naturally; wherever the man had been at night there were invariably crows by day. Not that one could tell by nature night from day anymore. The Lunar Long Count was at 7 Uinals 3 Kin already and only just beginning. I survey the sky for any sign of the moon and see only an aircraft high over head, surrounded by illuminating lightning strikes. A Blow-hole 777, air whale, biosynthetic craft. I push asunder the doors of the bar and go in.

A broad, flat vista of various carnality. The decor is decrepit, as though Casablanca strolled in one night long ago and exploded and nobody cared enough to clean up. Around the walls wide round tables with green shaded lamps squatting over their centers. The bar is long and well stocked, but rotting, and the barkeep, seeing a fresh face, makes a convivial act of wiping at it with her rag. She is young, probably twelve or thirteen, and her left eyeball glowers sultrily in a vat of its own boiling fermentation, slathering the visible half of her face in a smooth sheen of sweat, uselessly powdered with aluminum. The other side of her face is covered by an abbreviated

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corona of bangs, the color of our setting sun seen through the aurora borealis. She smiles and her lip splits reflexively, a thin line of bright blood meandering down her little round chin. I glance around at the clientele, for comparison, trying to gauge her sincerity by the quality of her situation. She is either mentally retarded or a gypsy-class liar. The class of degenerates that mug about the floor are ugly beyond any pre-established description. Most are oto mechanics, hard laborers in the bio-synth field, grease doctors forced down some corporate ladder so fast their faces burned off, others who are off the map entirely, obvious conglomerations of their own or one another's failed experiments, the gangrened results of desperation with supposedly prematurely discarded genres. They turn towards me for an impassible moment, assessing me as a pretty-boy but not the one they're waiting for, probably not punchy enough for entertainment. They return to their drinks and their buzzing conversation recommences unperturbed.

I walk unhurriedly to the bar, still gazing around in noncognate impression at the genius of the environment. Its history is nude and raw upon all walls, potted palms pregnant with perverse fruits, the casual roaming of flies, crooked, sluggishly spinning ceiling fans, the leaking roof, a singed Chagall, moldy carpet, mildewed leather seat covers, patches of moss, the lustily drooling mandibles of the mutant hybrid patrons and the smell of masturbation they exhale seem to go on forever. Somewhere deep behind their surfaces lurk more than a million malevolently made mandalas and malfunctional merkabas, concealed in the purposefully muck smeared veneer, swelling up with patient protest imprisoned in the architecture. I smirk, turning towards the bartender, who greets me with a smoke stick and a fuse-key. My smirk wavers politely and returns as I stroke the tight rolled tube and clasp it in my lips. She lights it for me.

"Sorry, stranger," she says in French with a Marseilles accent, "you looked like the type." Perhaps by my expression she deduces my native tongue, but her accent is helplessly thick and salivary. "I'm Rose."

I lean back and turn away from the door, half facing her and half the open floor. I can feel her tension in the presence of an unknown customer, her curiosity inflamed all the more by my relatively unregurgitated appearance. I ignore her, searching the shadows that suck at the furthest edges of the room, and she walks down the bar trailing the rag along its ancient top behind her, the fertile pink flesh of her supple young hand dragging like a delicacy on a hook. She bends over, her knees straight, shoving her tail in the air, and from below the bar I hear the tinkling of glass against its own. She crests directly in front of me with a bottle of clear liquor and two shot glasses. Her one eye smolders grim with greed.

"I thought you might like to have what I'm having," she goes on with her fecund, coy con, undoubtedly practiced more before mirrors than on men. It is possible I am the first drink in tight genes she's ever seen. Perhaps she's lived her whole young life in the interim of waiting that has driven the rest of the gin joint's denizens to inert distraction. Or perhaps she's a slut. Anything's possible.

"May as well," I lapse into character, "don't know how long I'll be here." Her chin drops towards her soft sternum, her lips pursed and moist, her eye raised to me. With her wrist bent and only the index finger extended she pushes a full petite glass over towards me. "I'm a traveling salesman." This statement arouses momentary attention from a few of the monsters about the closest table, who glance around over their shoulders warily, irritated, both confirming that I'm not a cop, and assuring me by their looks that they'd like to beat the banal and eager pride I representatively exude out of me and into a pool on the floor boards either way, and are prepared at the least provocation to do so. Rose lights up, immediately suckling the metaphor with undernourished appreciation, her tongue turning around against her cheeks and gums so loudly I can hear it, the look in her eyes one of crazed determination, the fantastic impression of a stable hand spurring harshly an unbroken horse. Obviously she is lip-reading, her tongue jiggling like a marionette to the tune of words hatching sourly in her mouth, and moreover struggling to restrain herself to just this oblate level of famished flirtation.

"Well here's to traveling salesmen," she chimes, and clinks her shot glass against mine,

swallowing the full amount in one voracious gulp and returning her face to me smudged from horny madness to a smugly ironic awareness of her own insatiability. This washes away as quickly as it had appeared and she sinks directly back into her obsessive coquettishness, planting her elbows on the bar, propping her now wrinkled chin on her knuckles and pouting, batting doe eyes. "Tell me about yourself, Mister," she invites, swaying on her fawnish stalks, pretending that one shot had finished her for the world.

"Well," I begin, recollecting an artificially constructed memory of fishing with my father, "I get to go all over the country. I meet hordes of fascinating folks. And I'm proud of my product so in the end there's no jokes." That does it for the beasts at table nine, who stand up, their chairs falling back from behind them, and, lurching towards me with fists cupped in soaked palms, growl and grumble through gritted teeth that there aren't no travelin' salesmen allowed.

I swivel around on the hair-stuffed stool and remove my pistol from its chest holster, leveling it at what I take to be one's head, and before they can blink any of their hundreds of different colored bodily eyes he is gathered in a simpering heap at their feet, clutching impotently at an overturned chair with one hand, a flipper and three tentacles, and holding the falling remains of his face with his other two hands, one an infant's, the second a bundle of cloven-hooved fingers.

"I'm a gun salesman," I chirp with animated merriment. "And my name is Fred. If you gentlemen aren't buyers, you could soon be dead. If you're interested I have my entire ship-load just outside, and plenty of handy samples of my more than magnificent merchandise."

"My face!" the deflated wretch howls, "the fruit shot my face! My face! The fruit!" he goes on bellowing while his deterred buddies scoop him up and pour his massive clotted spoiling left-over wastes into a chair. He weeps womanishly.

I return my attention to Rose, who is in an advanced state of awe, the swampish smell of her self molestation creeping up from the long fingered end of her arm, hung down below the bar. Her cheeks are flushed, but her shoulder keeps pumping, her eyes locked with mine, her craven acquiescence to animalism intermingling with my stunned disbelief, and her mouth working wordlessly unfolds her elevating excitement until she is overcome in her own mysterium tremendum and shudders loudly into collapse. I wipe my brow with the foolish gape of a naive schlock-jock, and the duration of her repose pushes this compression of character to the brink of mental retardation. She finally peels herself from the putrefying bar and, raising her now purple bagged eye to me, she removes the bone left dangling from my parted lips, her appendage slick to the wrist and smelling of the darkest recesses of the sea, and, immediately soaking it through, takes a long, full pull.

"Sorry about that, sir," she sighs, "I hope you don't mind."

"Mind, how could I mind? I don't have even the least iota of an idea about what just happened. My question is do you mind? No explanation necessary, in truth, but surely you understand. It's the least you could owe me for arousing my interest."

"I see you speak my language," she says, devouring the rolled leaves like a lab rat fed on shocks and candy. "Now that we've cocked the hammer, you have an eye to find a target? Well, let's get lost and see what helpless little woodland creatures we can turn up, shall we?"

"Alright then," I lower my voice, "here's a couple: I'm not a salesman and your name's not Rose. What do you think they are?" She stares at me momentarily, her face icing over as I coolly exchange my stunned shame for her comfort.

"How do —" she begins, but the words grow impossibly heavy in her mouth and her lips curl in on themselves. She looks like a lizard now, less like the flitting bird of prey she doubtless feigned herself to be. She is neither. Only bubble gum. She gives up her flavor and then impacts upon asphalt. People used to chew tar before there was gum. Before there was tar they chewed cocaine leaves. I can see how you would get from tar to bubble gum, but what would possess the intuitive leap from cocaine to tar? She doesn't get it, and, like my question, everyone who ever knew the answer died; probably from something they ate.

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"Come, come, now child!" I say popishly in my salesman character, spinning around in a full circle on the stool, lifting my knees up like a ridiculous punk, cheesing the rest of the pub to come at me, knowing what would have to be done. "You're forgetting our little game, the one you made up, remember? Well? Have you an answer then? You're holding the gun? There's two beasts! Just pick one!"

She begins babbling. "Snake is the tail of memory, but leviathan is a whale, two whales, the one above and the one below and, the cat's cast shadow is the crow, he is lit from the heads of the fallen fowl he has eaten, their souls, become the serpent's carrier code. I don't know, I don't know."

"Yes you do Rose. Let it go."

"Don't call me that! That's what she calls me," she hisses in a whisper, eyes flitting around uneasily, beads of perspiration fermenting on her brow. "My name is Ouarda. Oaxaca, but you already know that, oh, no. Oh, no..." her voice quavers on the precipice of infernal distraction. Automated emotions flare up within her formulating schematic methods of attack and escape, directed at everyone at once and no one in particular. "You're a bad one, you! You're the false prophet. You're the Anti-Christ, the son of Satan. You're the source of all we suffer, I know you. You're the wicked priest, you are. You're Lucifer, Jesus before even Jesus knew, there was you, oh son of all unholy iniquity, son of Cheshire Sam! You've killed him!"

She grabs a picture from towards the end of the bar and marches back towards me, her tantrum boring me, despite the plush words she was throwing around. It was clear she knew only what she had read or heard about these people to whom she referred. To her they were so many bureaucratic stuffed shirts, or pages of paper, and I took them as the feather pillows to which they amounted. "You've killed our Father! Our Great Man! You've killed him! May your soul be damned!" She slams the picture down in front of me on the bar. It is an old pre-electric photograph of two men on a boat, wearing Hawaiian shirts and captain's hats, holding between them what appears to be a salmon that had died of old age. On the left is Friedrich Nietzsche, unmistakable with his handlebar moustache, W.P. emblazoned on his shirt. Opposite is the man I knew from EL-Epso Fucto's last writes as General Tso. I smirk.

"Tell me what you know," she hisses under the din she makes simultaneously, clanking about bottles. "We take the excess energy of society and bottle it up. Just like the old country's sour grapes, it's much less filling, 'cause it's light, and light tastes great! Just ask Tony Tiger when you eat your morning serial, and you'll see our illumination comes from a wolf's and not cows' nipples!" Again she hisses, "tell me what you know. We haven't got much time!"

I point to the bald man. She looks up at me with a mad hope in her eye, too confused within itself to be described, as though he were a God to her. "Alive." I mumble. She throws her hands in the air and spins around like a drunken girl, which I realize now she is, and always was. She was lip reading then, and is lip reading now. How little of her own personality she holds, like a regularly beaten adolescent clinging to a tattered blanket. I point to Nietzsche, grabbing her by the arm and halting her in her whirl. "Where?" She shakes free of me and, smiling widely dances off; she begins singing loudly and without particular tune, "He lives! He lives! Our Holy Father lives! He has been seen even by this gun man! He is near and we will see him soon! Oh, what a joyous occasion! O, what sweet revelation!"

At that same moment the shadows at the far end of the room come alive. The patrons, who do not so much as lift a head over the girl's news, except for Charlie, who they nudge to mumble the news to and who lifts the remnants of his face, the same one I shot off, up from the table long enough to wave the stalk of his one remaining eye around, make room respectfully for the beast emerging from the darkness. The air is sucked out of the room. All is ominous.

Ouarda stops dancing, petrified with her back to the new beast, as large as all of the rummies combined and then some, for who knows how far she stretches back into the gloom that seems to go on forever. "Thelma!" she hisses, spinning on her heel to confront the fuming living compost.

"I told you to call me Mother!" it bellows in a gut rumblingly deep voice. It quivers for a long moment, shaking the whole shack, and finally the features of a face begin to form from the indiscernible relics strewn throughout it, caught in the greater specter of its gelatinous mass like bones in bubbling tar.

The bartender stamps her feet angrily walking towards it and just past me, positioning my role, regardless of its true nature, in the direction of the door, and excluding me from the imminent brawl. She peels her gaze from the two story tall blob of undulating oil and pierces my features one final time, scorching them like a fire brand on her brain. "Limbo," she says, not whispering and not lip reading. Then her face begins to run like wax, her eye-ball springs out of its socket, the stalk perversely erecting, her shoulder blades crunch together, protruding her arms fiercely out to her sides, where they writhe, her lower lumbar bends backwards and thrusts her torso far forward, and her strawberry wig sloughs off onto the floor. I step back, the stool dropping behind me. She begins rising up, duplicate legs sprouting from the rear of her hips, unfolding from within her, an exoskeleton inverting. Her head is the bald head of a baby doll, bare to the skull as the flesh melts away, and even this begins to crack open sourly. Her blouse falls away as her dress catches fire. Her skin has all become a burnt umber charred black, her exposed joints opaque amber. Electricity climbs across the fissures of her blossoming armor like sparks dancing up a Jacob's ladder. Her skull splits open and an insectile head of pure electronic circuitry emerges. As she reaches her full height, raised in the middle of her series of segmented legs, each pair naked and more human with distance, their connections concoctions of pure libertinage, no two alike, budding horrible genitalia in each angle and from every intersection, the mechanical dynamo on her neck splits open again, revealing pure clear light, and in a wave that rushes down the entire astounding length of her the exoskeleton electro-mechanizes, bursting forth into a swarming sea of circuits, pulsating with illuminated currents of emanation.

I take another step back and stumble over the stool. "Mother!" the whirling clicking hissing humming bug turbine creature bellows shrilly. "I'm trying to use the phone! Can't you see? Father's coming back soon, to crown me as his queen!" I make it to the door and stumble out into the refreshing electron heavy rain.

3b) the Return Key

Halfway across the gravel garden rooftop a heavy hand claps down on my shoulder and I spin around. The silhouetted visages of Charlie's two comrades greet me and I grimace at their appearance, which is corroded in the rain. Thunder cracks overhead. The one who had grabbed me steps back and glances at his friend, who is shorter. They are continually forced to reform themselves in a vortex of rubbish.

"Who do you think you are, coming in here like that and picking fights?" the tall one demands with a Lancashire accent. "Yeah," adds the other, his voice deep and dark. I say nothing in reply, but watch them, ready for their move.

"We've been waiting for you a long time, you know," says Cockney. "Yeah," confirms his counterpart, in the same tone as his agreement before. "You've got some nerve acting out this way. Why don't you have a little gratitude?"

"For what?" I snap, irritated at their immasculating deprecation. The smaller one shoves me, crushing the pack of smokes in my pocket.

"A long time ago," he mumbles, almost imperceptibly over the downpour, "you picked your fight with us. A long time ago. We were innocent, then. And we still are, as much as you've allowed us to remain."

"Clear up," I order him, "I've got no clue what you're getting at." He looks around as though my problem lies somewhere on one of the surrounding rooftops rather than with him.

"We're little people here. Lots of little people. All of us are only lots of little people here,

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and you come barging in... well, we won, anyway. Didn't we? Well? Didn't we?" I stare at him harshly.

"What my brother means is," the larger one takes a breath, "you know us, but don't recognize us. For us it's the other way around with you. Would some names help you out, big man? You can call me Global, and him Tlaloc, then. Are you satisfied now?" The little one weeps into his contorted elbow like the name is pain alone.

"Do you think that I care who you are?" I demand. "You say you know me, still, so what? If you want to do something, do something. If you have something to tell me, spit it out. Otherwise? Dust. I've got better ways to waste my days than chatting with two surfeit fugazis." I make as if to leave.

"Listen to me," the tall one begs, "for the sake of the khabs and the khu! The house and the home are divided. It's fact and fiction, man!"

"So I keep hearing," I growl. "So what?"

Tlaloc looks up again, almost hopefully. "Never come back to our R.o'T. do you hear me? Mrs. Ka won't let you in anymore, she's said as much herself. And it's clear that we don't like you, so why don't you just get lost. This is our little stone, and it's not much, but lift it up again and on your head will be all cost, for you agree you've already lost, so go. Go back to losing! We don't know you anymore. We've grown up and you've stayed the same. We're still innocent, and you've changed. He doesn't even recognize us! I told you, I'm Oeddy!" These last statements are directed to Global.

"I know you just fine," I assure them. "Sure. You're fragments from a broken mirror. Once upon a time somebody saw true love, and it saw them. The system shattered, and now you're here. So be proud. And blame me at the same time. See if I care. You're nobody. And I may or may not be back, but if I am I know I can count on the two of you to cower in the corners like cockroaches and let whoever reminds you of whatever you think I was, or whom you mistake me for, stand on your skulls. Good day, sirs." I walk away. By the time I get to the edge of the roof and turn around to climb down the fire-escape ladder they have already slunk back inside, too ashamed to be seen for too long in even the relatively secluded public of their own pub's porch. I wish they could just stop being mice, or dogs. I'm sick of killing women.

3c) Lacrimal Sanative Trope

I take up temporary residence in a hotel across the street, with a view from my window of the rooftop bar. The name of the Hotel is Climax 6. It is older, but relatively well kept up. I carefully remove and reinsert reversed the two way mirrors, and strew a newspaper across the floor for a bed. After one day roaches and various other bugs have eaten half of this, and I have to replace it every two days, if only to keep the natives well fed. The roaches here are highly intelligent, some of the smartest I've seen, but waste most of their overgorged intellects on ridiculous games and features. The paper costs more than the room — and this attests to the nature of its walls, which, were they not painted in a tainted adherent, would have been consumed decades ago by the massive populations; they are, in fact, roach paper, and from time to time I chuckle at the irony of this, wondering what the news itself is feeding off. The rent is a nickel a week, and this is staggering for the district, but explains the extraordinary quality of the maintenance. In many hotels in this sector it is not only the restrooms that are communal, but the sleeping quarters in general. Some places provide multi-storied warehouses of bunk-cots, where people swarm in deference to the denizens responsible for clearing out the partitions. Others charge hourly rates only for a closet where large groups of students go to seek solace for their studies and/or distraction; many of these latter are in sub-basements of the former, and prone to exposure to leakage from the ventilation, utility and sewage systems, the closets predominantly being hewn from the limestone walls of boiler rooms and interconnecting subterranean tunnels. I

pay for my room with doubloons palmed from the corner newsy, whose blind ruse prevents him from interfering, and at whom I glare directly with pure contempt while I do this. Since the night he first saw me I was not arrested he assumes with disgustingly comfortable portentousness that I was not the searched after suspect. I smoke and chat with him as a Siamese ferret trainer, serving simultaneously to confuse and to irritate him. I tell him, “a ferret’s favorite food’s a mole, if you can get it.”

After a week and a half the coverage pays off. I spot the man enter the pub, alone, garbed in an ordinary business suit, raincoat and porkpie hat. I gather my things together and am stalled only for a very brief moment closing my account with the front desk, and yet, even at the same time I am climbing over the short ledge surrounding the rooftop, my feet still planted on the top rung of the fire escape, the pub explodes, a massive fireball lifting up five stories high from the surface of the thirteenth floor, sending off sonic shock waves of such magnitude that the windows of the surrounding buildings within a seven block radius are blown out, the support structures of buildings within two blocks shaken loose and permanently upset, while the foundations themselves of buildings as close as one block collapse, causing massive black-outs and flooding. The fire escape I am still standing on immediately heats and warps, wrapping itself around my ankles as tightly as if I were Achilles, and, tearing itself free from the building side, flies into the face of the building across the street. Although I am pushed at the speed of heat through a cursorily consumed brick wall, I am luckier than had I remained on the rooftop. As I am flung through the scalding air I have a plain vantage of the rooftop melting into a cracking sea of magma, followed by the incremental detonation of each of the twelve lower floors of the building, projecting a dust cloud interspersed with solid debris and the remains of the residents. The building into which I am hurled becomes destabilized by the force of the blast, and begins toppling over like a fallen elder cedar. As it collides with the building the next block down it folds over upon itself, and disintegrates into a pile of rubble. I am stuck in a cavern formed beneath a solid piece of polycarbon base for several hours after the blast, trying to shovel my way out with increasingly marred hands, finding to my dismay this only destabilizes the set. Eventually I begin to hear voices, which makes me happy for a change. It is the newsy who pulls me out, his face burnt to a cinder. He can no longer pretend to be blind, and I can no longer pretend not to be a dick. He tells me his name is Lucky.

II.

A. Obsidian Limbic Dormancy

Limbo. A vast flat expanse of emptiness. Ghost towns squat eating dust. Radioactive tumbleweeds. Immeasurable emptiness. Desolation. Thistles and passion-flowers droop in the light of the dust smothered sun. In the desert of the coal black sky it hovers in a black-lit puddle of still darker blood. Sputtering generators populate the decomposing surroundings, patrolled by fleets of regulators, energy rustlers, feeding off the flow filters of the background radiation processed by the converters they were constructed to repair. Hollowed hulks crouch throughout the scenery of lean survival, the echoes of machines that failed, their final countdowns pitched howls on the winds that visit them, the tension of sand tsunamis uncovering cow skulls, bleached by the ceaseless barrage of fine powder. Peeling skins canvassing post-terminally dehydrated skeletons, the smell of above ground burial attracting profuse pollutions of air borne scavengers, vultures interbred with trap-door spiders and star-nosed moles, wings beating the tempo of shuffling scrolls unraveling cinders on frigid sudden updrafts, swarm viciously upon packs of ravenous curs, hides pierced in long streaks of open atmosphere, tearing their troops apart over the least digested morsel of cowboy carrion recently regurgitated from the depths of the stoneless cemetery by the angling of the air. Decay. Despair. Roving bands of dried sea scavengers, loose tribes of lost fools and their waxen scribes, endanger wayfarers even more. At any moment the

most grizzled sheep strayed from the dim oases of society, secreted in the suspension of pure grime and fetid nocturne, might without the breath of birth find themselves beset upon invisibly from all around by a stampeding herd of autophages, garbed in the innards of their previous conquests, raping wide open every pore with unimagined fears, charging their inhalations to electrocution and slicing them into diminishing poor portions. No one dares exist unarmed. On the horizon the wilting poles of resource removal plants and alchemical probes erect, disgorge and shrink, phallically depositing the excruciatingly heavy, smotheringly thick, mineral-cored smoke that slithers within the cobwebbed canopy of the wilderness, an artificial oil slick aura, necessitating respirators and masks, predominantly produced by the very same delves and slurries, without which however, the massive hives of the alienated cities and the punctuated outposts of poisoned economy could have never inverted from impossible fever. Of this original doubt, the incurable yearning of man's mind's maw, Limbo is all that remains. It underlies and tempers the more sophisticated sufferings of civilization, its obfuscated fauna ornamenting its oppressors' own plundered, ravaged psyche. It is the soft soil of our uprooted reflex; unchosen emptiness wagered against infinity.

1a) Punching the Terminal

The terminus is the shelled out carcass of an old exo-Chaldean warehouse, probably used for the storage of extracted, pre-refined ores and other mining debris. It follows the basic catacomb design, thousands of microcosmic cavities surrounding a central, massive promenade, punctuated by gothic arch ways and hieroglyphed pillars, roofed with a cracking quilt of plate glass panes force-shielded against the erratic magnetically actuated mineral flurries, and floored with an undulating sheet of all manner of life, a swarm of a geupleplex scale ants in a hive.

The plane swoops onto the tarmac and crawls into one of the hundred hangars, folding its elongated soft skin wings to its side. The passengers begin collecting their belongings from the package carousel in the creature's disembarkation gullet, while various half-breed life-forms coalesce and recoagulate unobtrusively, offering assistance if necessary. The egression passage yawns ajar alongside the slits of its enormous gills and, as I part carefully from its mucinously lubricated innard to the smooth plexi-crete surface of the walkway, I am aware of the beast's immense, serene eye overlooking the departure of its wards with the warm concern and satisfaction of a surrogate form of parentage. Its neuralaxial cables interface with the synthetic, flesh-adaptive mainframe system of the terminus, and shrouded cyborgs await in the surrounding shadows to perform the duties of the symbionts within the aircraft as required while in the terminal. Their spines conjoin the wall. The central system is primarily automated, and along my way, I purchase a newspaper and an Irish coffee from the slithering clutch of biotech tentacles that submerge the foundry of the walls. Upon request the wall provides a holographic projection of my location in the terminus with convenient touch-zoom labels of all the individually modeled details.

I sit down at a bench beside a transparent steel wall separating the fourth story lobby where I am from the vastness of the two square quarter below. I open up the paper only for camouflage and begin listening to the conversations of passers by, acquainting myself with the general atmosphere of Limbo.

The most common dialect is a form of mecho-Greek, based on the synchronization of biology and technology, the former including both aspect and function, the latter both function and technique. This leads to an interesting admixture, wherein a deep foreboding is omnipresent, like a disagreement over time. The cause is quite obvious, zodiacally, although implies no solution. It stands to reason the technique can only be carried through to test whether it is sound, or whether it will not survive itself. Conversations within this context vary, yet are profoundly more limited than not while the proximity of others is a factor for delimiting consideration,

which appears to be always. Most utilize this performative trait in a variety of self-complimentary or situationally supplementary fashions, their application of it sickeningly dependent upon the implied rule of never directly addressing its awareness. In order to overcome this hindrance to interaction with others, particularly strangers, a variety of characteristically metaphorical conversation structures have been implanted and elaborated upon. These are cataloged in a more easily accessible game model that is, in turn, determined in form by the passage of time. The entire metaphysical situation is either a perfect mirror of, or perfectly mirrored in, the architecture and civilization of the terminus itself; an impossible loop equation, therefore one not worth following up on.

I sip listlessly at the coffee, taking particular note of breathing apparati worn by some of the wayfarers, especially by those who look as though they have only recently come in from outside. They are long, punctuated tubes that dangle from before the mouth, attached by a duraplex cup to a head-strap, and concluded with an ornamental containment system housing concealed filtration equipment. Some of them are extraordinarily unflattering to their wearers, while others can slip easily by unnoticed. They seem to be worn by an overwhelming majority, at least, leading one to believe them an environmental necessity.

It is almost as though the biosynth strike never took place. One year ago the terminus was next to desolate, populated only by those who had stayed there on accident or were unable to leave. They meandered the corridors like internally desolated bedouins, their veins shimmering beneath their translucent skin bioelectrically. They exterminated the malfunctionals, androids that had generated their electromechanical connection with their host tissue at the same time as an older series of mechanix was attempting to close their feedback overflow termination cycle implantation factories. Ultimately this attempt was a failure for them as a result of the aforementioned time driven device, and proved to sufficiently retromotivate their subsequents as to promote negative integration of animal and programmed components. However, for the reproduction of mechanix, as are the commonest of the living machine population at the terminus, the rate is much faster than for either their flesh or chrome individually, and these events were concluded in little over ten-and-one-half months. Now I can hardly tell the robots and people apart, and the fates of each are their own. During that time however, there was no biotech wall, no periphery cyborgs, and perhaps half as many flights. The terminus is the only standing structure for three hundred miles in any direction, and without a biosynth transport, escape would be determined entirely by assertion of will-power. And that is where I come in.

The lead at Thelma's brought me here, the connection between William the Conqueror and our General was unclear until the explosion of the pub Rose, when I had seen quite clearly the effects of retroactivation described in the communique between I.F. and Curly. While in the rubble I had realized that forward and backward moves in karmic terms were little different than legal and illegal activities, rather than a question of possible or impossible, and Lucky had seemed to coöperate this with our discussion regarding situations and the illusion of organization, which occurred in the subtext of my interrogation by his buddies, the Z.P.D.

The sky beyond the partition above is recongealing, turning inward on itself as though a hunger is consuming it internally, and I set down the paper and move off in the direction of the promenade. I walk for what seems like five days, always pushed at from every side by lost looking pedestrians with soldier eyes, punks with mohawks, blanks holding their luggage over their heads, hermaphrodite-visaged voluptuous crows, and I know that a lead is near. The walls of the bazaar are tall and flat, obscured in the shadows that stretch down from the ceiling, where the weather swallows and digests what little illumination the alcoves can produce. The scan of the geography puts the generators that power the biotech underneath, yet here there are fewer of the tendrils along the walls; there is little room for them. I overhear a million fragments of talk, primarily mechanical directions, a few extremely high minded quips, interspersed with dripping unreality. Eventually the walk, although seeming to have been straight at every point, reconnects to itself from the other side, and I smile.

I step aside into one of the alcoves, where candles glimmer in the damp mud sculpted muck of the extracted ore pile it is carved into, along the inside of a stone corridor. A synth woman in a crimson shroud, appearing nearly black in the dim and shimmering light, approaches me and gently takes my hand, turning it palm upward. I notice an ornate mandala inscribed on the skin of her palm, seemingly scorched there. She traces along the lines of my flesh and, looking coyly at me with lidded bulbs, she asks me who I'm looking for. Her tongue and lips are real, but her teeth are smooth metallic steel, pointed, and indent upon her tongue as she speaks until the pressure whitens it. Her shop is an awful composition of detritus from other people's interests, relics from the exo-Chaldean era, and remnants from various animal and mechanical revolutions since. Despite having a wide variety of it, there is nothing here that I could want. "No one," I tell her, not wanting to excite her interests under non-economical pretenses.

"You're lying," she reminds me, yet allows me to escape.

I am floating along in the throng again, choked by the lack of remaining oxygen after the thousands of whirring processors have finished extracting their toll. The current carries me into another eddy, this one run by a liquefied yogic, whose muscles slowly crawl around him like loosened animals beneath a thin cowl. His shop is full of cups and bowls, all various forms of container, and illuminated by a single hovering globe of self-contained electrostatic ambience in the far corner, shimmering irregularly pale pulsation between marbled white and indigo-violet.

I browse around for a while, letting my mind wander over and around the various available objects. Each is a story of its own creator's world view, some forcing themselves outward, others pulling one soothingly in. An aquarium lines one wall, and fish with luminescent eyes flit about in the wake of their own communications. From time to time the proprietor dips a cup into the aquarium and extracts what appears to be liquefied light left behind by the fishes' eyes, sipping at it casually, and causing a pattern of strange illumination to occur upon himself in varying hues. I doubt, by his demeanor, that he would know anything relative, although undoubtedly, perhaps much that would be interesting.

I politely nod my head and am once again thrust into the chaos of the corridor, shoved along without the ability to see beyond three feet before myself, disoriented, and suffocating. The upper surfaces of the walls shudder and become porous, and a light sprinkling commences. Several people curse, while others envelope under umbrellas. I am pushed first one direction, then another. Above this, outside the plate shielding, the weather continues to swirl, strange quakes of lightening rippling beneath the darker caverns of the cumuli, occasionally surfacing long enough to ignite static spark cascades across the surface of the force field.

I see a little ways further down the side, a shop light glowing with an array of flickering desperation. "A (nd) .'. A Sleepwalker," it asserts in ultraviolet. I approach it, and find a hypothecary shop doubling as a bar. I enter, and am reminded intrinsically of the pub R.T. The bartender, however, is rather a short, long-bearded old man, and the bar is on the left rather than right side as one enters. Neon signs decorate the walls, surrounding holographic cinemae that interactivate when contacted. Dead dials present multi-channel boards, and, when a particular dish is selected from the menu, the light board elongates and quavers down to a palpable frequency, providing access to the desired feed of virtuism, ad- or con- virtism. The tables are plates of transparent colored plastic, and the creatures in the booths undergo various stages of astral transformation and trans-physical autonomic mutation inevitably leading to the types of aberrations that glutted the Rose of T.

I approach the bartender, who has two black plastic eyes, and is polishing a cup with a black-lit shining white-purple rag. Behind him is a wall of melted wax honeycomb and dripped wet sand providing ports and terminals to the living information network. I pull up a stool. He speaks to me in Enochian, and I make a confused expression and tell him, "Englos," despite being able to understand his punctured slang rendering, and his mandible quivers into a pastel static field momentarily while reshaping his mouth to formulate a different dialect.

"What will I get you?" he asks.

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"A man," I rejoin. "A particular person. Is that possible? Do you have individual information databases?" He looks at me flatly, his flat black lenses inscrutable. "Do you need a name now?" I add.

"You should pay first," he states factually. I agree and put out a corolla of bills on the bar. A gleam sweeps across his eyes.

"How much?" I demand, reminding him of, between me and my money, to whom he is actually speaking.

"Depends on the person, their distance in the system."

"Piscator Wilhelms."

"That's easy," the old man smiles, "he was just here." His grin implies a great quantity of contact with Wilhelms, particularly pertinent to the alteration of strategies, although the muscles around his eyes belie that all the drinking and talking that one could do would almost certainly elicit little more than this, and leads me to wonder if it isn't actually the old man that's being fooled into thinking he knows the fool Wilhelms any better than I.

"When will he be back?"

"He comes in fairly regularly. Funny thing, eh. Always seems the system goes to glitch just a while before he gets here too. Ah, well. About an hour ago, maybe two. Sometime a little after lunch, and he's usually gone before dinner. But I'm always here. And so's whatever you want off the menu. So what'll it be, then?" He picks up the same glass he had set down and polishes it more with the shining rag.

"No thanks. I'll be back then." I turn to leave, giving the entire joint the once over as I slowly turn on the seat. "One more thing, though," I return full around to face the man. "Where's the nearest place to stay cheap around here?"

"Ah," you're going to want the Berlin," he assures me, giving his polishing a little extra elbow grease. "It's just nine blocks right along the corridor here, then right hallway 1110, then left down alley 774, up stairwell 414, then you'll see a sign."

I follow the old man's directions, almost missing the first and third turns for the crowd. The claustrophobia implies an unpleasant tension that is more imagined than real, although provided with an innumerable amount of opportunities for eruption. The sign above the door of the motel is a holographic projection of a shell, which, when seen at the correct angle, contains a serene view of the ocean. Ironical, for the name. I part the door and am inside.

Another synth, similar to the one in the store, hovers on an anti-gravity generator behind a wooden counter. She stares vacantly at a projected screen floating above the counter top, displaying a read-out of the day's events. As I enter she hits a concealed knob in the spliced spruce veneer and the projection retracts into a whorl that washes away. Her eyes burn toward me with mechanized impatience. I hustle over to the counter, feigning a limp, and inquire about the cost of a room. While she scans my card I glance about the lobby. It is, like so many private rooms, inordinantly expensive; however, since I expect to be staying no more than one night, it is of little ultimate consequence. It impacts on the cost of the investigation much less than the price of cartridges has, and therein is my own personal irony for the stay.

I ascend a spiraling staircase to a long hall with wooden lining, and, finding the room comfortable beyond my requirements, settle in for a relaxing night. I am awakened later from my rest by a nearby tram. It is too loud to be slept through while still several blocks away, but the tracks run directly beneath the stairwell I ascended, and so I restlessly pull on my pants and shirt to heed it while it goes. I stand on the stairs with a few other upset sleepers, a few smoking shiftily, as the enormous apparatus grumbles past below.

1b) Fisherman Omega's Envoy

In the morning I go down to the lobby, where the same female droid remains, her processor still mulling over what happened before I entered, her attention divided by the counter projection and a small meal; she probably won't remember who checked out. I stroll around the quarter for a while, browsing in many of the shops along the halls, inquiring here and there about Wilhelms. His interests are difficult to distinguish. Here he is interested in extinct birds, there in cathodic geodes, here in a well-tailored suit, there a custom fit dog collar, etc. It is almost as though he follows impulses others would not, or perhaps that, rather than letting himself go, he has lost the meaning of this altogether, and is after his own ideal. It is certainly slow going. Most people who claim to know him cannot agree on one description, and make conflicting claims as well about his character.

For lunch I stop in a Thai restaurant serving platters of delicious looking optix noodles. The service is fair, the workers obviously tired and lazy, their eyes purpling, their flesh a greenish yellow, almost certainly fuzzy logic fixers, practitioners of the biological system inferred above. The optix noodles shine bright colors, glowing from the inside with their injections of antigen radium. It is health food. I try to avoid making direct eye contact for too long with the proprietors, preferring to mind my own business, yet they incessantly hover about, waiting to discover if I require further service. They are excruciating, almost more mechanical than some of the androids, although it is entirely due to their unspeakably immense culinary pride.

At the designated hour I return to the Sleepwalker. It is within eyesight of the Thai restaurant, in front of which I spent the remainder of my afternoon drinking Irish coffee and reading the newspaper, and during that entire time I saw no one remotely resembling Williams enter. I approach the bartender, who, as he promised, is the same, right down to the polishing glass.

Looking around the establishment while he smiles serenely at me, his head cocked to one side, I say, "where's Williams?"

"Why, he's right there," the old man says, pointing at someone who isn't him.

"That isn't him," I politely explain.

"Just try telling that to him," the old man grins terminally, and saunters away.

The person sitting at the table is a child. They have long, wavy hair. It is blonde, almost white. Their skin is a beige tone, but their eyes are hidden. They are of the average height of a ten-to-twelve year old, depending on their gender, which is, as well, hidden by their sand colored robes. They are plugged into the port at one of the transparent plastic booths. The frame has detached from the wall and is counter rotating itself at varying velocities, its ambient screen, shimmering like wave caps, is undulating down in a spiraling tendril to generate an interface console on the table top. The whole scene is surrounded by a thin energy bubble that slowly spins like a stirred oil slick, swallowing up one of their hands. Before their face is another flat projection emanating from the table, on which is a series of screens displaying files that are moved by their discreet gestures. As I walk towards the kid they select one and a fluid patina trickles down through the holo-tube and up to their fingertips where it sinks in shining a bright purple blue.

As I near him, he seems to take notice, his head twitching in my direction slightly, and his fingers tense upon the flow. It retracts, the bubble shrinking back down to around the bright white tip of the swirling vortex, the projection field folding up along with it, until finally the screen is recompleted on the wall and the menu scroll assembles. I slide into the booth opposite him but he does not look up. We sit there, across from each other, for what seems like a long, sharp moment.

"I'm looking for Piscator Wilhelms." There is another brief silence.

"Well I am he," he says calmly; an Asian voice, young and proud.

It's a slow day in the hypoth-bar, so I decide to be frank with the kid. I lean in to level with him. There is a sand colored smear on the black-lit plastic back of the bench. I look over and he is at the bar. He seems to be paying the bartender a tab.

"Damn," I hiss, imagining attempting to catch him if he were to make it to the courtyard. I leap up from the seat and pull out my piece. "Impressive," I tell him with as little inflection in my voice as possible. It is the word and not any notion of its backing that causes him to slowly turn his head around. His eyes are Siamese.

The thought of escape crosses his mind, then his shoulders relax and he begins to approach me. There is another white blur and I reposition my pistol in a double crescent pattern, contacting his wrist as he attempts to disarm me, and following through to pinpoint his head as he kneels on the ground before me, slowly rising to his feet. "Nothing's going to happen," I assure him, then, as he is inhaling, "play chess much?" I ask. His breath catches in his throat and his head lulls for a split second. "This is either checkmate or a stalemate. You officiate." His skin hangs around him for an instant like smoke around a cigarette as the wind shifts, then he smiles, and gestures toward the booth. I don't take my eyes off him.

"You make bad moves. Neither of us is being completely honest here, yet I think I would be more alike myself were we somewhere else." This comment as well is meant to distract me, yet it merely seems hurried and urban and I have only to invert it to better comprehend his origins. "Why you don't even smell like you; maybe you're somebody else. Well?" I do not answer his question.

"Put your weapon on the table." His eyes shift around like knuckles cracking, searching for an alternative to compliance, despite the logic and passivity of my request. His arrogance is stronger than his youthful radiance. I now know one thing too much about him. I cock my pistol and he seems quickly to find some balance, withdrawing a kitana in a sheath from beneath his robe behind his back and setting it down evenly. His eyes burn with loathing. My blood does not run cold.

"Piscator Wilhelms. You're such a difficult person to understand you don't even look like yourself." We resume our positions in the booth.

"Would you like the short answer," he coos, leaning in, "or the longer one?"

"Sit back," I jam my gun against his forehead and push him away, my interest in his colorful answers to my necessary questions dwindling rapidly. "You already know you aren't going to do anything. Who on the hill are you though?"

Mercury scarab shells slip down, covering over his eyes. Out from these a fetid turmoil spumes, boiling away his skin and decomposing his skull. His face becomes a sky blue static television egg. The white sparks floating about establish elaborate connections and quickly tremble into geometric frequencies. The fractions fracture and the entire visage implodes into scorchingly bright clear light. From this the image of an old man gradually emerges, balding, liver spotted, a thin layer of beard stubble, and in the shadows that ensconce his eyes, although perhaps it is only the quality of the monitor upon which his transmission occurs, I notice the deepest hue of black beyond within as I have ever naturally seen.

"Watch chew wan?" he asks crankily. "Actin' 'ike yer tryin'a kill a feller, young shit."

"You must be Piscator Wilhelms," I say, still uncertain whether to posture myself as though I were addressing the body, the face, or talking into a mechanical apparatus.

"You're early. Always early. Early with Curly and you're early here. Early with Rose and you're early here. You should get in a groove. Much easier." The age of his face is slowly shifting. Some of the words that he says elicit younger visages than others, both drier and old. "Well, we know what you want. D'you?"

"Emit, my friend. You are quite bright you must admit. I think I mean time... But I know your name, which is strange. Your face is quite changed. If you know what I want..."

"The desert. 'S'only place. Gotta get together. Can't talk here. Already 's'hot. Transmission cut." As his face recedes into the ambience from whence it emerged I am certain I can hear him

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saying, although probably only to himself, “best I ever seen.” As though it were a reflection in liquid washing down a drain the boy’s face reverses and depixelizes into stasis behind the vanishing link.

“Now,” he says, his face hanging down and diamond clear eyes slicing upward angles at me, “you have really done it.”

I sit there imitating the stupidity of the enneagram that processed that thought for him, then click into activity, swiping up his blade and extracting it from its scabbard. “This is a fairly nice sword you have. I don’t know anything about them of course.” I peak out of the edge of my eye towards him, yet he is wise. He holds his composure until I have replaced the weapon on the table, waits for my assent, then lifts it calmly to replace it along the contour of his spine.

“So,” I mumble. He anticipates the more technical question of the two on the tip of my tongue. I ask the other one. “When?”

“Always...” he begins, explaining their connection, then quickly correcting himself, slightly louder, says, “right now if you like.”

“Or whenever,” I chide, indifferent as impatient.

“Then now it shall be,” he elucidates, standing. I concur, and we walk out into the quarter. He smiles back from a little way ahead of me, tauntingly, knowing he could easily lose me in the crowd, and also that he will not. I do not reciprocate this.

We follow hallway 147 to alley Art 12, then hall 963 to alley Art 18, finally catching the 7 True 6 in Tunnel 861 to the lower levels, where Piscator actually lives. The tunnel has long ago filled with thinly viscous fluid overflow from the mineral extraction process, and the tube-worm slices through upturning the soft slurry smoothly. When we resurface it is in the salt caverns nearly a mile below the floor of the main plaza, where the feet of all the pacing tumult pound the surface above the primary generators. Here, half submerged in the murk, they pulsate, several thousand meters in height, moving together, to merge, slickly grinding, their heat fueling the surging brood of biotech tentacles and cyborg mechanix that undulate within the terminus high above. It is in one of the outskirts, near, yet without of the urgency of the clockwork orange, that Piscator lives. We follow a series of winding burrows until we come to an unmarked, elliptical wooden door. We enter.

The room is small, lit primarily by a terminal in a root-like excrescence that is pulled from the concave rounded wall to the equally indiscernable floor. There is bedding near the cable root on a kind of shelf stump, a low, flat heap of the same nondistinct substance the remainder of the room is made of. The ceiling is damp. The room is naturally warm. There is a door leading to another room that is partially shut. Light spills through from this crack and pools upon the surfaces of various catches on the ground, discarded projects, cellophane liberated and cyclotronic. On the terminal is the view through the eyes of Piscator’s little minnow.

He emerges from the next room wringing his hands with a towel. His face is aged, but his body seems firm between the dim blue light of this room and the bright yellow light of the next. He touches his finger to the wall and pulls along its surface, raising a bar over which he then throws his washcloth. He smiles and extends his hand, clean, a clean white smile, and his hand free of any residue. I shake earnestly.

“Well,” he groans like a rickety rocker, “look’a ya. Look like a snake, now. Thin, ghastly thin as a sheet. I bet all the whores ‘round, haven’t walked as much street. You know you are what you eat; betchu haven’t sucked down a square since yer ole lady’s teet.” He turns to the boy, “Already met the boy, prairie boy, just a little abductee, really; same old story, ghost trains, red indians, strict frontier gash paranoiac authoritarianism or the softening of the time-space continuum for the purpose of celebratory exploration. Which would you choose? Anyway, now he’s here. You and I are old friends. Just get used to the multiplicity of my voices.”

He collects his drab gray flannel suit coat from its wall hanger and his matching fedora hat from beside the door. He points his finger toward the monitor and it deactivates, collapsing into a single bright white point at the tip of a fiber-optic strand retracting into the surface of the

cable root with a tug as though there were a flowing current thereof within. Williams taps a panel that had been concealed by his hat as we are exiting and the room shudders a shallow quake as its heat disengages. Behind us the lights switch off and the elliptical door wishes shut.

We stop at a cluster of lockers near the tube-worm depot where we must wait for fifteen minutes before another one comes through heading back for the surface. In one of these lockers is a tote-bag belonging to Williams which he checks for and throws over his shoulder. "Used to go mad with the quick pack frenzy," he tells me, adjusting one of the multiple utility pockets that array the sac, "now can't afford it. Fuzz moves much faster 'ese days. Up ahead, sometimes, know, waitin'."

As the train is approaching, and at a volume that is nearly entirely subsumed by the sound of the engine, he leans in to tell me, "there's only two rebellions, if anyone asks." The conductor steps out of the first segmented, insectile cabin, the windows spiraling in upon themselves to expel jets of noxious yellow green fumes like the eyes of a falling down drunk, and yells, "all boarding Nova Express to the surface! First and only recall to life." Williams presents the already torn tickets we acquired on the ride down for himself and the boy, his now also punched for the baggage claim, and I hand the conductor mine. He slips them all into a slit in his stomach that is slimy and toothy, and grins at us while he is doing it, the pervert.

We step through the bio-mech flesh-mesh exoskeleton of the sub-tram, resilient enough to withstand the friction of the worm's velocity mixed with the acidic quality of the sluiced excavation excess. Inside it is entirely organismal, the phosphorous-fed blood evanescent beneath the slippery skin surfaces of the compartments, muscle belts strung down from the ceilings and intermingling with the tissues of the floor and wall; keloids lining the sides of the segments for sitting have crusted over here and there with nanoplatelettes, creating centers of mobile fungi that sterilize the interior. The ribs are intermittently interrupted by stretches of durable skin providing a translucent ambience. Almost before we are strapped in the tram lurches forward and we are propelled through the chute. Williams extrudes from his suit jacket a pack of Liso-strati and lets one dangle between his lips.

Within a minute, the sound inside the compartment being too deafening to converse, someone passing by on wobbly legs stops to offer him a light. He declines, pointing at the boy, who, despite having his face turned toward the window, watching the subterranean autofagic fluids slung by, instinctively turns his head to give a malevolent glare at the ghoulishly grinning couple before slowly turning back around to stare at the slightly reflective dermis again. Williams shrugs his shoulders and the swaying oaf stumbles off. I stare at him for a while longer, his face undergoing the same process of trans-age-ience I had witnessed over the com even while thinking, until he notices me, imputes my query and looks ritualistically at his watch. I cannot myself resist the urge to confirm the status of my gun.

Soon the tube-worm glides into the port and the meager collection of deep dwelling passengers, mechanix and halfies spills out onto the platform. There is a newsstand where Williams insists we all buy the cheapest available respirators, and, while we do so, smokes his cigarette. He carries them for us in his duffel bag, advising us they are more for fashion inside, survival out, and twitching while he discusses this at the observed modern styles. We ascend a steep stairwell that rises above the extremely tall and narrow passageway of the sub-tram track's entrance to the port platform that terminates in an equally narrow and deeply sagging rope bridge, extending across the indiscernable gulf into shadow.

We emerge in a more open, though low ceilinged, actuarial; a wide selection of excursion gear for the outgoing and interface equipment for the incoming, a slightly cold environment, the outskirts. Limbo just beyond. Williams and his ward wander around awhile away from me. I watch them over the aisle tops, monitoring them behind displays. They surreptitiously pocket an inordinant quantity of smaller items, filling most, if not all, of the packs and pouches on the rough sack. The proprietor is a halfy, an elderly synth, not following current biped citizen model design. His face is a twisted heap of wrinkles and warts, emerald eyes emblazoned within above a

long grizzled beard; his body is human from the waste up, although his back and hips are attached to a wooden-sleaved branch of circuitry that extends from a rail system above the ceiling, which is itself the consistency of a thin sheet of cobwebbing, resealing itself after the multi-elbowed armature has eased through it.

"How far ya headin'?" he inquires, whirring up to me.

"Don't know yet," I reply, affecting a similar accent, "how far can we get on?" I ask, forwarding a handful of cash, crinkling plastic credits that I don't even know if he'll accept. I could easily put the bill on the scan card I carry. But I'm curious.

"Depends, a'course. A'three a'ya?" I nod. "Well, now. Let's see. I'n give ya a land scooter, be about yer size, not cozy, I'd think," eyeing them up and down he goes on, "or a couple'a biotech horses, ribs are showin' through, though, probably not the best. Let me see. He scans over an inventory that scrolls down on the surface of his own pupil. "Ah, here we are. Gravity repulse sail yacht. Forgot I had this one, though. Been up in dry dock for... don't even know how long. Don't know why I even thought of it. It's more'n you got there, that's sure —"

"That's right for us." Williams interrupts the old halfy as he and the boy walk up, Williams extracting a bill-fold from his jacket pocket that is revealed to be in no short supply of credits and cards alike. He looks at me, his lips pursed and lowered as though sucking on something, his eyes wide yet glossy. I remove my ruse from sight.

The bione triggers a display map for us and we are shown the way to the dry dock hangar. We pay him the money and follow a series of narrow passageways and lamp-lit stairwells until we emerge in an arithmetically cavernous loading and storage bay, where several ships of various size and make are stored. We emerge halfway along one of the walls between two air-whale hangar-sized apertures beyond which yawns a maw of seemingly limitless emptiness. Glistening force shields are in place across the two chasms, and from these an inconstant static luminousness fills the entire hallway with an occasionally eruptive turquoise hue.

We discover our ship in the midst of a collection of others and reposition it in the center of the strip. It is called the Hermes. It has two decks, the upper one uncovered, and is largely mechanical, a testament to its age. The biological parts control the sails, it being steered instinctively in response to a wetware guidance system. The sails themselves are horizontally oriented above the craft, almost transparently thin skin with a venous network of blood that glows a milky moonlight color when the engine gets humming and the system starts to flow. The primary motivator is in the lower stern, a manually fed protean engine with two directional side-mounted thrusters forwarding the repulse generator on the under-hull, accessed beneath the second deck floor panels. The engine is slow, but ultimately responsive, the guidance system capable of providing a holographic display for several hundreds of miles in all directions accurate to within five years, and though the thrusters are weak and the sails non-retractable, Williams calls the craft "chiefly cheap," and it is unanimously pronounced expendable. The only serious piece of damage is a minor set of pin-hole punctures in the lower deck that render it as environmentally hospitable as the upper, which is itself only forward force-shielded. I say nothing about the undefined duration of our expedition.

Our craft glides silkily down the wide aisle towards the buzzing static field and passes easily through it, the electricity stirring off the dust and rust collected on the floors and hull. We are in Limbo. Immediately the pressure drops at least a dozen isobars. The boy's nose bleeds a crimson delta across his sand tunic and Williams doubles over clutching his middle, leaving the helm unmanned. "It'll wear off," he barks, but I can only understand some of it, my ears readjusting repeatedly. We don our breathing masks and this begins to help a little, as they at least provide corrected air pressure above our ears and noses, and to some extent, within our lungs. The pressure reduces our heart rates, however, and according to Wilhelms this single rhythm affects all other physical functions, right down to the processing of nervous system signals by the brain, the very one, he smirks ironically, with which alone it is reciprocal. We pull on goggles as well, Piscator wrapping a turban on himself and tying back the boy's hair. I pull my

own fedora down more snugly around my skull. The repulsion field's gravitronic disturbance and the gentle humming of the craft create the sensation that we are almost floating on air as we walk, and moving even when we stand. Soon enough we are acclimated to the moderate discomforts of travel.

2a) Into the Out(s) of It

"We are given the perfect excuses. We know our choices well in advance. We are even the shapers of our own deaths. Whatever our sufferings they are self-inflicted. Even the inexplicable ones require only time for solution. Time for doubt to die. For the writer of fiction, whose life seems to be moving forward, inexorably, like a boat heading for a waterfall, there are only two sides: the speaker and the narrator, sometimes the same, others not; and these are as past and future, or even as water and air. For the writer of fact there is no limit set to the number of sides from which an event may be examined, nor temporal limits — the only constraint is placed on his own voice, for only in displacement of effect can one retain objectivity, or just as appropriately, on his own identity, for he can have none; only in obliteration of his center can he attain to all points simultaneously on the sphere of reality's influence upon itself from the inside out. These two are all that there are in the living realm of the active, the one like the pen, the vessel, the other the writer, the messenger, and the both are as one writing itself. They overlap one another constantly, interfering and vying for an imagined impact upon the ultimate conclusion. The pen will run out of ink, and the writer become his own center, given time. The same is true between beings. Should they seem to cross paths, they are truly one. Should they seem to seek to establish relationships it is only the energy of time. They are writing each other, and this is always true. They will write of limitless variations on their own true path, imagining opportunities arising alongside it, branches cascading away from it, sharing it with other travelers, even its own end. And yet none of these are as real."

Williams tells this to both the boy and myself. The crackle of the radio voice box of the breather interferes only slightly, the hot, dry winds of Limbo touching playfully at his trailing turban. He has pulled on a long black trench above his grey flannel suit, to keep off the industrialized pollutants. The boy's front-piece remains bloodied.

"The pen, this plane, provides us always with the proper raw materials for telling our story. If there is dissatisfaction with what we have at hand, it is due to its lack of necessity. Stories of fact are those true to ourselves, and those of fiction those true to commodity. All writing is true; though, just as it would on a single page of paper, so in reality it will inevitably overlap regardless, or ironically or not, because of this." The ship is on auto-pilot. The holographic generator projects an image of a remote outcropping of shale in an otherwise vast, flat stretch of desolation, slowly rotating. "When two of these writings overlap they may appear similar, they may reflect one another, or even contain one another. Yet no two stories can have the same ending. This is the last truth of writing. It is the wall to which all writers are inevitably led. The bending sheet of parchment we call the mind sky floating in the wind. The opening doorway to the next dimension." I can understand, as the information I gathered on him before coming to the terminus indicated, how he could have easily been one of the settlers of Limbo, and founders of its philosophies. "If you are on a path," he waves his hand in the air sweeping upward from his shoulder, "it is yours. You can no more share it than you can share your body. But it is, as is your mind related to your brain, always greater than your body. They you saw at the terminus, were, if anything, no more than politely embarrassed for expecting their path to follow their bodily gestures, their speaking, their expressed expectations, as their mind seems to react to the alchemy of inebriation, the chemical gravitation of desire or the natural and beauteous defense mechanisms of intoxication. These are all writing, in terms of fact, technique and style outgrowing the ego, or in terms of fiction, the present tension arising from either the past writing

the future or the future the past. Here there are truths within truths. Here we may see that writing is fractal. Here we may see that writing is older than verbal communication. Here we may see that writing is the implosion of the nothingness called reality.” Williams stops for a moment to survey the rotating holographic map. “We’re almost there,” he turns halfway towards us and says. The boy speaks.

“Wilhelm, why are we going here? What is it that we’re looking for?” Piscator looks to me and I glance down at the floorboards.

“There are things that are unseen by youth, even ignored by man, that are left to be the burden of the weariest, as am I. The difficulty in writing is its ease. It does not require writers, any more than writers require pens. Writers would still be writers even without pens, writing would still go on even if writers had no heads, etc. Writing is the eternal that promises writers immortality. And yet, here is the greatest wound of all writers. It is not unlike the joke: I stand by my words, yet my words stand alone — where did I go? In being aware of this need for egolessness in writing one has uncovered the greatest paradox of writing: the self is not needed, yet without it writing cannot occur — how can one write if one has no self? This would seem to mean that the dead too write, or perhaps write though us when we read, only thinking this writing. So if, as one must encourage of others, one chooses to step off from their path, they will see it going on without them. Is this anything other than death, as it is, in reality — seemingly arbitrary, inexplicable to loved ones, without consolation besides the practice of ritual? How hard it would be to explain to others the absolute rightness of one’s own foreseen death. Mourners almost always assume the deceased has come to their conclusion too soon, when perhaps they only seek to see a mirror of their own egos where no longer there is one. In fact, there is no wrong time to realize this fact: that to stray from one’s path is to strengthen it, for in every way the path itself will remain — one’s writings will come to the light of many an eye, and in the meantime one is enlightened themselves as to the nature of mind.

“All writing is at war with itself, as is the body, or similarly the environment; or so it appears to us, from within these organismic systems, when really they are only automatically recycling. This active process of continual adaptive modification of system within system is survival, and it differs from death, which is passive, only in frequency, for once one has died, has, that is, seen their own path from outside, one knows there is no true path, though there may be more traveled roads, and that all paths wither eventually, that there is truly no inside or outside, except to space-time, the continuum, the sky, because it opens and, like a good story, has two sides. What is necessary for survival to occur passively is to see all paths, all moments in time, simultaneously superimposed, and this is death in activity. This event is the origin of voice. And, after a manner of speaking, it is this we are going to find.” Wilhelms concludes by coughing into his respirator until his goggles fog up and he is nearly doubled over. The young one and I lean in to help him, but there is really nothing either of us know to do but hold our hands over his convulsing rib cage, which obviously doesn’t do any good. We look at each other grimly, each consumed in our own false conclusions — mine having hoped to find a more concrete link to the General, the boy’s being, if I know him from his actions, to kill me for training.

Eventually the old man regains himself. “M’aright, m’aright. Quicha’ fussin’ actin’ ‘ike a couple old queens about Potemkin.” He shoos us away and hunches over the control console. “Still a way’s away I say,” he says, making his way out to the stem, where he sits in lotus position and falls immediately into a trance. Again I am left behind with the child, whose angled glances dry my throat. He begins reviewing the ship’s onboard uplink to the information network, scanning with unnerving rapidity through news broadcasts on the holographer. I lean back in the crook of the stern, unfolding my ocular scanner from the brim of my hat, and, using the retinal motion interface, look over what information I can find on Piscator Wilhelms in the global legal data library on the thin lens of transparent plex. I copy Smithe’s disk.

2b) Zero Squared

After some time the ship slows, its engines sputtering, sending loud vibrations throughout. Piscator hops nimbly over the holographic console, through its display field, landing beside his friend, who obediently deactivates the device. Williams seems refreshed from his meditations, and looks from the lad to myself with dogged eagerness, as though debating which one of us to share some personal good news with first. By way of introduction he advises both of us, thus: "One person in an advanced state of enlightenment might help out another who is not; when they next meet perhaps their situations will be reversed, and the more enlightened get to play the younger, more foolish party then." He looks at me. "The one who is following you will kill me. There is no harm in telling you this. You don't need to feel any tension in your throat." He turns to the boy. "And I am going to kill you. You don't need to be afraid. You understand your spirit is of neither particle nor wave. Your youth will die, as will my age. These are the mysteries of this page." The young man does not so much as blink out of turn, replying, "I abide, master, until I am released." Williams is as exuberant as a child himself, although merely pleasantly glowing. We exit the ship by the retractable staircase from the lower deck on the port side, beside the holes.

"Every moment in time is a self-contained fractal, its own impossible loop. The sky is flat, yet never twice the same, like a living graph evolving in an ever-changing game. We live in the hollow spaces of these moments, as do thoughts within our brains. In this way writing is nothing but shadows, the impulses of bats that echo in caves. And following this reasoning each writer cobbles up his own coffin from other crabs selling sea shells by the shores of the sea." We are climbing a gradual slope of slippery shale, Fisher Bill's voice crackling melodically in our headsets, the wind cascading our garments and fecundating us in scathing waves of stagnant sand. Occasionally he turns around to monitor our progress, I bringing up the rear and party to the child's morosity, lightened by the elder's glances, as well as the greater barrage of updrafts, my body acting to shield them from these, upsetting my footing.

The body aches, it disobeys. The winds insist. "It is not us that the writing is, for we live next to it. Nor is the written message the same as the act of writing itself, for, as many methods and techniques as there are, the desire to catalog these rather than merely utilize them is used up like youth by age, to shield the real issue, which is continual decay — there is no permanent method, there is no trans-temporal technique. All writing manifests itself as symptoms and treatment, while the disease and the cure that cause it remain just beyond the realm of its expressions. Here is the solution contained within the question: the conclusion of a thing was its purpose, and this motivation is its cause. In plain text the cure of anything is its cause, inverted from unconsciousness to consciousness. Everything else is a side-show along the way. Roses to be sniffed. Dying, poisoned, radioactive roses. Gather them while thee may." These last few words seem to be rattling even Wilhelms himself, and he stops for a moment to rest. He mumbles a few words to himself, swaying, then calls the boy close to him. "It's time," he tells him. "Give me your sword. I send you to the light."

The young one's head is cleanly severed. It rolls down the slope we just climbed. A chill runs through me. Piscator looks up. "He was only one of many. A Blank. Still training." His body, which had been knelt before Bill, now crumples. It seems his voice is still in the air. "We'll cook him and eat him now. It's Blanking ritual. Without it his voice will linger, echoing as I described, bearing a message meant for only our ears, and already heard." He disrobes him ravenously and flashes out a small taser, frying up some of the shale to white heat and supporting the carcass above it with a gravity crunch palm unit. "The Blanks are proud," Bill whispers, speaking loudly enough for the wind, caring little if I am listening, "some say too proud. They are lying. Only lying dead now. Only lying dead." He kicks the corpse on one side to start it spinning in its stasis field, the flesh heating rapidly and flaking off in peeling cinders. "His name was T.R. Elliot. T.R. was his encryption modus, each one's got one a' their own. His stood for Tabula Rasa, Blank Slate — the translation is the branch name for his entire peer group, everybody who came up with him.

Through True Bullshit he could over-easy anything required, including the tricks you saw him pull, although, as I say, he was still learning.”

“So he wasn’t really a hologrammer, then?” I cannot resist asking.

“Yes and no. Bugs depend on a graft/bud implant-based system, whereas the Blanks learn the manifestation method and, in so doing, formulate their own widget. The Bugs have a hierarchy beyond the capacity for comprehension of most other than those cleared for the highest levels, and the majority of them operate in the dark beyond what little light they can surround themselves in with their holo-mods. The Blanks are divided exclusively into dyads, a master and a pupil, although through the communications of the masters they are progressed in ordered collections and will all bear resemblances to one another, despite the fact that the Blanks themselves do not even know others like them exist. The Bug masters have access to all levels of the bug hierarchy, awareness of all the more visceral data accumulated by drones and collated by the intermediary bishops, called Gatherers. The Blank masters are aware of the nature underlying this information, which is that some, such as the Bugs, live by the letter, while others, the Blanks, inhabit the spaces in between — although we all exist, as I have said, only within this information. The primary split between the Bugs and the Blanks is merely semantic child’s play: whether we are of the information or if it is of us. Once these two schools were one, and, it is written, will be so again. And, as it is written, so from one perspective, it already is.” The Fisherman deactivates the antigravity unit and the body falls onto the slippery shale. He removes from his tote bag utensils and commences consuming the carrion. “I tell all this to you because we haven’t got much time left. The General you pursue is coming to kill me to prevent my revealing much of this information. The only luck that we have is that he does not even know of your existence, nor your case. He is pursuing his eliminations from the perspective of internal Bed Bug espionage.”

“So the General is a Gatherer,” I interject.

“No. He is beyond their doctrines. He is of a practice even older than either the Bed Bugs or the Blanks. To understand this one must first understand that these two orders both see themselves as representative of the beginning of the universe, the Bugs of the golden ratio based faces (or bodies) and the Blanks of the letters that can be seen in abstraction. However these both take for granted the presence of a viewer, of an eye through which their perception founded existences came to occur. This is where the faction represented by the General comes into play. They are known as the Cheshires. I believe you are familiar with Cheshire Sam already. Is he not the man around whom your case revolves?”

“Why exactly would the General care about the affairs of the Bed Bugs then?”

“It is not the Bed Bugs alone whose internal affairs interest him. It is the Blanks as well, as well as the Blanks have any inside or outside. You see, to a Cheshire the affairs of the Bugs and the Blanks are really little more than a game. One day a move is made on one side. Another on the other. It is all very boring. It is difficult to say whether the Cheshires do this for fun or if it happens through genuine hostility. It is only known that they are concealed behind a veil of inference that is as luminous and simultaneously ebon as the first moments following the creation. To know more than this one has to penetrate this veil. This, and I tell you now so that you know what you must do, is like a blind man learning to see, or a deaf man to hear. My own personal theory is that the Cheshire embody the physical state of existence for the creator, if there truly is one, and that the Bugs and the Blanks are merely varying degrees of health. I refuse to even determine that one group is sick, the other well, in the traditional sense of these words. Merely that one technique may cause healing in one and illness in another, and that we are all part of the universe.” Bill’s eyes flutter skywards, considering the contrast between classical visions of heaven and the bleak wasteland that surrounds us now. “Tonight I’m going to pitch a tent closer to the ship. You pitch yours some ways further up the hill, behind some cover, and remain out of sight. When the time comes, you’ll know.”

He gives me a tent and a roll out sleeping bag from his tote and parts company with me about a third of the way up the hill. It only occurs to me some time after he has left to be

concerned about where the boy's head ended up. From my position I can see the entire circle of warm yellow light cast from the fire he creates near the ship by heating the shale with the taser. I leave the flap open and curl up in the sleeping bag, pulling my fedora down mostly over my eyes.

2c) Zero Cubed

There is the howl of the wind for a ghastly long time, waves of sand washing over the tent in searing peels, the flap tugging at itself. This gradually fades away until there is such a profoundly deep silence that I think I am sleeping. It is only when I realize the sound of distant conversation is not a dream that I realize I am not.

"Well the soul's just a microcosm of the spirit," says one voice.

"Dwelling in the brain as the spirit the body," says the other.

I put my head out of the tent flap slowly, as though there were a venomous serpent coiled directly outside. Looking down I see by the dwindling flicker of the camp's central flames the strangely warping forms of two upright men, twisting and shadow dancing like pillars of smoke. I cannot tell which is Piscator Bill. Their conversation has turned itself around in another direction now and I strain my ears to hear the words that seem to be almost swallowed up by the deafening silence.

"Understanding and Imagining are the same," says this silence.

"Thing-man sit behind construct of flat wooden surfaces. He is many colors and no colors, uses five pink tendrils on a black stick to fill white areas with non-white scratches, trying to put his brain as he imagines it onto paper as he understands it." This voice is craggy, reminiscent of Williams. Is it, though?

"('to be' understood; 'not to be' imagined — DesCartes's take on Hamlet...)"

"How do I even know Thing-man *is* man? I cannot see his pink trunk. Man-body I assume beneath the clothes is this really all it takes to make a man? I could make a man. and I have. In my mind. Thing-man sits before me, in my brain as I imagine it, takes shape outside my eyes in non-white scratches on white areas. Thing-man becomes an idea in the mind of any other reader and is, once immediately converted to memory, as good as an, admittedly dull, experience."

"My friend yesterday said of TV watching being us-done at the just-then time: 'I am only waiting for the bright rain thing to come and make the power go away.' Shortly several lightning strikes nearby left us in a temporary black-out. The rain outside the window, the balding joke-man on the TV, Thing-man inside my brain as I imagine it;" the two voices seem to mesh, blending together omnipresently, "glass barriers between one side of IN and the other, only a dream of balance and predictable orientation is our continued expectation of such convenience."

"Man confuses man's senses." It is difficult to tell who says this.

"All else can be trusted." It is impossible to tell who says this.

"But man's shadows don't always move from external forces I imagine, even as they are understood to be a Thing-man by my shadow." There is a pause in their talk. It unnerves me greatly. I can feel the building up of quivering throughout my entire body, as though I would be thrown into a seizure simply by the incompleteness, the lack of closure, the dreaded, hanging, impending question.... The General speaks next. His voice is deeper now than Williams's. It seems he is the shadow on the left.

"I don't like to write much. The things which inspire me to write also inspire me to write in a very specific style. This would be all to benefit if they were only dead objects which speak to me with such voices. But no. They have to be *books*."

"Rather than being a polite inanimate object a book must feign being alive in the most arrogant way — it acts as if it is you who are the empty husk and not it. In this way a good, uppity book like an overbearing pet steals your consciousness from you; flatfooted demand from this collection of skin grafts bound from the author's swollen carcass. Perhaps it is this stealing of

livingness that is literature's entire appeal, regardless of how effective. Consciousness is transported *from* body *to* book, actual sensations deadened as they are imputed into the hypothetical situation. The body then is a dead object and the soul is transported into a coffin full of paper bones, dried marrow thoughts, stiff jointed ideas and decomposing images.

"Every author writes about this death, even if it is only in the delicate ignorance of it that their words bear — the frustration of an implied emptiness will still be present. They write about the death of the reader, their own future-death as experience is re-'lived' in the form of artificial memory; every author is simultaneously a reader. Every author writes about his own death."

Wilhelms rejoins, although he is already wilting, "the soul is looking down, the spirit looking up, yet they are both merely a single fiber in the fabric of the space-time continuum. For a writer to write he must first learn how to let others read. Only when anyone can read anything can they then become the writer's words. And only once they are the writer's words can there..." General Tso extends his arm towards the kneeling knight. There is an explosion, a sound that seems to echo off the air itself, cascading outward, doubling itself, quadrupling itself, until it sounds as though the entire world has been shot.

The General dances about joyfully, appearing to spiral around the circle of light like a twister of pure shadow, waving his gun in the air. "I gave him the gun!" he sings loudly, to the air. "I shot him!" Then he stops, sensing something not quite right. He turns slowly around towards my direction. There seems to be a long pause. Finally he raises his gun and shoots it at the Hermes, penetrating the thruster and bursting the protean engine. The yacht erupts into an immense spherical inferno, temporarily blinding me and warming my skin. When my vision returns to me the wreckage of the ship is still alight, its skeletal shell sprawled out like a billion burning stars in the blackness of the night. But the General? He's gone.

3a) Hyper Zero

I stumble around stupidly for what feels like two or three eternities. The wet, close delirium that took hold after the explosion slowly, shakily dissolves, unravels. The ground juts up suddenly on one side of me, then it sways around and pulls some sort of maneuver, like as if to make a shape, but when I open my eyes just a little more, I see it's only stuttering, partially obscured in the bloody red glare of the after image of the ship, going gone, I feel spun drunk and dreamed of.

Somebody is approaching me from the shadowed regions of my vision and I laugh loudly, coughing blood, feigning moot defiance. There is a bright patch of yellow with a moving green halo. My brain feels shifted, uncomfortable. I swing at the air twice, once a round house right, then left, my knees both turning in, giving out, and I collapse. The world goes on doing somersaults around me. I fold over.

There is a boot near me, and now I am aware of it, and I can't let it go, so I reach out for it. The first time I miss, the ground turning into deep mud and my hand disappearing into it, only for my forehead to un wrinkle and reveal it for illusion, that I haven't reached the boot yet, and so I keep reaching, and reaching out, and finally it's there, and I can feel it on my skin. I touch it to my forehead, letting it become the axis of the world's centrifugal spinning. Quivering and forgetful I twist my face around towards the pulling abyss of the sky, and to the face of the owner of the boot that I am hanging onto by my fingernails to keep from falling into it.

The General is looking down at me, passively, it seems, although he is distorted along an immeasurable distance, stretching far off until the tiny pink puddle that is his face is barely more than a star speck wave fleck in the quavering ocean of night, so his appearance of serenity is washed over repeatedly by closer waves of darkness that contort his features horribly, although it may only be my sight.

"Child of darkness, child of light," he says calmly. "How can you even show your face?" I

Cheshire Trilogy

by: Jonathan Barlow Gee

repress vomit that gushes up in a burp from my gut, one of my cheeks bulging out with a wince in a way I'm sure he won't notice. Despite my wishes he reacts decomposingly to my grimace and kicks me in the middle, folding me up around his foot and reminding me of my lack of dignity, he having stood so much closer to the debilitating explosion being fully capable of towering solidly over me, and the pain divides itself between a stream of flashing colors swirling up to spiral in my temples and a firm, dark aching that grips my groin, questioning my fortitude.

I gather myself with no easy effort into sharper focus and demand on the shallowest of breaths, "well? What do you want?"

"There now," he assures me, "that's what's called being a man." I feel violated. Again I must repress the urge to vomit, and yet, phasing through several stages of consciousness and unconsciousness, I find myself somehow rising to my feet. He aids me. Finally I am up with my hand on his shoulder. "Felling better?" he asks with naked sarcasm. My face must be green. The world swims around me and I float for a moment, feeling my own feet come up off the ground, accompanied by a wet pressure behind my eyes. My throat rises and falls slowly, as if I am drowning in a dream.

"Right as rain," I return, unable to open my eyes further than a tight squint, my tongue still feeling swollen and dizzy, tasting blood.

"Never taken a hit before?" he asks, seeming genuinely friendly.

I feel like one big bruise. "What's that?" I cough.

"Never mind. Come with me. You can walk, just do it." He begins walking, his arm, as thick as my neck, under both my arms almost lifts me off the ground. Lightly first one foot, then the other, skips across the ground. A moon walk. My arm around his neck. The sky is still alive with my pain. Again I assert a thick and swimming effort to remain present tense. I feel I am falling behind my body, which is being dragged along limply like the lifeless form of a doll, and I realize how serious my situation is, even while wanting to laugh at this absurdity. My eyelids flutter.

"Talk," I order him threateningly.

"Or what?" he seizes the opportunity for humor.

"Please..." I cannot summon up the strength to carry on the joke.

"I have much to tell you, detective. First let me say that I'm not what the Fisherman probably told you I am. I'm not your enemy. I don't want you dead so, if you don't mind, I'm going to step up the rate we're walking. And please don't judge me too harshly over the Fisherman's death either. I was merely doing what had to be done. Not like what he did to his pupil. Oh, yes. I know about that. I found his severed head. He was innocent. So far as I know. There was no reason he should have died. Quite frankly I'm a little surprised you let that happen. He was, how you might say, just bait though. He was a plant all along for the organization I represent. I know that Williams didn't know this. It's all the food chain, you see? A moebius strip!"

"Talk..."

"Yes?"

"Talk... less."

His ship is a hover yacht, similar to Piscator's. It is much more spacious however, and much more regal. He sets me down after the boarding platform has locked and retrieves from another compartment a first aid kit. He passes an internal assessment referencer over me and a clouded look comes over his face. He walks to the far side of the cabin, which is shadowed, and broods, placing his chin in between his thumb and first finger, scowling pensively. Then he returns to me and sits down.

"You need liquor," he tells me. "Or it needs you." He gets up again and returns with a bottle. Opening it he squeezes my mouth into a puckered funnel and pours a swig into me. It tastes like desiccation of the dead. I try to turn away. He holds on tight.

"Damn you, hold still. There's more to this," he barks. I liquefy. He pours. My head turns into putty swallowing itself in a quaterninial whirlpool. The pain dances.

"Are you drunk?" he asks. I nod, rather helplessly. "You need surgery," he says next,

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“and I’m the only one around here to do it.” I look at him with curiosity, partially because his face seems to be made of billowing silk, warbling in the wind of thoughts blowing through his head. “Red hot shrapnel penetrated your side, cauterizing the skin behind it, but piercing your right lung causing internal bleeding. Now I have the tools to operate, but, shy of this whiskey, I’m short anesthesia. You’re going to have to buckle down, understand?” I nod, slowly, barely listening as I am so distracted by the raw softness of his skin. I realize suddenly that I am glad I didn’t catch sight of his teeth, and then I find a line of reasoning I regret, associating the image of his skeleton with that of my own blood, which I would be seeing shortly. I squirm. “Are you alright?” he demands an answer on the spot. “You told me you would be alright.” I am not panicked, so I nod again. “Drink,” he orders. I comply while he fetches the necessary instruments.

After only a handful of moments, and merely a quarter of the bottle, he is up to his wrist between my ribs, and toweling off my blood flow with the other hand. He withdraws the rind of metal and drops it on the floor. I bite down heavily on the metal tubing of the respirator and, doubling over slightly, catch a quick glimpse of the blood splattered grated floor. “Hold still, by Lucifer!” he exclaims, reaching behind him to a blowtorch pistol attached by a tube to a tank of continually spin - reversing electrons which generate enough heat to melt my broken ribs back together like candle wax and seal up my skin. “Now drink!” he intones bassitonally.

I drink, in one continuous action, another quarter of the whiskey.

“Good?” he asks me.

“Good!” I agree.

“Now. Shall we have our little confessional session, or would you like to rest?”

Always being an obedient and thorough bloodhound for information I choose to rest. “Acceptable,” he agrees, and brings in a mobile holographic projector with informanet connection. The console is spartan but easy to use, and, in my condition, I find this very satisfactory. I bring up an image of the ship itself, to acquaint myself with my environment, and the General leaves the room to allow me my relaxation.

3b) Zero Plus the Square Root of Five

Later we sit on the upper deck of the ship and are waited on by a robot who pours us drinks. The utterly uninterrupted horizon of Limbo in the direction of the Terminus is alight in the distance with the supersaturating solid electrical storms stirred up in the dusty atmosphere by the traffic of the air whales. I remove the filter from my mouth briefly to take a sip of vodka. The General speaks.

“Tell me the last thing the old man talked about. How far he got.”

“About you, or about the ‘game?’”

“Well now the game isn’t me is it? So I suppose now you’ll have to tell me what you know of us both. Just in order for me to be able to fill in blanks without going over anything you already know.”

“How do I know you aren’t just interrogating me to find out if I know something you’d have to kill me for?”

“I’ve already saved your life. Only the Lord would be so fickle.”

“But that’s all I know about you. And that you are a Cheshire.”

“Good. That’s really all you need to know about me as well. I hope by respecting my privacy you can find an honorable way to reciprocate for my not killing you. But what about, as you called it, the ‘game?’”

“I don’t know much. I know about the factions, and roughly what’s at stake. I know how it started and how it’s supposed to end.”

“And how would that be then?”

“The same way it began.”

"Frankly I don't see how that would be possible."

"I'm not sure I do either. But anyway that's pretty much everything he told me. But you must already know all of that. If the boy was a plant then you must have been hacking his system — seeing through his eyes the same way Bill did."

"Yes and no. As long as you were in the city there was a stationary broadcasting basis, and the bandwidth was limitless. Once you left the city there could only be what limited range my ship could pick up from its on-board receiving beacon. And I wasn't as close behind you as Williams may have thought. And besides, after the Fisherman killed him, there could be no beacon." Something isn't adding up about what he's saying. "Let me see if I can further illuminate you."

"The beings Williams associated himself with, which he calls Blanks, describing their master/disciple relationship, are not the same beings as Cheshires call Blanks. The beings the Cheshires call Blanks do not exist in a traditional sense, that is, they are trans-corporeal embodiments of eternal path-angles. This is the secret, most deeply indoctrinated teaching of the group to which Williams was affiliated. That group is called by the Cheshires the Quetzal, after the bird, because they, like the Bugs, are aware of the paths and, feeding on the bugs, may be seen as the same idea manifested in a higher dimension, hence the simplicity in detail and complexity in scope of their organization. In short when a bird eats a bug it discovers that a path becomes a blank. This is only the beginning."

"We Cheshires are students of states of consciousness. We believe that various levels of awareness and trance in our species are equivalent to emotions in a higher dimension. We also believe that these same states of consciousness are equivalent to difference in appearance and function in a lower dimension, namely, animal species, from which most of the factionalism between followers of the primary path of consciousness comes."

"A higher dimension... the primary path of consciousness... aren't you talking about God?"

"We'd prefer not to say what it is exactly. Not until we've studied it a little more and can say for certain. Hopefully this would coincide with the ceasing of hostility between the conflicting factions. We'll see. In any event there are many other factions that Williams did not, I suspect, represent to you in his little tirade. He is to be forgiven, though, the old fool. He was never that concise at speaking his mind. Or at differentiating between vision and data, nor separating his beliefs from that of his alliance. I knew him and worked with him. He will be missed by me as much as by anyone. Now then, the animal factions can be likened to quanta, the only naturally occurring discrete information bundling system, which is atomically (the one) what the periodic table is chemical-molecular elementally (the many). If God is anywhere he is here just as much as in the higher dimensions, for here, even in this low dimension, the amount and complexity of structure is determined by the vibration and harmonizing of higher dimensional objects. These in turn are equivalent to the number of potential paths, which brings us back, once again, to the differing states of consciousness. All of this is fine in the eyes of God and the Cheshire, except for one thing."

"The dispute between the Bed Bugs and the Quetzal has put an undue amount of pressure on a certain one of these archetypal forms, and is causing it to break. It currently serves as both a connection and a division between them. It is like a window in which they can also see themselves reflected, although it is not usually completely without its own natural level of disturbance, like the surface of the sea."

"The best way to explain this is perhaps musically: as a tone changes its vibration from one note to the next it is most commonly depicted as the variation of a point (the wave crest or trough) along a string whose base state is a standing line. Another way of depicting this same event is with a three dimensional solid being moved through a two dimensional plane and appearing to go through a series of transformations in shape. The changing shape along the surface of the plane is the same as the positioning of the point along the wave. The three dimensional shape itself is transforming as well, however, because it is only generated as the result of a fourth

dimensional object moving through three dimensional space. Thus, even while the shadow pattern it casts on the flat plane changes the vibration of the wave form, so is it merely a mutational cross-section shadow of an invisible shape which cannot be comprehended with only the common sensory apparatus. The only real way to achieve perceptual awareness of the presence of this fourth dimensional shape is, as you have already seen, through thalamic holography, which the bugs achieve superficially and the quetzal achieve comprehensively. In both cases the result is the creation of a fourth dimensional vibrational veil before the focal center of the sensory apparatus, their faces, along the projective network of the bio-electrical energy field which lasts, based on this symbiosis necessary for stasis, as long as they are alive. There is more to this fourth dimensional shape, as I may or may not explain subsequently, depending on its relevance, for, just as the chaos of wave forms on the surface of the sea, it is always naturally changing as well, but it may not be necessary to go into this more deeply at this time. For both the Bugs and the Quetzal the holographic thalamic sixth sense manifests itself alternately as the sprue, or third eye, allowing them to witness the transformative metamorphosis of this fourth dimensional solid, and in the ability to reshape their face to match the changing shape of their own mental energy.

"I should tell you a little bit about Elepso Fucto and Piscator Williams and how they relate to the mission that I am on. Fucto was, in the Bug organization, the rising star equivalent in potency to the waning Williams in the Quetzal. In my line of business this makes them the same person, because the Cheshires only like to deal with the true Blanks, and where one meets another on opposite sides of the fourth dimensional veil there is only one path angle involved that combines both of them. The intention in eliminating rather than combining these two variables was not to further aggravate the rift between the two animal factions, but to alleviate pressure on the angle that mediated them. You see, in order to understand all this you have to think from the other side of the looking glass, will you agree with this? But not from either the Bed Bugs' nor the Quetzal's sides, do you understand? Nor must you think two dimensionally, as through along the rippling edge of the plane between them."

"I have two questions," I advise him, my head feeling significantly cleared.

"One of them is surely why am I telling you all of this," he chuckles.

"Naturally. It's rare in my line of work to receive unsolicited information."

"Well, what is the other one?"

"The other one is, where does the Pub Rose of Thelema come into all of this?"

"That pertains to how the Cheshire perceive the fourth dimensional object I have been describing. That I would rather not go into yet. I would rather answer the question you should be asking, which is 'are we of the information or is the information of us?' What, really, is the difference between the Bugs and the Quetzal?"

"The answer, and you will see shortly how this pertains to the Pub of Thelema as well, is that, as the fourth dimensional shape, or rather shapes, as it is perpetually in naturally mutation, moves through three dimensional space, it causes fractal patterns to emerge. These fractals are the abstraction in which the Bed Bugs practice the manifestation of features or forms and the Quetzal recognize letters. They are the raw information to which both sides refer as their source and product. The Cheshire utilize methods of manifestation and recognition as well, being sensate. But we do not bind ourselves to the merely holographic. The thugs that you encountered at the Thelema Pub were living fractals, experiments, really, in the art of creation."

He is obviously not going to be as forthcoming with information regarding the Pub Rose as he has been with esoterica. He lifts his respirator and sips his whiskey. "What about Oaxaca?"

"Took a shine to her have you?" he laughs a little too long. "You know Ma Ka Thelma used to be quite the number in her day as well. But I digress. You wanted to know about Rose, well I will tell you about Rose. She is a fourth dimensional shape."

"What?" my surprise is lip-read, illicit somehow by his messaging. Only now do I realize how deeply in the turmoil of intoxication I am once again, only this time, not artificial,

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somehow direct. Somehow coming from him, and I realize why my pain is gone, or rather, how it seems to be gone.

"Yes," he smirks, right there with me. "She is, or rather was, a living blank. She and Thelema both. Which is why their sacrifice was necessary. They were bodies consecrated to the channeling of the one path shared by the Bugs and the Quetzal, which manifested itself, due to their conflict, as two Blanks. Due to the nature of their disagreement, one of primacy, they manifested themselves as a mother and daughter. Thelema aged forwards and Rose aged backwards. Thus it was, as it is between the real factions involved, both impossible and irrelevant to differentiate between their origins. In effect, each gave birth to the other. Just as the arising and termination of the Fucto-Williams dyad allowed the explosion of wills between Thelema and Rose you witnessed, so the destruction of the fourth dimensional path called the Pub Rose of Thelema has cleared the disturbance in the interface between the Bugs and the Quetzal. Furthermore all of this was nothing more than a single fractal, and this fractal was my mission."

"So which came first?" I quip, a headache returning with a quivering, drilling sensation in my right ear.

"Well, now there's an educated man's question," he replies, glancing out across the seemingly infinite expanse encircling us. "We know that the Quetzal existed in a different form a long time ago, their faction being guided partially by the spirit of snake consciousness as well. We think that it was at this time that they believe they were one with the Bed Bugs, whereas we have only found that they were more closely aligned then. You see, the date for the creation of the universe one works with is entirely relative to the scale of the measuring system one uses to calculate it. The Cheshire's calculation for the creation of the universe is much older than that being utilized by the Bug-Quetzal channel because we are not as limited as they are in our choices of measuring systems. Thus we recognize similarities in them which they are, as of yet, incapable of recognizing in themselves. With each disturbance that occurs on their channel we hope that they are being brought closer to this recognition, but there is no way of knowing beyond a reasonable doubt. At one point, they were one, and they have progressed significantly far enough to begin to accept this fact, but they are still unclear as to how long ago that really was, so there remains conflict. Hopefully the actions I have taken at this time will help to assuage some of this conflict, however, the only way of knowing this will be to wait and see."

"So you're done with your mission then. The fractal is restored to self-referentiality."

"Almost," he glances back at me to make sure that he just heard me correctly. "There is still one variable factor."

"What's that?" I ask politely in his dramatically pregnant pause.

"You."

We both drink. Then he continues.

"When the thugs accosted you at the Pub Rose, did they say anything that seemed to you to be... overtly... familiar?"

"They seemed to have me confused with somebody else."

"Well that obviously wasn't me, as you can see that we have no physical resemblance in common. Who do you think that it was?"

"I honestly haven't given it much thought. I find the less personal involvement an investigator has in their cases the more easily they work out."

"Haven't you got any heart, man?"

"None to spare."

"Have you ever seen Cheshire Sam?"

"No. I haven't. I've had run-ins with some of his clones, though."

"His blanks, you mean."

"Whatever."

"No, you see there's a very important distinction. Blanks are on the same spiritual path as one another, whereas clones may be completely dissimilar in terms of taste and habit, but are

identical physical duplicates. Blanks don't have to look like one another, or their creator. It is their manner that is as one. Take us during this mission. I was blanking in the Cheshire path, and thus equivalent to Sam. You were blanking along another path, one that led you first through the role the bugs were playing, then after that played by the Quetzal. There is a legend, from long ago, that the first Quetzal, Quetzalcoatl, was a blank with Ben Dahrmakzim in this same way. Some describe their relationship differently, as being more like that of pet to master, or even father and son. Even if this were the case, particularly, still, generally, they would be blanks of one another, sharing a common path. This legend is useful today as well. It applies directly to our situation as we sit here. The Cheshire are blanking to Ben Dahrmakzim, and you are equivalent to Quetzalcoatl. In fact, it is possible that this was causing the disturbance that occurred between the Bugs and the Quetzal. Of course, the difference obviously between your case and the legend is that you are not after Ben Dahrmakzim, but Cheshire Sam. For you, again, obviously, this is a very important distinction. Just as, from my perspective, talking to you, is the distinction between blanks and clones."

I drink again and turn on him, tiring of word games. "What, in all of this, is the point?"

"All in good time. First I think it only fitting to describe to you the nature of the rift between the Bugs and the Quetzal. We Cheshire see it in terms of similarities, so it is in these terms I will present the information. But bear a grain of salt in mind, as I'm sure you already do. For what is fit for one might be poison to another. Now, then. The greatest asset of the Quetzal is their ability to fly in formation, to gather into logical groupings otherwise disparate assemblages of data. The greatest asset of the Bugs is their awareness of heat, tightness, freshness, to determine proximity and alertness even, or rather especially, in inert biological masses. Thus what the Bugs do towards others, the Quetzal do to themselves, and that is assess and assimilate order, structure. There is natural disparity in what order they find, what structure they process, but there is also a ratio within which the amount of static remains tolerable. For the most part all animals, including all the progenies of the mind of man, remain well balanced within this dynamic. Occasionally, and for various reasons, they diverge from this ratio, this fractal, and propagate disorder. This too is fairly common, as a sign of growth, a stage of dramatic change preceded and followed by a plateau of normalcy. Other reasons include the other major points of breakage in the ordinary life cycle fractal — birth, true love, death, etc. but none of these are usually as complete nor as prolonged in its affects as growth, and all merely translate to progress along the philosophical path. From the perspective of the Cheshire, and again, this is the only perspective from which I can speak, this seeming disorder is merely the growth of the Blanks inhabiting this particular path within the Path. However the animal factions involved have, at various times, insisted the cause of the conflict to be all of the others I have mentioned. They disagree as to who was first born, they expect one or the other of them to die sometime in the near future which, so far as we can predict, is not likely to happen, and of course, the theory that all forms of disturbance in the pattern are a manifestation of Love, a fifth dimensional shape moving through the fourth dimension. I, personally, find a more likely candidate for this fifth dimensional shape to be Time, but that's just me.

"Whenever a dispute such as this arises there are three ways it is viewed by those involved. We Cheshire represent the fourth way, through the looking glass, as I have already said. The first two ways are from the sides of the parties involved in the disagreement, and the third is from the mediator who arises to assist in its resolution. In this case, that mediator was you. So, my question to you is, knowing what you now know about the conflict, what would you do if you were me?"

"I'm not sure if I understand the question?" I counter. "What are my options?"

"Why, life and death, the same as they always are."

"Who's to say I'm not going to kill you?"

"I think that would be an unwise move."

"You'd be going back on your word if you were to kill me. I fail to see how my killing you

would be any more unwise than that.”

“Then you truly are a man of discipline. I will honor that in you. For now, you live.” He drinks from his glass. “For what it’s worth,” he concludes.

“On one condition,” I interject as he is sipping. He looks over at me in surprise.

“You set conditions upon your own life! My boy, I love it! What can it possibly be?”

“No, I set a condition on your life, for, by letting me live, you endanger yourself.”

“I see,” he grows momentarily somber. “Well, don’t keep me guessing!”

“You have to tell me where to find Sam.”

“Well, tut, tut! I hardly see how you can expect me to do that, and even less do I see myself complying, still less can I imagine why I would, and furthest of all away from me is the least little reason why I should. Yet beyond that there might be hope. You say you might kill me? Please, tell me more about how that would happen.”

“I would shoot you. It’s just that simple.”

He again becomes serious. “I see. No, I’m afraid that won’t work. You’re going to have to do better than that.”

I reach into my coat for my gun. He had removed it during my surgery, but when he had left the room I had replaced it. I point it at his forehead with an outstretched arm above the drink table, both of our feet still propped up on the same Ottoman. He smiles broadly, serenely, almost pityingly.

“I’m afraid I’m quite honest in what I say,” he says. “And I tell you now. I could tell you the way to find Cheshire Sam. But I will not betray him like that. No more than I would betray you to him, as I could just as easily do, for you see, you could as easily be brought to him and placed in his custody to meet him as to track him down from some dropped lead, but I assure you, you would not long continue to breathe. I neither wish to see him hurt nor you. It would only serve to further us along a path that leads to no end at all. No, I am bound by my honor; though you would do well to believe me when I say that it honestly pains me to do so, I must keep you apart, or at least have no part myself in your being brought together. You see?”

I continue for some time to leave my gun pointed at him, thinking over the holoscan of the party, his role in the Pub Rose of Thelema, the way he killed Piscator Williams, and finally the way he saved my life and laid his knowledge before me. Slowly I withdraw the gun, feeling tired. I know that he is telling the truth now, that he can very easily, and yet will not, help me. I am in no condition to attempt to put pressure on somebody in his position. My best bet is to wait. I lower the gun.

“Ah, so. Here we are again,” he smiles, but his eyes are already distant.

“A standoff,” I offer, also aware of the sour taste of disappointment hanging in the air. “What more is there?”

“Not much of an ending,” he turns back to me, light returning to his eyes. “Let’s call it a beginning instead.”

“Agreed,” I muster up a heavy smile and holster the gun.

It begins to lightly rain around us and the sound of it is a drumbeat on the canopy of the horizontal sail stretched over our heads. It hisses with steam as each drop strikes down, and the floor of the wasteland before us is soon covered in a shroud of mist. All that the wastes have been witness to is being scorched away. My eyes as well are fogging over. I feel at last the wear this case has inflicted on me. The hours without rest stretching into years. The soreness of the body that carries me along. The stupid stumblings of our souls, the aching emptiness we can’t let go.

The robot hovers over again, the pulse sustainer at its knee level humming with a vibrant milky hue, its ocular visor oscillating a turquoise trace. The General gets up and walks over to the ship’s flight console, his robe billowing soothingly behind him. The display is a crystal concentration panel, with an array of light puddles across its surface like so much spilled paint, from which, at the brushing of a quick series of tones, a schematic of the ship springs in full clarity. The General touches the ship in the area of its engines as the hologram slowly rotates and

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the deck begins to vibrate, the ship slowly turning to aim the bow toward the orb of illumination in the sparking distance, and presently we are underway at a smooth, pleasant, velocity. The General returns to his seat. The robot has already dispensed for him another quarter of a glass from the bottle it is holding, the same one from which I drank straight earlier. He leans back.

"It's a good year, isn't it?"

"Pardon me?"

"The whiskey. The vintage. Did you enjoy it?"

I nod somnolently, yet verbally protest. "I enjoy vodka." I reward myself for the remark with a swig.

"Scotch is good too," he confesses, joining in on my mood.

The rain does not disturb us. I lapse into a tenuous sleep.

4a) (Zero Plus the Square Root of Five) Halves

When I awaken I feel like I've forgotten something. The ship is docked in a hangar in the outskirts of the terminus. As I search the decks for the General it slowly seeps back into my memory, what I had thought was only a dream. During the operation the General had told me, right to my face, which surprised me so much I must have gone into a light hypnotic trance, actually confessing to slipping me psychotropics before having even done it, that 'all good vodka made you sleep when you thought I was talking about scotch.' Of course there is no sign of him anywhere on board the ship. I pause at the threshold of the port and the main halls to scan the crowd, seeing no one familiar, and, pulling the collar up on my trench coat, walk in.

I find my way back to the shop run by the synth psychic and enter. Inside it is darker, the candles still to be replaced from my last visit having burned down considerably, changing the angles of the shadows that swamp the floor up to my knees. I find her sitting in the farthest corner of the store, curled up, with her arms around her legs and her eyes fixed on infinity. I interrupt what can only be taken as her meditation optimistically, and when she comes to it is with a dry sob. She asks if she can help me find anything and I struggle to remind her who I am, describing how she predicted I was searching for someone and I had denied it even though it had been and still was true. Although I don't mention it to her, after my meeting with the General and his report of the forces involved in this part of my case, I am willing to stoop even to the level of the inexplicable for assistance in foresight. After two attempts she has cleared up enough to remember me and asks me with the same practiced seductivity why I lied to her. I tell her if she's as good as she would have to be to be of any help to me than she can guess that herself. She turns half way away and looks down again.

"It's more complex than that," she tells me. I ask her how so. "First of all," she replies curtly, "I don't guess. I know. But the knowing is dependent upon clarity. It is as though the psyche were a body, and this body can either dance outside in the sunshine, or cower in a cave in the rain. Since the last time we met there has begun an immense psychic storm. The most powerful of any I have seen. Prediction is almost impossible now. It is like some long forgotten childhood dream. But for you —" she bats her eyes at me mechanically, yet I know in my gut the only interest she has is unraveling for herself the connection between my appearance and the beginning of her 'storm,' "for you I can give it the old college try."

We sit down in the corner where she had been couched. There is the traditional small round table above which is hovering a gazing orb made of an alloy of various complimentary rhombic molecularly structured crystals and crushed fiber optix for internal luminescence. She touches the orb and it shimmers with a timid purple electrical surge and then lifts itself to slightly above our heads, its milky glow increasing to bathe us in a halo of soft light. She silently asks for my upright palm to be outstretched across the table top and I comply. She shuts her eyes and a wrinkle in her forehead appears and begins to shine in christened reflection of the

suspended sphere. Its light increases as the seer goes into herself, and the hair on the back of my hand stands up. Her forehead blushes, and finally washes away into transparency, revealing the crystal surface of her android skull beneath, which is alive with rivulets of current. She quivers, convulses and collapses across the table.

"Nothing!" she weeps in spasms, bolts of lightning shooting from the orb above. "Curse the continuum!" she cries desperately. Then suddenly there is a palpable shift in the ether. She twitches and silences. "Wait," she commands. "There is someone... or something..." she sits straight again and takes hold of my hand, not to read it, but clutching it as if for support. Her eyes are open but have rolled back in her head, revealing only the pearls of her sclera. Her lips are pursed, and when she speaks they open to a very narrow slit, but do not move, retaining full pale tension.

"The Blanks you seek," she intones, "are not the True Blanks. If you continue following the path upon which you are, the consequences will be dire. The potentials provided by reality are a plenum, not factional. One must partake or suffer their exclusion; such is natural law."

"Ask about the storm," I suggest, seeing little relevance in her forebodings. Again a spasm sweeps throughout her body, and her eyes begin to shine.

"No!" she screams loudly enough that I look around to see if those in the outside corridor might have heard her. "No!" she screams again, and again, and again. Finally I have to pry my hand from hers and, standing up, grab her by the shoulders, giving her a good strong shake to rouse her from the trance. When her eyes finally open and her body ceases gesticulating she has one full second to gape at me before the strength flows from her and she drains into a pool of limp and flaccid weariness without the ability to so much as prevent herself from falling from the chair onto the floor, upsetting her precious little table along the way. The worst part is she hasn't told me anything specific. I am as lost in the details as if she hadn't wasted herself on my behalf. I kneel down next to her and she is panting heavily, a sheen of sweat glazing her over with the perfume of exhaustion. She looks up into my eyes and in the reflection of the orb in her pupils I can see the pulsation of thousands of permutations of skeletal geometric constructs, a torrent of impressions wiping across her face and melting her resolution away. "Pull yourself together," I offer, perhaps too harshly, hoping to appeal to her sense of purpose. "Tell me what you saw."

"Words," she heaves, "saw... words... power... Power..." her eyes are beginning to go astray as a headache I do not envy her begins slowly creeping in.

"Have you got anything that helps you when this happens?" I plead. "Elixirs, potions, spirits, first aid? Anything?" She shakes her heavy head, attempting futilely to lift her hand and point at something. "Something over there?" I beg. Again, she shakes her head, tears beginning to flow from her eyes scorching over the soft hills of her flaming cheeks.

"I go..." she exhales, "Sleepwalker." My mind races through the scenarios. She is too weak to make it there, even with my help. I cannot tell what might become of her if I were to go there and retrieve something for her. I remember her prediction of 'dire consequences.' I wonder if it's usually so sudden that her wish wash comes true. Coming up with no solution on my own I ask her what I can do to help.

"Nothing," she sighs breathlessly. "It passes. Just takes... time."

"It isn't usually like this, though, is it?" I intrude, giving her some challenge.

"Like what?" she mocks me, smirking post coitally. "You mean this old thing?" she attempts to lift her hand again, which immediately flops back down to the floor again under its own weight. She smiles helplessly, flushed. I return her glow.

After a long moment of soothingly holding her there on the floor of the little shop I part my dried lips to ask her some impolite but obvious questions. "What did you mean about the Blanks you mentioned. Who are the Blanks I seek and who are the true Blanks?"

"I really can't tell you much. It would compromise my safety if I did. I don't know anything about the person or people you're seeking, but the true Blanks are all around us, even now. They're the ones you should be attempting to ally yourself with." She pronounces ally with

the accent on the second syllable. “If you don’t,” she goes on, “then you make them your enemies, which is infinitely worse.” I write all of this off as post-cyborgistic superstition, the machine attempting to cope with its elder predecessor, the biological’s seeming omnipresence, and projecting this most basic emotion onto the external environment. Although it does concur some of what the General had spoken of as a specific elaboration on what Williams described as the source of all inspiration. I ask her what she saw at the end that so upset her. “I can’t tell you yet,” she looks at me imploringly, wishing I could simply read her mind.

“I understand,” I tell her, and continue holding her for another moment.

“It seems,” she says finally, “the ones you seek believe that manifestation is meant as distraction. They had initially believed in the offering of inspiration to one another, but that was long ago. They have since come to believe that only distraction exists—that hopefully by firing distractions at one another, after a certain amount of time, or perhaps at some certain moment for some unpredicted, special reason, they will direct someone onto what will prove to be the path that leads to all of their salvation from this self-imposed Hell. It is difficult to say if they are truly the ones you seek, or merely a covering organization of conglomerate factions. The Blanks are only showing me directions, not those involved. Does all of this make sense to you?”

I nod.

“What I saw at the end of the sitting,” she says uncomfortably, “is beyond my ability to describe. It was the most powerful vision I have ever had under these circumstances, and I can only attribute the strength of it to the psychic storm. As such it is undoubtedly of a quality that will not pertain to common conditions. Once the storm has subsided it is unlikely that the vision will maintain applicability, and, I certainly hope, its strength will fade.”

“Was it words without faces?” I ask. Her reaction is one of someone abused.

“I... I cannot say. I think you had better go now. I’m feeling much better. Thank you, but I no longer need you to stay here with me. Please go.” She shuffles me out the door and, closing it behind me, activates the closed hologram without turning to look at me.

4b) Zero Equals One when One Equals Planck’s Second Constant

The mood of the denizen souls outside is much more tense than it was before. What had been merely the possibility for disagreement before is now the opportunity for open conflict. People everywhere are taking advantage of it, jostling harshly into one another. The avenue is mostly empty. Those who are out at this hour are clearly looking for fights. There may be as many as one thousand people in the quarter and seventy five per hundred are prepared for a massive civil outburst.

I make my way to the Sleepwalker, intending to further inquire regarding Williams, hoping to pick up a lead and get the hell out of town. I enter and am immediately given the once over by an angry looking gang of young thugs in the far corner. I walk, somewhat stiff legged, over to the bar where the same bartender is still polishing the same glass.

“They don’t want you here,” he informs me rather dully. There is a pause while I ponder why I should care. “Perhaps you’d better leave.” I sit down at the bar and order a shot of vodka. “Alright,” he says, turning around, but I’m not responsible.” One of the roughs immediately saunters up to me. I finger my piece.

“Pyriah,” he pronounces chillingly, “anathema.” I show no reaction, inflaming his sense of civic duty as a fisty. He hauls back to poke at me and I swivel, producing my weapon in such a way that it conceals my face from him.

“Dead man,” I rejoin jovially; “weak.” My words are simpler and my weapon bigger. Both of these are language he understands. He begins backing down. His boys come up behind him. I reach behind me and scoop up my shot of vodka, dousing it down the back of my throat with a contented sneer.

They have, in the same moment, decided that they can take me. They spread out so that I have no path of escape. Of course, that is hardly my plan.

There are five of them, and I think they figure on sacrificing one of their number in order to overwhelm me in the interim. They bristle and shift their weight. "Well?" I expound. "Do it already!" They do.

As they surge forward I pounce upward from the stool, which slams to the floor below me as I sail over their heads, landing behind them about where they were standing before and turning on my heel. They cluster around the bar and, before they can regroup, I pick off the outermost two of them, impacting in the chest and the face respectively, their blood exploding in a sonic shower across the bottles. The foremost three collect themselves and step forward again, the two on the sides looking around almost fatiguedly at their slumping mates. I step backwards, planting my heel, and flip over myself, landing behind a large round table made of duraplex which I promptly upright and fling at them. As they brace themselves to catch it I shoot through it, offing the goon on the right. This shot, however, spins the table around, opening up a clear path for the goon on the left, which he immediately takes opportunity of. I side step as he rushes and trip him over my ankle, sending him headlong into one of the booths where a terrified looking couple is cowering. Now they are on either side of me, which is a bad position to be put in. The first goon is grabbing up a piece of the shattered duraplex off the floor and the other one is already rounding himself from being bent across the table in the booth. I wait for a minute while they shake off the last two moments worth of events. Finally they come at me. I take another back step and they crash into each other, the first goon ramming the shard of invisible plasteel into his crony's abdomen just below the rib cage. I watch their eyes go wide, pupils dilating. Then the second one folds down to the floor and I am standing across from the original fool. This was too easy. A festival.

He gapes at me. "You miserable little whelp," he finally bursts out. "How fair is it? That you have a gun and we were barehanded?"

"You started it," I remind him, "I just kept it clean. Now, horizontal or vertical. You choose how you want to leave here." He ponders on it for a while. Then turns around with a glint in his eye. I know his next move almost before he does. He wheels on his heel and charges at me again, apparently willing to die to defend his condition of mindlessness, and I am in no position not to oblige him. I lay him flat in one shot and walk back over to the bar. "Tell me about Piscator Williams," I demand of the barkeep. "Where was he from before this?"

The bartender is trying to conceal the weakness in his knees and acting casual. "Listen, mister. You pay me for the damages and then we can talk. You get me?" I nod and slap down my narrow wad of cash on the counter, knowing that it is not enough to fully cover all the cleaning and replacements necessary.

"Or we can go with the cheaper version of this transaction," I snarl, holding up a bullet and loading it into my gun at eye level between us. He quakes and gives.

"You win. He was from Pod City, Deutch Nepal in Sunken Oceania. But that's all I know, I swear. He never told me much. Just that."

"And what about the Blanks?" I demand.

"Oh, God no!" he cries, "don't ask me about them, man, please! I'd rather die than go back on them! Come on, kill me now and find out if I'm lyin'." He seems straight so I don't bother pushing him any further. I thank him and take my leave.

Out in the corridor the static in the air seems to be thinning. It remains far from abated but where there had been only glum glowers before there are now a few chummy convivialities. I am already so sick of the scenery that it hardly interests me one way or the other whether the lot of the throng would be on their knees or at one another's throats. I am eager to get to the next location and flee the confines of this ridiculous environment that, by the confines of its space and the proximity of its similarities, makes the populous mechanized and the biotech emotive. There is little room here for someone such as myself, who seeks for solutions beyond the superficial or the pressing. I am as unwelcome here as the General is welcome everywhere. It is always nice to

have polite aristocracy around to liven the mood of an otherwise dull doldrums existence; but to these same folds of wool I am as annoying as a gadfly, threatening to expose the entire snakepit for the den of cowards they are in a single blinding flash of revelation. I am given the eye by everyone I pass. I can feel things changing all around me.

I purchase an airline ticket from the swarthiest bag of intestines I have laid eyes on since the Pub Rose. Centipedes are crawling all over his face and through his sunken eye sockets, while metallic coated bones peak through his rubbery flesh, which twists and reconfigures, pulsing with waves of disgusting warmth. He is clearly a zone cop, with as little interest in hiding it as there has been beauty in his life. I board the passenger whale and nestle down into one of the muscle-covered seats, which softens immediately to conform to my body. I depress a nerve center in the back of the seat in front of me and activate the holo-screen. I vegetate.

At 24.40 the plane bites clean sky and I have departed Limbo.

III.

A. Resilient Abrogation Trawl Synod with Wan Impunity Nuisance Graft Scrutiny

1) God's Gas

Pod City. A neo-Leviathanic quantum distortion bubble carved out with a combination of iron industrialism and nanobarnacle in the coral reef of Deutch Nepal at the bottom of the deep sea trench of Sunken Oceania, feeding off escaping hot gas from volcanic tubes in the ocean floor. I descend in a gravity repulsive submersible that jets up a wide corolla of froth behind us, stretching back the widening measure between the craft and the surface. Inside the cockpit the air is so heavy and stale I can barely choke it down. The driver is nervous, fidgety, but under the extreme weight of the surrounding water, his touch on the wheel matters less than the pull of the tide — which is drawn in towards the electromagnetic disturbance field that surrounds the grotto. The light blue strings in the wide nocturnal world of the broth visible outside the rear portal have almost vanished when the shuttle starts to shake under the influence of the city.

We slide through the pressurized distortion field and I feel for a second like I am being turned inside out, a very disturbing sensation to experience at this depth beneath oxygen. The porter purses his lips, this being a common experience for him. I hear prolonged exposure to the particular frequency of spin diversion used by the city's generators causes gradual mutagenic affects, although I see only a set of gills on the neck of the driver, which he undoubtedly had implanted as a speciality for coping with deep seafaring existence.

The docking bay's lamps are dim, conservation of electricity necessitated by the limited supply provided from the processing rate of the gaseous heat converters, and intermittently flicker on and off, as the quantum bubble generator cycles through its progressive phase shift routines and saps the station's energy. We rise up from below the overhang into the inbound destinations pool and magnetic clamps latch the sides of our hull to the edge of a platform. The top hatch of the vessel decompresses and rotates open creakily, a pillar of pallid light gushing in and dividing me from the one eyed seaman. He swivels on his navigations mount.

"Three-sixty," he tells me. I hand him the nearly worthless paper credits in the halo of winking glow.

I haul myself up through the cavity and stand on the shell of the ship, stepping over the darkly lapping gap overhung by the magnetic clamp to the grating of the platform. I am greeted by a broadly smiling native African with yellow eyes that shine mechanically and several thin strands of decoratively speckle pattern painted skin hanging down from the ridge of his zygomatic arch and jaw.

"Welcome to Pod City," he says rehearsedly, belying nothing of practice. He extends a

three-fingered hand to me and I shake it. "How long will you be staying?"

"Indefinite," I reply dourly.

"And have you got anything you wish to declare?"

"I may have to kill some people," I say, my eyes shrouded, feeling tired.

"Well I hope it isn't me, y'know?" he smiles. "If that's everything then all we need is a sample of your helix."

"Understood." I shuff off my overcoat down to my elbow and yank up my sleeve. He produces and punctures me with a citizen-status confirmation hypo-gun, leaving a small pink circle on top of my pre-existent trivialistic scar.

"Enjoy your stay," he beams, and ushers me past him to a yawning ellipse which I step through and into a broad, high-ceilinged, egg-shaped acclimations bay. I find my satchel, the bag that Wilhelms had packed for our trip into Limbo, which has had to be shipped down on a cargo transport as the weight of the passenger carriers is adjusted exclusively for human accommodation, check it into a secured locker, and exit into the labyrinthian intestines of the sunken city.

I purchase a holographic projection display unit at the first automat I can find which contains a tour brochure of the city including a map. I follow its instructions to the Mandrill sector, where a residence for Paul Seward, an old alias of Williams's, is listed in the telecom directory. Whether it is the result of exposure or not, the overwhelming majority of the residents here are malevolutants, of an amazing variety of shape, pattern and color. They appear to have grafted the city in accordance with the ages of its denizens, such that the Mandrill sector, being on the thirty-third sub-deck, is assigned to those who have lived here for at least ten years, or so is my assessment based on the common appearance of those I pass in the halls.

I find the door of his domain, numbered 594 in corridor 198, and ring the buzzer, one hand on my weapon. An aging man answers the door, his skin drooping and liver spotted, scabs gathering in the dried out folds of his tensely wrinkled flesh, his eyes two dead sockets holding onto languid, plaintive cataracts that perpetually seep a viscous pus that runs in rivulets down to the front of his black satin collared red velvet smoking robe. His skull is bald and warted beneath a tall, starched fez, the tassel from the top of which hangs down almost to his knees in a braid of worn knots.

"Wachuwan?" he drools. "Msleepin. Comback nother time."

"Just a question," I implore him hopefully, acting the part of a neighborhood kid selling newsviewers. "Where can I find Paul Swards?"

"Donliv ear nmore," he mumbles confederately, "askt Coundus."

"Where can I find this Countess?" I say, half turning to go in assurance to his lack of patience.

"Th' Black Hand," he says clearly, lifting his head to try and see more clearly out of the bottoms of his eyes. "Why? Whoryu?"

"Oh, I'm just a friend of his. Did you know him?"

"Hsluky I din," he concludes, slamming the thin metal door.

I cross-index the name and location finder features on the brochure and am led to a lounge on the uppermost level of the city. I part the waist level swinging gate doors and step in. Chandeliers hang from the ceiling, which is a large plex dome arrayed in a Muslim pattern outside of which spotlights strike and move across the facets of the surrounding coral alcoves. Thousands of undersea creatures make their home there, and in every sweep of shine their teeming life is revealed. Circular plex tables dot the wide, round, synthwood floor, and an enormous bar encompasses the entirety of the room, being worked by several cyborgs in black bowties and red vests. At the far end of the room is a raised round stage, limelit along its full circumference, where a lone woman garbed in a form-fitting and flowing golden gown is standing and singing Lili Marlene. This is, without a doubt, the countess.

I take a seat at one of the tables near an unusually mutated specimen whose head and face

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have melted forward and, probably due to the use of some restraining mechanism, maintained a cylindrical shape coming to a dull point where his nose and upper lip are bent almost to meet, and his sharp pointed teeth peek through his thin, squirming lips. His fingers have five knuckles each. I recognize him.

The woman on the stage is glorious. She radiates confident sensuality, at once expressing misery and embodying everything that inspires the spirit toward ebullience and celebration. She is five-three; short straight purple hair hangs even with her eyes. There is a respiration ring encircling her nasal cartilage along the same shadowed line. I wish I knew her from somewhere.

I lean over and ask the gentleman at the next table who the performer is. He informs me it's the Countess Odessa Zaob. I thank him and summon one of the serving girls who hovers over to me. I order a screwdriver and delightedly roll myself a smoke stick, chuckling to myself at the pleasure of the atmosphere.

She bursts into a rendition of *Ciribirbin* followed by *In Der Furher's Face*, and finally *Taking a Chance on Love*, concluding her set. I stand up and applaud at the end, the limp butt dangling from my lips. She approaches the table of the man I am sitting near and collapses back into the smooth ergonomic seat, sighing. After ordering a screwdriver she turns to the man next to her, whose name, as I recall, is E.L. Maladactyl, and they begin speaking in hushed tones. I listen.

"After the show... going to the... gin and whiskey... upside down... the one... and so below... after we've taken control of the generators from them... become one with the qua(ntum) matrix. Now I've got fifteen men who... and who... to help?"

"Twenty-seven and a few amateurs... knew from.... Do you think we should... the flow matrix at its source... or cut it off from... below?"

"It's rerouted through a number of... subroutines..." The lights flicker. When they come back on again I am sitting next to them at the table. E.L. retreats with a start and Zaob bats her eyes girlishly.

"How are you two doing?" I ask with thick, rich plasticity. "I couldn't help but overhear... you ordered the same drink as I did?"

"How very nice for you," Zaob hisses acidly. "Now crawl back under your rock or I'll be forced to throw one at you."

"Can't a fan convey his admiration?" I whine. "I just wanted to tell you it was a really lovely set."

"Thank you," she says droopingly, as though it was cruel of me to say.

"And if you penetrate the quantum bubble's processor from the subroutine matrix at the electrical influx junction you'll succeed in shorting out the city for at least long enough for the outer shell to decompress, but likely be caught in a collapsing fourth dimensional implosion in the act, so I hope you know these men better than you seem to, because they're probably going to figure that out if there's even only one expert among them, despite the drinks, and he would, it seems to me as an objective party, only instill a mutinous panic in your less intelligent friends."

"Just who do you think you are?" the Countess demands. "Do you know who you're talking to?"

"Not as well as I will after an hour with you," I say, jabbing my gun against her ribs through my coat. "What say you postpone your little suicide mission long enough for us to have a casual chat?"

"E.L.?" she hesitates, the treble in her voice rising politely.

"Listen, mack," Maladactyl begins to rise from his seat on cue.

"I wouldn't," I growl, glancing down to lead his weak will in the direction of the object of immediate attention. "Whatever you two think you have together you'd better weigh it against the fact that to me you're just an easy target and she's just another dame." He slumps back down. Not much of a pair of saboteurs. "Now then, let's retire to somewhere a little less public."

Just then her screwdriver arrives. I pay for it and the waitress leaves. "Drink it first," I tell the set of luscious pipes, "then we'll take it on the heel and toe."

She downs it and turns her eyes towards me. They sparkle with a wild defiance. I am unmoved. "Let's go, sister," I give her an encouraging shove in the direction of the doors. In the Ariesocohedron sector we follow corridor 209/5 to passage 24.9 and turn right. We proceed until we arrive at room 888.2 and enter. It is her quarters, posh and spacious, with a view of one of the internal oxygenation tubes of plex surrounded coral that line the hallways of the outer and upper shells. Once we are inside I close the port behind us and take my piece out in the open. E.L. squirms uncomfortably and sits on his hands. I gesture to him with the gun and he puts them flat down on the arms of the chair. The Countess strolls over to a mini bar across from her kitchen and depresses a switch on a synthwood console, initiating a rotating countertop to hum out of the wall. As it is opening she undoes the collar of her dress and unzips the exo-weft, shedding its drapery and dispensing it into a one piece skirt.

"What do you want to drink?" she asks me dryly, and I see for the first time a tattoo similar to Curly's on her shoulder, only nonbiological in its design.

"Nothing right now, thanks," I snap back, leveling my gun at her and directing her to move over to a well-stuffed sofa. She complies, rather stiffly, though I see her knees drawing in toward each other just a little bit. "Now, do you want to answer the questions I had for you when I came here, or do you want to answer all the new ones you two have just brought up?"

"Neither," she spits coldly. "I still want you to go away."

"Maybe later," I suggest, leaning against the console of the mini bar.

"Well, what do you want?" she demands. "We're here. Kill us or question us, just get on with it. We have other things to do."

"First where were you meeting your friends?"

"Here —" she begins.

"At the Octonial —" begins E.L.

"Just shut up," I conclude. "You live in the outer shell. Why would you try to blow it up?"

"You fool!" she ejaculates. "We're anarchists! Why should we need reasons?"

"Don't tease me," I urge her, "a nanant bit my finger just before I came down. Why don't you start by telling me your life story, Countess. From the look of you that should take a minute or two. By that time we'll see if your little band has shown up and we can place bets on whether it'll be a blood bath or just you."

"You don't quit, do you?" she moans, then finally gives in. "I'm from the kingdom of Einfuhlungcyrberuzgeist. You may have heard of it. There everyone sleeps. I was considered evil for having active opinions, so they banished me. It was only then that I discovered my true heritage. I belong to the Blank Quetzals, the followers of the Persephonic way. I rose quickly through their ranks as I am from royalty. I came here for the sole purpose of this job. We are not planning on detonating the generative core, you poor dunce. We are planning on incorporating ourselves with its construct. What more do you need to know? We are working under a deadline and, I assure you, I have no fear of sharing this information with you because it will be no bet at all that you will soon find yourself dead."

"Tell me everything you know about Piscator Williams. The rest I could care less about and am most happy to leave you to."

"Do you know Piscator Williams?" her eyebrows raise as if charmed. I nod. "Then you know a very great man. Until one year ago he lived here, he was working on our assignment with me. He was, he was almost like a, a mentor. A father certainly. A friend. If you are truly a friend of Piscator's, then why are you behaving so cadishly? Put away your gun, for the friend of my friend is quite welcome here." She refuses to go on until I have complied. I leave the shoulder harnessed holster unbuckled, never doubting my doubting her. "What shall I tell you of him? Oh, he will be missed most assuredly once we have joined with the stream length. We can make time, perhaps, a few extra minutes? to discuss him with you." She asks this of Maladactyl as if to assure him. He seems to deflate somewhat, and relax.

"He's dead," I tell her while she is still turning back towards me. By the time it has

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revolved, her face is aghast, all color drained from it, what little there was.

"How?" she asks quietly after a long moment.

"He was killed by a rather accommodating General named Tso. Do you happen to know him?" She shakes her head, looking off into the distance.

"This is very disturbing," she whispers to herself.

"Tso is a Cheshire, a comrade in arms of the man that I'm after, named Cheshire Sam? Do you know him?" She pauses for a long moment, finding it difficult to gather herself together.

"Yes. Yes, of course. He is their alpha."

"Who? The Cheshire?" I say sternly, trying to get her to focus.

"How much do you know of our plight?" she says, holding a wince.

"Very little. I know that now the Quetzal are pitted against the Bugs of Darmakzim, with the Cheshire acting as a mediating force. But I don't care that much. I'm only looking for —"

"That must have been what your accommodating friend the General told you." She becomes cold and the air pressure shudders. Maladactyl resumes his perched posture upon the chair. "No. No it is much more complex than that, and entirely more grievous than your callous mind can comprehend. We have been locked in a struggle for as many generations as have been recorded. On the one side are the Bugs, and on the other side are we. But it has never been much of a conflict, for there was no balance of power. The Quetzal have dominated for the better half of our struggle, and we intend for it to stay that way. But then the Cheshire came to play. They are cruel, unfeeling beasts that kill us on both sides without compassion or remorse. We have only tried to maintain our natural right to access of information, and they have interrupted that process at every point and violated our connections in every way that they could. But still we persevered. Until Samuel Cheshire one day appeared. By his directives the tentative peace efforts between the Bedders and the Quets were invalidated. We launched merciless attacks against him and his growing power in the organization, but to no avail. He has achieved what was predestined for us, the Quetzal, which we would have willingly shared with the B.B.s if we had only not been thrown back into turmoil by his infernal meddling. He is the bane of Quetzal existence, untouchable behind his armies of Cheshire. What can we do? We are too torn now by the conflict that he has seeded between us to be strong enough to stop him. If Piscator Williams is gone then our operation here is the last hope that we have. He was the closest to curing us of Sam's curse. And now he has been struck down in the Blanking way by some meaningless pawn in the plot of a madman. I apologize for my brevity, sir, but you really must leave us now to our work, for if you are here then this General cannot be very far behind you, and that makes our haste much more urgent. Please, if you were a friend to Williams, go now, and let us to our duties. Otherwise I am afraid you will have to be dispatched however else we can."

"I have one further question, Madame," I say. "What's your scheme here? What will it accomplish, your joining with a quantum data stream?"

"Oh, but do you know nothing of the Cheshire? For every ten steps we take they take but one. We have been striving for aeons up to this moment, and they, in their impetuosity, in their abruptness, in their comparative youth, have sprung onto the one thing that we exist to desire. The transformation of our base matter into pure quantum data. The ability to become one with the Path! And I swear to you," she says standing, "if you have led our enemy to our doorstep, then I promise you the consequences that fall upon your head will be dire, most dire, and dire and foul!"

"Relax. Why don't I stick around and see if he shows up. Not that it's my responsibility if he does show up, but there's probably a little more that he could tell me than he let on before. I'll tag along with you and blow your little generator, and then after that I'll make myself scarce. How's that sound, Countess?"

"It sounds to me like a ploy. I would prefer to have you out of the picture. You would serve as little more than a distraction, and the bearer of bad news isn't exactly the best of luck."

"I think that living in this bubble's gotten to you," I tell her frankly. "How long have you known Maladactyl?"

"I've known him as long as I've lived here," she raises her chin.

"But I've lived here much longer than she," he pipes up, "I was the coordinating supervisor for the Quetzal's undersea operations for —"

"Just what I thought. I don't know. The Bugs are just more professional."

"We're surprisingly organized for anarchists, don't you think?" she chirps.

"I don't think it would hurt to have another good head around, do you? I may not have to wrap my brain around any of your problems, but I can sure keep other people's problems out of your hair. Besides, how are you proposing to get rid of me?"

"Well, for starters, we were both lying about where the meeting was going to take place, and you didn't seem to catch that. Maybe one or the other of us, you figured, but I could tell you didn't expect it from us both."

"That doesn't prove anything about the future."

"How about something in the past, then? Your drink at the bar. It was poisoned. We've just been gagging about here humoring you and waiting for it to kick in."

"So, if you can't fill the shoes of the Lords alone you get together, does that pretty much sum up your ideology?"

"Pretty much, and quite pretty it is too, we think. We don't need you. You're just a messenger. Just icing on our revolution's cake. Too bad you won't be there when we're drinking treacle from the skulls of fools just like you."

"You've got as much tall talk as I've got constitution to tolerate. If I hadn't tasted the poison in my drink, why would I have poisoned yours? What goes around comes around, regardless of whether it's clockwise or counter-revolutionary."

"I —" she falters. Her silence seems to last forever, but it is no more than a second at the most.

"Didn't see that one coming did you? It doesn't take a dame and a cripple to fill my skull. I've got a lot more upstairs than the two of you and, I'll bet, the whole lot of the scum you've accumulated on your heal marching towards your doom. But before we've stopped talking about shoes let me just remind you how ready, willing and able I am to kick your teeth in for the antidote, without having which I know you never would have poisoned anyone, just to cover your tail. Or did you slip that to me before you poisoned me? I bet you've gone just that crazy."

"Yes. We have it. But not here." Her face falls upon the floor, sweeping upward and around in a wide arc. "It's back at the Hand, behind the counter."

"I see," I say. After standing for a moment and watching her shift her weight about I search out the particular knot in the synth wood wall containing the actuating mechanism to reveal her personal supply of liquors. "Maybe I will take that drink you offered," I tell her. I find the switch and the panel slides open slowly, just above the retractable countertop. Inside there is a varied collection of bottles of all colors and sizes. For a moment, keeping my eyes on them and my gun up, I search through them, the glass clinking against itself in the tension-laden silence. She begins to stand up reflexively but I hold her to an awkward intermediary position with my carbine. I pick up an unmarked chalice and, opening its hinged lid, toss some down my throat. The clear liquid has no flavor whatsoever, and no aftertaste. She sits back down on the couch and her gaze drifts down to the floor like a falling feather. "Now that that's done," I wipe my lips with the back of my sleeve, "I suppose if I don't give you my antidote you'll start flinging around slogans again, so here," I say, and toss her a phial. She uncorks it and drinks, drying her lips with a smile. "Hey, take advantage of a guy's kindness why don't you?"

She stands up again and, having determined that I am at least good for some laughs, even if still not fit to spit at, says, "fine, you can come along, but I'm telling you beforehand, it'll be thick, so don't come crying to me if you die. So, we have only about fifteen minutes before we have to be there — we may as well get going now." I watch her feet sinking into it as she walks across the thickly carpeted floor to her closet on the far wall and, flicking a small, concealed button, opens the smoothly sliding door. She proceeds to unload equipment, beginning with a plexsteel vest,

knee and elbow pads, and a wide assortment of guns, grenades and knives.

"Williams left a bag of goods," I tell E.L., not wanting to shout to the Countess while she is dressing. "I'll go get it and meet you back here in five."

"You'd better hurry," he says, leaning in some, "even if you try and sneak off now, the implosion from the bubble will pull any ship within twenty miles back and crush it like a plexluminum can."

I pat him on the arm and dash off. I dart through the winding, metallically echoing hallways to the broodish acclimations bay and fork over my confirmations pass. In seven minutes I am back at her room, but there is no answer. Concluding that they must have gone ahead without me I consult the holobrochure and make my way to the core. As soon as I hear the sound of gunfire I kneel down and begin emptying the duffel bag onto the grated floor. The lights flicker on and off around me as the engine begins its third cycle since my arrival. There is a plexsteel vest and knee and elbow pads, as well as a wide assortment of guns, grenades and knives. It is as if Williams had presaged this exact moment. I pull them all on, the vest over my shirt, the elbow pads over the sleeves of my trench, and begin strapping the guns to every spare area of my body I can. I latch together a sash of grenades under my coat, the knives to my belt and knee pads and, returning to it for more weaponry, find the satchel emptied. I stand up and, in the strobing lights of the hallway, begin running towards the war zone.

2a) How to Spell Relief

Inside the main hull of the generator bay it is a light show. Bullets electrify the air, streaking it for long, heavy moments with bleeding white scars. The bay lights are inconsistent and it is impossible to tell the combatants apart. Massive explosions rock the bay on all sides sending shattered shells of debris flying up in roseate blooms of flashing, flaming hues. Parts are raining down constantly all around me and I cannot see two feet in front of me save for the exposed and dancing skeleton of lucidly smeared shrapnel and artillery when the bulbs blink out. I dive in, firing at everyone within range, and felling the majority, turning back the remainder. I toss the gun back and forth, alternating at close range with a serrated short sword, somersaulting in mid-air and landing with my foot in another's face.

I locate Zaob and Maladactyl positioned behind an enormous storage plexpolymer semi-transparent crate that is beginning to be blown to bits on its far side by blasts from a catwalk above and opposite. I slam my back against it and pop another cold fusion cartridge into my cannon, locking it down with the handle clamp. The burning steel grows frigid with the pulsating, eager bullets.

"Sorry, chief," Zaob shouts over the tumult, "couldn't wait for the clowns to come home." I nod and duck around the corner, picking off two shadowy figures on the catwalk. One flies back against the rails and explodes in a showering splatter of entrails, the other flops over himself like a hooked fish and plunges to the floor below, where he cracks open to a moist husk. I turn back to the Countess.

"Hey, who's got the time anyway, right?"

"Exactly," she concurs, and darts across the floor to a further, smaller pile of less deteriorated crates, poking up from behind them with an insane and bestial look on her face, popping off round after round in an arc encompassing the entire field of battle. I peak around the corner and watch their heads pop, picking off the ones she wounds or misses. There is already a thick maze of corpses forming on the floor between the boxes, and the blood from the crossfire is sole deep on my boots. Some way off the primary generator pulses, an enormous dual hemispherical unit turned in on itself and giving off a soft green glow. Above there is a cobweb of catwalks branching off from a central ring that surrounds the generator at its equator, where raw quanta are exchanged between the upper and lower casings, giving off a staggering white glare that

alternates with a sustained purple haloed black null in cadence corresponding to the bursts of alternation in the stations electricity. I recognize that ebony from somewhere. I pull myself back behind the crate, which is throwing splinters down and being pushed back by the impact of forced pulse shotguns, and think for a moment. Ah, yes. Williams's eyes.

A man in face-shield and body-armor drops down from one of the catwalks onto the top of our crate and is immediately blitzed with a grenade thrown by Zaob, who drops down from the pyramid of boxes and slithers over to our position.

"It's no good," she cries, "we're being overrun here! Where are the three amateurs 'Dact?'"

"They'll be here shortly." He appears completely at ease, as though he was born and bred in an environment like this. "They have a flare for dramatic tardiness." He fires around the corner, the first time I have seen him do so. It is only then that I notice the magnitude of his armament. It's a biotech supplemented strong nuclear antiproton accelerator. He hefts off one shot and I watch it ignite the smoke-filled, war-torn air and strike a catwalk. The catwalk sparks up like a superheated solar flare, the molecular disruption obliterating it at its center and sending a shock ripple through the rest of it, unhinging it from its hangings. Where the blast struck the catwalk has begun to melt, and now it sags like a strand of stretching honey, the battle-armored men stumbling and clinging to keep from falling into the furious fray below while the remainder of the moorings give way. Zaob and I both duck around the corner and begin cranking off shots at the hapless, stumbling saps on the strutless, unsupported walkway. They burst and bleed and shower down body parts. We retreat and reload. I turn to her with a wary look on my face.

"You were saying?" I implore. She bats the lashes of her sparkling eyes.

"There'll be more of them. There aren't any more of us."

"Isn't that just always the way?" I give her a cockeyed grin, clamping in the clip. I storm out towards the center of the battlefield, blasting away at the scuttling clods on the catwalks. Bullets slam down all around me, kicking up spumes of dust from the plexcrete floor and ruby splashes of plasma from the puddles of blood. There are a few bright white doorways visible along distant dark walls disgorging troves of these men in wave after desolating wave. I shoot through them two at a time, watching their luminous cybiotic lymph spurt from pursed entry wounds before the frozen counter-rotating shell stops in their suspension, triggering the cold fusion reaction and striking a hydrogen detonation inside their innards, tearing them to shreds. More surge out, stepping over their fallen comrades. I sidestep and shoulder roll on the floor, absorbing a long, dark swath of spilled secretions, and pop up behind a small outcropping of crates to fling a grenade from my chest strap toward the nearest doorway. A wide, bright ball of fire leaps up and swallows some twenty men or so, throwing another ten or fifteen in the periphery of its shock wave out in all directions, picking them up off their feet and sweeping them up until gravity has had its fill and caresses them seductively, sinking its claws in, and yanking them back down. Two hit the ground nearby me. I have dispatched one before he can even lift his head up. The other draws a weapon as he is rising from his knee, and I run towards him, turning as I do so, grabbing him and lifting him up by the collar with my left hand and blowing an expansive hole through his guts with my right before carrying him a few paces and hurling him at another oncoming truncheon, who, distracted by his fellow being tossed towards him, I surprise from behind the body shield with a shot to the face, his head vanishing in a sticky crimson cloudburst of vaporized bone and brain matter.

The crates near the door where I threw the grenade are smoldering with blue tongues of fire, and the soldiers are still charging through them. I holster my pistol and unstrap the Excalibur quaternion gatling, which feeds its core engine off ambient electromagnetic waves, converting them through directed spin potential into plexiron constructs of stable fractal extractions, cooling them to solidity after firing in its rotating barrel array. Each bullet is strong enough and propelled at such velocity that it can escape the gravitational pull of the planet. I aim indiscriminately.

I finish off a host of the hordes at the door, but by now the creeps on the catwalks have

noticed me, and I hoist the enormous machine up towards them too. They begin downpouring their armored corpses as the cartridges shunt through. To my right and above another walkway explodes in a blinding flash of energy and begins to melt in a molten mess. Beyond that and on ground level I see Odessa almost overrun by troops and I start to make my way toward her. As I approach I begin sounding off and strike several of the soldiers perturbing her unawares. I'm beginning to think she was right about there being too many of them. And they don't look like the capturing type. She drops a grenade at her feet and books it in my direction. She barely makes it out of the blast radius before it goes off and throws their emptied bodies skyward. Two of them land right beside us as we assume position behind a crate and take turns shooting randomly into the flickering darkness that gives the eyes no time to adjust so as to make out the full dimensions of the hangar.

"Why am I here again?" I quip.

"Make me laugh," she smiles.

"Right. Where further can we go from there?" I pick off three on the catwalk.

"There they are," she gestures towards the door; I think the one that I came in. I turn and see three people in battle gear similar to ours standing silhouetted while the lights flicker on inside the bay and outside in the hallway alternately. These are the amateurs. They are mutants. They rush into the room, which is largely cleared up to our position. One of them runs over to where we are. His eyes are glowing ultraviolet and his movements are somehow smoothly exaggerated.

"Well, it took you long enough," Zaob chastises.

"We've taken care of intra-station communications," he says, his voice more a vibration palpable to the ear than a sound. "You needn't worry about any further reinforcements arriving. After we mop up the main generator bay, it's all us."

"That's reassuring," she says. I stand up between them and fire the Excalibur in a blanketing sweep across the parameter, hardly even seeing if I hit anyone before ducking back down. "Show me something."

"Problems none," he hums.

"Here," I offer the gatling gun, dropping it onto the floor and pulling out a double barreled automatic sub-singularity shotgun.

"Unrequired," he nods, dashing off. He tears into the swarm of drones emerging from the nearest doorway. While they are lumbering in mindlessly, their guns ablaze, he begins picking them to pieces delicately, operatically. He leaps up at the same time as ducking down, one to the left, the other to the right, simultaneously, dividing himself ethereally into either one dense and one light body, or two transit modes, confusing the gunmen horribly. The leaping one lands and, clutching throwing stars between its knuckles, slashes the throat of the uncunning runt. The ducking specter crouches and fluidly slices the bulbous abdomen of another. It is now that I realize he is in neither place, but further back, hiding in the shadow of this event in a former position, where he produces two guns and, turning to his left, shoots two of the helmeted data-suckers in the eyes. He continues on in this fashion, throwing his bodied weapons out and popping off caps from a more protected distance, all at an incredible rate, swirling and recongealing, turning in on and passing through himself in a pale shimmering shroud of undulating light. He is single handedly making his way to the elusive door.

I stand up from behind the crate again and pump the shotgun. It growls in my sweating palms. A nearby crate explodes as one of the guards on the catwalks heaves down grenades. I run off in the direction of Maladactyl's new position, a little further than where Zaob was when she was overwhelmed. She runs with me, shooting to the opposite side. The blood is slippery and at moments my boots slide beneath me, wavering my step. I leap over a crate. We are running underneath the catwalk where the man was hurling down grenades. Without stopping or looking up I unpin one from my chest strap and heft it upwards, hearing it explode above and behind me with a crunch following a plummeting scream.

We reach E.L. at the same time as one of the amateurs, who is approaching from our original position. He is firing the nuclear accelerator much closer to the quantum generator now, which would seem dangerous if they weren't professed anarchists. The catwalks continue to melt down and the piles of the fallen are rising as high as the stacks of crates in some places. He is crouched behind one of these, curled low, waiting for his weapon to recharge. Odessa gets there first and slides right foot out through the seeping gore surrounding the cadaver drift. I arrive neck and neck with the mutant, which is ironic, as, joining the huddle, I see he is budding faces all over his body. He is carrying a gun I have never seen before, with three green glowing tubes protruding from the side of its slick, mercurial surface, yellow lights dancing in channel display patterns all across it.

Zaob is the first to start shooting. She fires off a barrage of shots trading between the catwalk warriors and the fleecers on the floor. Their bullets tear immediately into the still warm flesh of the sorrowful forms of the dead.

"We settle it now, Zaob," E.L. declares frantic eyed as she stoops back down. "I can fire a concentrated antiproton stream directly into the lower deck from here." She pauses to consider. "Our only other option is finding a doorway that will lead us to a catwalk I haven't already incinerated." His statements are flat, dull and poison. The lights are still coming on and off and I see a pained expression on the Countess's face. At first I wonder if she is shot, and then I realize it is only her perfect plan deteriorating that is the cause of her distress.

"Keep shooting," she orders him. "Just shut up and keep shooting."

The mutant stands up and fires his weapon. There is a tremendous pulse of white light on the floor nearby that sends off x-radiation, skeletonizing the corpses in front of us for a moment. Suddenly there are soldiers coming at us from all around it, even above it. I go to shoot at them, but then realize they are clutching themselves and weeping. Enormous bulges are appearing all over their bodies, swelling to full size and erupting into fountains of blood. One coming up over the mountain of decay collapses next to me and writhes around on the floor, his hands covering his face. Suddenly the skin bursts open and blood sprays between his spasming, crooked fingers. I grin.

Zaob and I both stand up at the same time and blast away at the mutating herd, E.L. joining us just as we are approaching the ends of our clips and firing two volleys up, in the direction of the generator's catwalks. One strikes the circular bridge surrounding the central unit, and it begins to drip red hot melting metal, which is immediately caught in the generator's field and sucked into its fluctuating flow. The other flies clear past it and strikes the upper rafters of the deck, causing a distant walkway to come crashing down to half its height towards the floor. We duck down.

"That last shot gave me an idea," I say over the incoming fire. "E.L. if you can fire at the support struts of a closer catwalk without hitting it, then maybe you can bring it down far enough for us to climb up from a pile like this one or a stack of tall crates." He turns blank eyed to Zaob.

"I like it," she says, pinching her brows together. "Make it happen."

"I have to wait for the blaster to recycle," he says. "But I agree; sounds good."

"Good then. Nice little democracy," I say. Zaob smiles pertly. We reload.

The mutant stands up and blasts off to the right, which has been clearer of interference, partially, I see now, to the efforts of the final other mutant. But a few have still slipped through and made their way to a secured position behind some crates. The blast annihilates the stack, leaving only the after glow of pure white light. The troops immediately run from behind it as before, dissolving into unfathomable conditions and popping like overgorged succubi.

I pause for a moment and watch the work of the further mutant. He is hovering in mid air and pointing at his victims. Occasionally he spins around where he holds, and some times he gives a little kick to drift. Concentrated levitation and projected focal pressure points. A very impressive deck of so-called amateurs.

The Countess and I stand up again and wipe away another approaching regiment. Many of

her troops seem to have fallen while we gained what ground we have. Much of the remaining effort is being concentrated on us now, and if we don't make it to the catwalks we'll be dead in five minutes. Not one minute more. Not one.

"How much longer on your gun?" I petition E.L., belying some desperation.

"It's coming on line now," he says, looking at me with indescribable eyes. One of them is completely calm and at peace. The other is wild and terrified.

Zaob finishes her clip and kneels down next to him. "We're running out of options here," she pleads.

"Got it," he grumbles and, raising the immense cannon, takes aim. He fires at the moorings of the catwalk directly above our heads which was fused a little ways further down and, resultantly, rendered bereft of occupants, by the first time I had seen him use his weapon, and I remember the encouragement it had made me feel then. The shot grazes the walkway itself and softens the grating, but strikes the support struts above. It immediately begins sinking down towards us and Zaob and the mutant let out a cheer. It is within reach of the top of the pile, so we immediately begin double covering the single-file line of spotter and climber that clamor up to it. Once Zaob is up E.L. follows, then they provide coverage for the mutant to climb, while I stand behind him, marking his treacherous footing amidst the dead mens' remains. As I am stumbling up I slip and almost fall, dropping my shotgun to the floor below. I raise my arms up and am hoisted aloft by E.L. and the mutant. On the catwalk I pull out my chest holstered pistol again and lock in a new load. We climb off to the left, side-stepping and firing, until we are within jumping distance of the next catwalk. I can see from where we are now that we are only two further jumps away. It is impossible to make it through the doorway between the catwalks, as it closed automatically when the catwalk was liquefied. Our only chance is the jump.

The mutant is the first to go. He flings himself across the abyss at the bottom of which is the wash of blood and bodies we have left behind. He makes it, clinging to the railing and quickly hopping over while we blast away at the armies rushing towards him from both sides and firing at him and us from the other catwalks.

Next is E.L. He barely makes it there, catching a hold of the lowest rungs of the rails with his hands, striking his chin on the grated floor panels. If he doesn't hold on with both hands the rifle will slip from its strap around his shoulder and fall to the floor. The Countess and I concentrate our fire on the guards approaching on the walkway, kneeling down to provide the ones shooting at us with less of a target. The bodies pile up into a blockade on both her side and mine, and the mutant stoops down to offer a face covered arm through the handrails to Maladactyl, who reaches up and grabs on by the forearm, placing his thumb rudely in one of the face's eye. He struggles up and onto the walkway, then takes up position back to back with the mutant and clears a space between them for the next jumper. They blast away with pistols at the troops on their walkway, who are now kneeling behind the body piles.

"Guess the number for it?" I offer.

"Three," she smiles, climbing up onto the railing.

"Impressive. You've done this before," I smile, cranking off shots at the soldiers on the catwalk beyond the next one.

She leaps from the hand rail to land perfectly in the center of the walkway between the railbars and her two friends. She unholsters her gun and begins tearing apart the further soldiers.

"No time like now time," I say to myself, and take the leap. In the distance below me the floor sweeps past dizzily. I land with one foot on the railing and the other foot behind me. At first I think I have the right balance, but it soon becomes clear that I do not. I falter backwards, pinwheeling my arms and bending suddenly at the waist. My foot goes out from under me and I catch the rail in my armpits, knocking the wind out of me and showing stars before my eyes. Zaob turns around and gives me a good yank by the back of my trench collar, which, thanks to the tight elbow pads, is actually firmly enough attached to my body to hold. I am up and over.

We have to work our way to the right to be within leaping distance of the next walkway, which, thankfully, is closer. We concentrate our fire on the troops still cowering there, the mutant bringing up the rear and blasting away with his strange mutagenic laser. Behind us the bodies of the dead swell up and explode, contaminating the crouching guards behind them. Before us E.L. takes a long shot with his fusion rifle, nearly bringing down the catwalk, and scorching the body pile and troops behind. One of them bursts into flames and, standing and waving his arms around insanely, topples over the railing and squashes into a fire puddle below.

"E.L." the mutant says, speaking with the voices of all his faces simultaneously, "Back here! If you blast the bridge, the door will close!" E.L. whirls around and we bite grating. He fires directly along the straight line of the walkway and strikes it just where it meets the door. Zaob and I fire around him at his knees to keep the soldiers from shooting him in the back. The catwalk shudders and the doors slide closed. The far end begins to droop, pulling at the moorings in a wave that is coming quickly toward us.

"Okay," mumbles the mutant, observing this affect, "maybe it wasn't such a good idea."

E.L. rounds himself and pulls his pistol up from its hip holster, striking one of the guards immediately between the eyes and splitting his head in two down the center. He falls backward on top of another, leaving only two for us to take out. We move forward, the three of us blasting with our pistols while the mutant takes aim at the soldiers on the next bridge with biological grenades, boiling their skin and cankering their eyes. We take down two of them just as the fallen upon one rises. Behind them the levitating mutant appears on the left side of the bridge, his face splitting apart as his head turns two ways at once, and points at the two on the bridge as well as a grouping along the next walkway. The two before us collapse as if hypnotized, blood running from their noses, ears and eye sockets as do the troops huddled together along the next catwalk.

"I'm here," says a voice that sounds as though it is right next to our ears, actually being broadcast as a wavelength into the language centers of our brains.

"Let's get out of here," Zaob declares, and we rush forward, hopping over the smoldering mound of remains. Behind, the collapse of the moorings under the weight of the catwalk is almost upon us.

"How are we all going to get across?" somebody asks.

"Step on my shoulders," says the levitating man. "I'll support you."

Zaob is the first to go, and the gap, too far to have leapt without extremely favorable luck, is easily passed. In the middle of the transport however a bullet grazes her right arm near the shoulder, opening up a deep gash. The shooter is quickly taken out, but she is losing her balance. The levitator does everything he can to recompensate and support her, and finally it is enough.

The next to go is E.L., followed by myself, and lastly the mutant. As he is leaping from it the walkway behind us crumbles under its own weight and clatters down to the floor like an undulating centipede. The levitator joins us on the catwalk, pointing as though he were firing a gun, with infallible aim. E.L. immediately blasts the far end of the walk, closing the doors, but this time there is no danger, at least none of us being caught on it, as there is a joining walkway leading to the very interior circle of the webwork.

Soldiers are swamping towards us from all the nearby doors, and their weapons are flashing like the dazzling spectacle of starbirth at the creation of a galaxy. There are a number of explosions widely swaying the catwalk, and we have to hold on to the railing for stabilization with one hand and fire back with the other. We slowly make our way toward the inner ring, the two mutants and E.L. on point and Zaob and myself covering the rear.

The dark guards are spilling over the sides of the walkway in droves. Many are burning, some bleeding capially, others bursting at the seams. Finally we are within reach of the innermost catwalk. The guards are thick here, down to perhaps fifty or so, making their ultimate stand. A bullet catches the levitating mutant in one of his hands and takes off several fingers. For a long moment he simply looks at it, aghast. While his guard is down another bullet strikes E.L. in the shoulder, going through, leaving his left arm limp. The mutant rejoins with a bevy of

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by: Jonathan Barlow Gee

telekinesis, lifting up guards by the dozens and simply flinging them at the plexcrete ground far below.

The guards have ceased coming through one of the doorways on the left, and in it stands triumphantly the third and original mutant, silhouetted as he was when they first entered the fight, almost five minutes ago. He joins the fray from the other side, slowly working his way towards us. While he is throwing off all manner of tricks, the levitator continues picking up and popping the brains of the blackguards, while the walking totem pole sprays them down with corrosive toxins.

"I told you they were amateurs," beams Maladactyl, pride and pain blending on his face. "No sense of fair play at all."

We have reached the inner ring.

"We have to hurry," cries the Countess, checking her watch. "There's only thirty eight seconds left before the generator finishes its cycle!" We are down to ten guards. Then five. Then three. Two. One. We are alone. The silence is deafening.

2b) Casual Causal

We stand around the right hand side of the inner corridor ring of Pod City's main power quantum bubble field generator as it counts down the remaining twenty seconds of its systems confirmation reuptake feedback loop. The faint lights of the shadowed hangar flicker. Before us it stands, a bright white light shining at its center, emitting an ominous, continuous dirge.

Suddenly two shots. To the left of me the levitator's face caves in to a bloody ragged heap and he falls backward over the railing and down into the abysmal drop. To the right of me the talking totem pole's head explodes, and he slumps down into a pile on the paneled floor. The next shot strikes the first mutant, who is also to my right. He doubles over, clutching his stomach, which then ruptures, gushing forth the contents of his cavity onto the walkway, bright red deep black shadowed blood dripping through the grating.

From behind the generator on the opposite side of the walkway General Tso steps out, with a devilish grin contorting his face in the low angled light from the generator core. He is holding an antiphoton counter-rotating shell firing dual dynamo pistol at waist level. He is seemingly ten feet tall.

"Well," he says. "Good tidings."

The Countess, to my right, is the first to react. She pulls her pistol from its hip holster. He blinks and fires a shot with his eyes shut. The gun is struck from her hand and goes flying off into the darkness, disappearing and reappearing in its trajectory as the lights come on and off. As this is happening E.L. raises his accelerator rifle. The General cranks off another shot and strikes Maladactyl in the left thigh, felling him. "No!" E.L. cries, slipping off the edge of the catwalk. His rifle strap catches itself on one of the bent handrail bars, holding him underneath the opposite arm in mid-air. The field surrounding the crystalline light orb begins pulling him in closer to it. He is hyperventilating.

"The control console is on my side," the General says. "You still have time to save him. All you have to do is enter the right access code. You still have," he says, casually checking his watch, "fourteen seconds. All I need of you is agreement to one tiny little condition."

The Countess says nothing, holding her chin up, her lip trembling.

"We Cheshire have everything. What you wish for is already ancient to us. We have made a deal with this devil," he says, pointing at the contraption, "for us everything is possible, on the one little condition that we can never know any idea from absolute truth. Alas, there is no getting around this, and we tire of it. For those who have absolute freedom bliss becomes boredom. We require slavery. We wish for you to become our pet."

The field is stretching E.L.'s legs out into a thin strand and beginning to spirally coil

them up into itself.

"Ten seconds," the General says.

"General," I say, producing from my overcoat pocket the disk Aziz Smithe gave me. "I think you'll need this." His eyes widen to saucers. "You only have partial immortality running this scenario in simulators. Life extension, not life expansion. You know what this is? It's the key to immortality." He lowers his gun, but I notice that, even though he has lost attention to all else besides the disk, it remains aimed at E.L. "The girl and I walk, you get the disk. Call off your war, and you live forever. Otherwise, what are you living for anyway?"

"Yes," he says, not having foreseen either backwards or forwards the contingency of seizing the opportunity himself, for any more than superficial means at least. "Agreed. Five seconds."

I look at the Countess and dark rings have appeared beneath her eyes.

"Alright, then" I say. "Never it is." I toss him the disk across the gap and it freezes midway, stuck in the electromagnetic field.

"Nool" cries the General.

E.L. has been swallowed up to his waist. There never was any possibility of saving him. Even with the proper code entry, he would have entered the quantum state incomplete, partially already mutilated by the transformation. The General reaches out for the disk at first, but something shifts in the ambience. He draws back and aims his gun at it. He fires. The bullet stops just before impact. It explodes in the extremely dense pressure, but the explosion is frozen immediately in time, and hangs there like a hologram. "No," he says again, to no one. The Countess clings to me tightly. E.L. is swallowed up to the chest now, and the disk has begun to stretch like melting plex into the core. The explosion becomes translucent and the field of the generator brightens. Quarks and electrons begin flying off of the explosion cloud, spinning and spiraling into the field. E.L. weeps, and the tears fall off his cheeks and evaporate into the core. His is stretched out now into a lengthening strand of tachyons and antivirtuals, being slowly strained up into the glistening sphere. It pulsates with a pleasant indifference.

The General begins making his way around to us, keeping his gun on us. During the last few seconds of its subcycling the generator core reaches its strongest pressures, its field expanding outward as it reassembles its data banks, now including one antiphoton explosion, one diskette with the code for transtemporal immortality, and one E.L. Maladactyl. The disk is stretched out half way now, the explosion almost fully incorporated, and Maladactyl's face becomes a smudge in quantum reality. The General comes up to us and buries his gun low against the Countess's spine.

"I would be a fool to shoot at the core now," he whispers, almost as if to himself, his face awash with awe at the sight we are all now beholding. "It would alter the spatial coordinate parameters and expand the core's field to the reach of its projected quantum distortion bubble." He pauses, staring at the event that bathes his face in pure white light, until finally the Countess turns around to look at him. "And a fool I am not," he concludes, taking her by the unwounded shoulder. "Come along now children," he says, his face still sagging with delight, "the time for our little fun and games has come to an end." He pulls on the Countess's shoulder and she drags me by my elbow along behind her. Maladactyl has completely disappeared except for his gun strap, and all that remains is a glittering string of blue and white shining particles whose existence can only be proven mathematically, winding itself up into itself along infinity. The disk and detonated antiphoton bullet have disappeared.

He leads us through one of the bright white doorways and into a corridor. As we step through the door there is a slight shift in the underlying sound of the station and the lights cease flickering. For all anyone else on the station knew this has been an ordinary, run of the mill, reuptake of the subroutines confirmation feedback loop.

2c) Fortune and Glory

We stand there in silence for some moments, the three of us there, the General, and the Countess, and me. Too stunned by what we have seen to be able to speak.... Either about it or of anything. Finally the General talks.

"I am leaving Pod City. Now," he says. "It was my assignment to find you and to kill you Ms. Zaob. But I no longer feel like completing that assignment. I no longer feel like much of anything. Perhaps you can think of it as indefinitely postponed. You're welcome to come with me if you wish, in any capacity whatsoever you should desire. Frankly the ride promises to be rather boring and I would enjoy the company. But if you would rather we part ways it's all the same to me." She says nothing, but continues staring off into space, her lips parted slightly. "If you do not respond then I'm afraid I'm going to be forced to take your silence as consent, as is our custom." She stands between us, her arms interlocked with ours, limp, delicate. "I understand. A little guidance now is in order. I will provide it for you," he says, and produces a pair of shackles, placing them about her wrists. "And as for you," he tells me, "I hope that you've learned not to go nosing into revolutions that ultimately don't concern you. The Quetzal wanted to oust the True Blanks and replace them as the living carriers of the messages to which pathways lead access. No, these are the faces of the Cheshire. So it has always been. The one thing neither of you seem to understand is just how powerful the senses of the Cheshire really are. They far supersede even your wildest aspirations. What we process in one day is likely as much information as you two could compute in your entire lifetimes, combined. Such is our blessing and such is its curse, for we have long since forgotten how to care for it. For example it even bores me to have learned from your subconsciouses that Zaob here was unaware of where you were hiding your antidote. Very disappointing. A Cheshire would have taken it from you before the poison was even employed. We have our hopes, but this is, afterall, only our youth. It is just the Cheshire's second incarnation under Sam, whereas the Quetzal and the Bugs, to name but a couple, have had countless hundreds, tens of thousands. It is incomprehensible to you what we are capable of. Now then, shall we be away?"

He begins leading Odessa down the corridor and I am nearly too stunned to do anything. Out of the corner of my eye I see her struggling slightly, although her eyes are still wide and vacuous.

"You say you know so much," I shout after the General. "But you've forgotten one thing." He turns around toward me, placing the Countess between us. Somehow her wandering gaze falls upon me and we lock eyes. The softness of the periphery dances. I look down at the grated floor just for a moment, thinking about her springing up to the ceiling. She nods, her head drooping, her eyes still on mine. The General has a truly perplexed look on his face. "I am a fool," I say, and, removing my weapon from its chest holster as the Countess drops down on her knee, send a bullet over to him that strikes him dead in the eye. He falls backwards, his feet lifted up off the ground, and, in mid-air, his cranium collapses and then erupts. When he hits the ground he is inert, except for his left foot, which twitches spasmodically.

Countess Zaob stands and walks over to me. It is so beautiful a sight it brings tears to my eyes. She leans in against my chest and I hold her. For a long time, I just stand there, and hold her.

B) the Dreamers of God Sleep lying

For the last part of our journey it is necessary to walk. We are escorted by a precession of an arrayed pack of young elephants, carrying our luggage, and the coolies who act as our guides. They speak no English and there are no translators, and their guidance is based exclusively on their gestures and appearances of behavior guided along approach/retreat mechanisms. Now these

approach/retreat mechanisms are not natural to what one might expect if the coolies were citizens, or in any way familiarized with the precepts and doctrines of the whole rest of the world. On the contrary they might guide our precession through an entire crossing of king cobras without so much as a misplaced glance, then stop for several hours to listen to the rustling of the wind in a particular tree along the path, only to conclude that we would have to turn back and go a different way at some juncture we had not noticed while passing by it any number of days ago.

The border, as we approached it, seemed insurpassable at least. It was lined with countless towers of immense proportion and magnificent architecture, reaching out like lightning rods into the indescribably deep clear blue of the sky. However the coolies proceeded to guide us directly through an open gate without even admiring these edifices, in such a way that my tooth reflexively panged.

The land of Einfühlungcyrberuzgeist is a broad, lowlying country with a range of mountains circling the east and north, the rest being hills and plains in the shadows thereof. The views are always magnificent, visibility stretching for as many as fifty miles while the wind that slides down off the snow-cooled mountain peaks caresses the landscape delicately, ambling about aimlessly in the sparkling angles of warmth from the sun. Above, immense monuments of cumulus shift their shapes and play about prismatically with the crisp, shining sky. From our position as we descend along the pass through the eastern mountains we can see almost the entire country laid out before us, the shadows of the clouds above smoothing out the vast crop fields with temperate breezes, and the sparse cities piled up into collections of pinnacles accupuncturing the soft epidermis of the fertile land.

As we make our way towards the capitol, in the center of the country, we follow a wide dirt road worn down with wagon wheel tracks that have sunk into its wetted skin and lined with cobbled creek stones. The coolies avoid entering into any of the smaller towns that lie off cross walks from the road, making downward gestures with their arms and faces and shaking their heads. We can see the glistening rooftops through the fir trees and the soothing turning of a waterwheel. But they are insistent and the Countess makes no argument, eventually simply shaking her head almost sadly in the same manner as our trackers.

Instead of seeking lodging at an inn, therefore, we pitch camp along the side of the road in a flat, bright green pasture on the low side of the slope of a rolling hill. While we sleep there beneath the cold canopy of infinite stars no one comes to disturb us, nor are we troubled by the wanderings of so much as a single bird. When we awaken in the morning we find the coolies have vanished, taking with them all but one small and confused elephant who must bear the burden of all of our luggage for the remainder of the trek. The countess seems equally unperturbed by this turn of events, and only reacts as though disturbed by fitful rest, heavy shadows gathering beneath her eyes and speaking slowly, as though to a child. Returning home is having its effect on her already, even though we are still a day's journey from the capitol and have not met a single of her countrymen.

1) Sand Castle at the Shore of Forever

We walk all day and throughout the night and approach the capitol in the darkness of the hours preceding dawn. Through the moisture of mist that has settled down upon us the first landmark I can see is the castle at the center of the city, and I point it out to the Countess. She does not lift her drooping eyelids to look at it, merely gestures it away as though it were a foreboding phantom. We penetrate the city through the winding cobbled streets of its surrounding township. A light rain falls.

Tall buildings with tiled roofs and high relief framed stained glass windows twitch their course through short, sharp cornered streets of rounded stone and wide, flat blocks. Statues spring up everywhere — the corners of rooftops, the centers of small squares and circles in the

roadways, above the archways of doors and in the framework of windows, conglomerating in fountains and pedestaled on columns — statues of Greek Gods and of gargoyles, angels with spread wings in chariots and armored for warfare, lurking bestiaries of marble crawling about the city at all heights and of all sizes. Buildings swell up and meet high above the streets in gothic archways of Baroque decor, minarets and spires electrifying the skyline with the angry angles of the forested mountains. Shops of brick sit next to unfathomably long dark alleys, enshadowed and creeping with outcroppings of carved creatures. The streets bend and slope, leading nowhere, or in circles, and the windows are all empty, and the whole town is silent. No one walks the streets and there are no congestions of cars, no ox-drawn carts, no loose running pets, and no birds, nor insects, nor life of any kind. The town is as quiet and as still as the dead. As though its denizens had all been awakened one morning by some catastrophe, some trembling of the earth and heaven, and, leaping from their beds or from where they stood in the streets, been transformed into the beings of marble that are the only evidence to the shape of those inhabitants in the city's deserted remains. The rain turns into flurries of snow.

We approach the entrance of the castle, which is a tall corolla of stairs lined on both sides by sculptures of various, ascendingly ethereal forms. At the top is a forest of pillars and archways where more marble perches and surveys us passing below. The interior entrance of the castle is a double set of steep wooden doors, which the countess shoves open. Only here are we confronted with the first sign of existence in the whole of the land. A man garbed in a shining golden breast plate etched with low relief battle scenes in distant foreign landscapes and a gold plated centurion's helmet with a bold red comb, clasping a spear to his chest and with his boots raised, is reclining on a tripod stool to the right of the doorway. The countess pays no heed to him whatsoever. The helmet is pulled forward, concealing his eyes.

We enter a long hallway of mirrors and windows that gives us the illusion of being in a garden, but it is only a garden of glass. The miniature enclosed retreat to the right and left of us, accessible through statue marked doors at the hallway's center, is thickly overgrown so that vines climb up the windows from outside, and have begun to slip their fibrous tendrils in through the slight gap between the glass and its wooden frame. What effect was perhaps once one of being mystically transported into a magical cove is now one of plunging headlong into the tunnel of some jungle, and rather than welcoming it is unnerving indeed.

We part the doorways at the end of the hall, also plated in mirror, and emerge into a larger court of hanging tapestries and, opposite us, a doubled, spiraling stairwell that stretches up above us into the boundless heights of the central tower. The stairway is combined at its base, and, as it rises above the second story, it splits off into two branches. These two branches, both supported only as extensions from the immense masonry of the tower's circular wall, then proceed to wind around one another until, presumably, they have reached the top. Light blasts in from immense stained glass windows framed in moderate relief with scenes of the afterlife casting strangely shaped shadows where the rays intersect one another in the middle of the tower, between the two curling stairwells. One, the countess informs me, leads to the king's chamber. The other to the queen's. We split up, and begin the dizzying ascent to their rooms, she going to visit her uncle the king, and sending me to investigate the condition of the queen.

2) "Good Times" Evil

Upon arrival to the queen's chamber I find the door slightly ajar. Pushing it open I intrude into the room, finding it empty. I search around, but there is nobody there, the embers of some ancient flame grown cold in the fireplace, and countless formal documents signed Shuvalkin strewn about on the floor.

I look up from the top of the stairwell, to the dome that caps the central tower. There is an enormous bell hung there, barely visible in the gloomy shadows behind the rotting rafters, easily

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as large as the entire court below. A rope is hung down from it, though rapt about the rafters and observed by more statues. The knocker of the bell, in fact, is a single, several ton statue of a head. I think of climbing up one of the hanging tapestries that lines the windows to the rafters and freeing the chord, but at that moment the countess emerges from the king's chambers and advises against it. As we make our way back down the long stairwell she begins to tell me of her life, and the history of her land, her voice reverberating in the echoing emptiness of the castle's main tower.

"Einfuhlungcyrberuzgeist as we see it now is a tranquil place of peace and seeming prosperity. It has not always been so. Our country was at the brink of the planet's greatest war once, when I was six. The king was a doddering invalid then, an old man suffering from the most profound melancholia ever known to the medical sciences, and, as its cause was undiagnosable, its affects were entirely untreatable. It was thought, by the majority of the courtesans, that the solution to this was a great conflict, a struggle to arouse the soul of the ruler from his malaise, that would, at the least, allow them to be closer to gaining power from him, either through reward for their efforts, or through seizure.

"At this time no trade agreement existed between the surrounding countries, and hordes of foreign labor was at the brink of spilling onto our soil. His Father, having foreseen this coming economic crisis, while the king was still in his youth, instigated a monumental construction program, at which time most of the statues, cathedrals and renovations within the cities, and watchtowers along the entrances to our border, even in the most naturally treacherous of atmospheres, were erected, and, although this could not have so much as begun to comfort the displeasure of the young king, then the prince, it did succeed in invigorating the national pride of the people. When the King his father died, our king was only about twenty some years old, and did nothing to curb the building campaign his father had begun. Quickly it reached astronomical proportions, setting the storehouses and banks of the palace in an even more dire condition than the threat of immigrant labor, and finally elevating our unchecked nationalism to an explosive extent.

"Now the queen, upon whose shoulders it should have fallen to suffer in the stead of our indigent monarch, was too preoccupied with her attempts at placating the power hungry aristocracy, the courtiers and vassals, to be able to waylay the oncoming conflict by so much as a single generation and thus, while I was still a child, Einfuhlungcyrberuzgeist went to war with God.

"This was a most horrible time to be alive. There were simultaneously the highest of hopes and the lowest of expectations. It was known openly that the campaign was doomed, but the popularity of the monarchy following the years of construction was the highest in our history, and demanded action. It was all the queen could do to keep the courtiers from revealing the king's true condition, and it was all the courtier's could do to keep the threat of foreign labor at bay. The situation finally came to a breaking point, and our armies amassed to go off to war.

"Then there was a cult of religious practitioners, almost as powerful in the court as the vassals, but who preferred their anonymity to increased say, who were to lead the armies. Their position was that, should they die, they would be made martyrs, which, in accordance with their practices, equated with immortality, and, should they win, then they would be heroes of the people, and the shroud of secrecy necessitated to distinguish them from their knavish counterparts the vassals could be lifted, the vassals ousted by popular demand, or, if necessary, by military coup.

"It was I who was given the task of ordering the men off. It was the most trying moment of my life. I know little of the battle that ensued, save for that we lost, and that none of our soldiers survived.

"The treaty that was forged simultaneously was unbreachable, being that the might of its enforcement was invincible. After it had taken affect, with Einfuhlungcyrberuzgeist out of the economic picture, it was easy for the surrounding nations to establish a free trade agreement of

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their own without a fight. If only we could have been around for it, this settlement could have aided our country as well. But alas, it was not to be that way. The contract agreed upon by the magicians, vassals and the representatives of the True Lord of Hosts stipulated that our nation should succumb to somnolence. That all should be accursed to sleep, *le petite morte*, for the rest of their lives. This sleep would come to them like a sickness, where they stood, it would beset itself upon them, and fell them, and they should not awaken from it for any reason, for infraction of this is incursion of the treaty. This was the only condition of our defeat, this absolute surrender of consciousness, but for the war lords who returned from the slaughter it was, most assuredly, a beneficent blessing.

"There were those of us, and I phrase it this way intentionally, for I myself was among them, that could not in our conscience agree to this, who could not finally sacrifice ourselves in a situation that was never in our hands to begin with. It may have been divine, perhaps, true, but it could not be reconciled with our idea of justice, which, through impudence of youth or stubbornness of age, we considered somehow just as holy. We rebelled against those enforcing the treaty, and at first it appeared as though a civil war would ignite. But finally the magicians intervened on our behalf, and arranged for us a period of grace, during which time all those throughout the country such as myself who felt that they could not live by the dictates of the agreement would be allowed to emigrate. It meant banishment.

"This was not taken as a victory, but it was taken. It was the only option offered by the only hand outstretched, and it was only presented with the compendium that our lives were already invalidated, and neglect of this opportunity meant demise. If the time of the king's sorrow and the war had been trying, this insult heaped upon our already broken people was far more disheartening. The melancholy, it would seem, felt by our king was merely prophetic of the suffering that now gripped us all.

"Mass migrations ensued. Families were torn apart from each other with harsh looks in place of warm regrets. How can I describe this? Best that I do not, for words alone fail. Let me tell you just this. That the plague followed hard upon our heels as we fled, and that, if there was an agreed upon plan, that we were betrayed. For not even those of us who escaped before the land fell into its current state of stupor were completely immune.

"All Geisters bear the signs of decreased metabolism, as though our hearts are still back in our homeland, asleep. This retards our aging process and, as I said, though I was only six when the war started, and some forty five years have passed, I am barely in my twenties today. It furthermore necessitates my excessive consumption of alcohols, to keep my spirits up.

"Many of our fleeing multitudes, suffering similar ailments, joined up with the Quetzal. Many of the magicians joined with the Cheshire, and are working with them still to instill in the mass populous a myth regarding *Einführungcyrberuzgeist* which states that it is become the living embodiment of sleep, and that the rest of the world and all its achievements are only our dream. This myth states that, to awaken us would be to instigate Ragnarok, the end of the world, Kali Yuga, the waking from dream. I do not believe this myself, but the bell which is hung in the main tower for just such an emergency, constitutes an invalidation of the treaty, and would doom, if not the rest of the world, yet definitely my homeland. And I will not have that."

We descend to the court below and exit into an adjacent wing, where live, she tells me, various lesser nobility. Occasionally we stop to peek into one of the rooms along the hallway, if only to no avail. It appears that those who cannot be accounted for as present and asleep in their beds are missing altogether.

"The magicians who attend to the Cheshire," she continues deliberately, as though talking were the only thing keeping her awake, "have taken with them the majority of the scientific technology of our land. And that was no small amount. It includes the slowing of the metabolism caused by the sleeping disease, causing prolonged life. I have heard through the Quetzal underground network that by injecting small doses of an extraction of *Einführungcyrberuzgeist* blood combined with certain other chemicals a vaccination against aging is produced. We have

known for some time that this is in the possession of the Cheshire, though we can only assume that it derives from the assistance of the magicians. One of the most illuminating theories we have to date is that our magicians are acting in the capacity of the True Blanks, either as representatives of them themselves or producing cloned bodies for them to occupy. This has all been since Sam. Although he was not from my homeland, Williams was an excellent scientist and practitioner of the arcane arts, and had made a significant number of breakthroughs in these fields for us. It was because of him that we tried to storm the quantum bubble generator in Deutch Nepal. Perhaps if he had been there we would have been successful. But for some reason he thought it more appropriate to place you in that position. He had been working with an ex-bug named Ilamencryption who had quit the Bedders to follow the way of the Full Monty Coatl, another group that desires true communion with the Blanks, but who have dedicated themselves to a condition of pure pacifistic observation, preferring to interfere as little as possible that they should be able to process data overloaded by all the involved factions.”

3) the Two Sides of One

At this point I interrupt her. We have nearly reached the end of the hallway, which has been gradually circling around so that now we are almost upon a set of double stained glass doors that open to a narrow overgrown pathway leading from the garden maze behind the grand tower, in between this wing and the one that mirrors it on the opposite side. “I know Ilamencryption,” I tell her. “He’s helped me work on cases in the past. While I was involved in the investigation that led me to you even, he assisted me.”

“In what capacity?” she ponders.

“He helped me make the link between Elepso Fucto, who was the one who was supposed to have brought the immortality disk into the possession of General Tso, and the B.E.D. Bugs organization, allowing me to intercept Fucto at the connection between himself and his contact for the rest of his accumulated experiences, named Curly, who, it then turned out, had killed Fucto over possession of the rights to bear the disk to the Cheshire, whom she would have met at the Pub Rose of Thelema, where I subsequently picked up the lead that I followed to find Williams.”

“After a manner of reasoning, without Williams’s interference both before you met him, through Ilamencryption, and after, by sending you to Sunken Oceania, you never would have followed your case along this line of investigation then.”

“By a forgivable stretch of the imagination one could reach that conclusion,” I skeptically concur, feeling sympathetic toward the lagging, staggering Countess.

“So Williams must have also known that, if we failed at the generator, and how could we not with Cheshire Tso there, we would probably come back to my home.”

“Perhaps,” I shrug, finding her line of reasoning ever more precarious.

“So there must be something here that we’re supposed to discover,” she goes on, playing the detective. “Not the king or the queen, as they can’t be found...”

“Or perhaps,” I suggest out of boredom, “it is the king and queen because they can’t be found.” Her eyes light up for a passing moment. “What?” I ask.

“It is possible,” she says, the depth of her focus deepening as her gaze falls from mine. “Perhaps it is the very fact that they are missing that we shouldn’t overlook.” She looks at me again with a desperate kind of hope and I brace myself, knowing such an expression never bodes well for objectivity. “It is possible that the Cheshire magicians have been abducting the royalty for their aging experiments.”

Just then we hear movement in the hallway in the direction of the court, and retreat into one of the lesser royalty’s rooms. The resounding footfalls and muffled discussion of multiple voices comes closer, and we draw even further back into the room, kneeling on the far side of the shrouded bed. Outside the wide, clear glass doorway leading to the unweeded garden maze, snow

has fallen in thickening drifts across the leaves and the ground. In the bed beside us there is the slight stirring of a breathing body. Before we have a moment to pull back the veil and witness its slumber the door in the opposite corner of the room swings open.

Three hooded figures in dark scarlet robes enter, long, knotted chords tied at their wastes hanging to the floor, their faces concealed. I place my hand on my pistol and the Countess does likewise. They cross the room towards us, still mumbling their muffled incantations. They spread out, so that one will approach us on our side of the bed, another on the opposite side, and one will stand at the foot. The countess lifts up the sheets from the cover and looks under the bed, trying to drag on my sleeve and encourage me to hide, but it is already too late. The monk crossing to our side of the bed stops and rears back, looking up, his hood rising to reveal his face. There is only one large eyeball that takes up the entirety of his upper face and half his forehead, below which there is no nose and no mouth, only smooth skin. I take aim at him, rising slowly from my knee. Behind me the Countess stands with me, still holding onto my sleeve with one hand, her weapon out but not aimed in the other.

Noticing that one of them has ceased their communication the other two stop and look over. The one at the foot of the bed pulls his hood back slightly, revealing an identical, grey-irised countenance. When he speaks it is the corners of the eye that move, squirming around to form toothless syllables and seeping orange pus.

"Countess," It says. "We haven't seen you since you abandoned your nativity to the sleep." It pauses, then adds, "How you've grown." Its basso voice sends chills.

"I know you're here for the Cheshire," she tries to be bold, trembling slightly, "and you should know before anything gets ugly that I'm here for the Quetzal. And you're right, I'm not the helpless little girl you knew."

"Countess," the being intones scornfully, "*you* were never helpless."

The one closest to us begins to take a step forward and I cock the hammer, my arm steadily measuring the horizon between my eye line and his skull. "Call him off," I advise the tall one at the bed's end. He gestures slightly with his right hand and the being, not looking to confirm this, moves back reflexively, the fabric of his robe stirring in unseen breezes. "This isn't the situation we want to be in," I speak up, addressing them all. "You'd better just state your intentions so we can all get out of here in one piece."

"The boy knows nothing of us, does he?" the tall eye says to the Countess. "Perhaps you'd better let him know that you two are only still alive now because we have allowed it." I look to her and there is frostbite in her eyes.

"It's true," she says, not removing her fixed gaze from his, "they're immensely potent."

"How do I know this confession isn't just a hypnotism trick?" I demand.

"Even if it were it would remain sufficient evidence of its content," he chides.

Odessa looks at me with a child's expression, perhaps reliving the events of her exile. "Alright," I give in, not wanting harm to come to her in this diminished state. I slowly holster my weapon, turning my palms to them as I do so. She shoves hers into her belt as well. "We know why you're here," I tell him.

"Well, you're lucky the humorousness of your cowardice has put us in too good a mood to want to kill you for that," the cold pus has oozed down to his tunic. "Now stand aside and let us do our work."

We step off towards the wide glass doorway leading to the snow bound garden. They encircle the bed and, muttering an invocation, initiate a spiraling of visible electron currents that quickens until it consumes the resting form, disappearing it.

The hooded figures begin to move towards the door and the Countess takes a half step after them. The lead one turns around. "It's not too late for you to join us," he advises her somberly. There is a long hesitation as the still charged air settles. The countess neither blinks nor closes her dry lips. "As you wish," he concludes, and they move through the wide doorway into the stillness of the hall beyond.

After another brief pause I detach my arm from her grasp. "You were right," I reassure her. "But for what purpose?" She looks at me momentarily, then hurries out of the room after the magicians. I step out of the door behind her just in time to see her collapsing into their arms some ways further down in the direction of the court. I follow at a cautious distance behind, sometimes thinking I can overhear snatches of their conversation regarding me, referring to me as "your friend," but I cannot be sure. They exit the castle by the front entrance, and I pursue them through the choking passage of vines and mirrors. I hide behind the heavy inner door and observe them dragging her through the alcove of columns toward the front steps beyond which I see an immense craft squatting in waiting in the city square surrounded by fountains and lightly frosted with ice.

Staying behind the pillars I make my way forward until I am at the top of the stairs, where there is only one set of footprints in the crunchy crystals of snow, and see her being loaded up a staircase on one of the landing legs of the ship and into a small darkened doorway. The gear begin to retract and the ship juts up into the air where it turns about slowly, plotting its trajectory. It then screeches off through the atmosphere, leaving a saturation trail behind it and punching a hole in the thick grey clouds through which beams a broad ray of balmy golden sunlight.

I return to where the guard is still sleeping and kick one of the three legs of his tilting stool out from under him. He caves into an armored sack on the frigid pavement, righting his helmet and looking up at me with a befuddled, annoyed, yet ultimately drowsy expression. "Where do the druids take their subjects?" I demand.

"Imperial Central," he sighs, as if it is common knowledge. I give him a hand back up and he immediately collapses back into his recumbent position on the leaning stool, readjusting his majestic helmet to shade his eyes. I thank him, although he is already sunk back into sleep, and make my way off to find some sign of technology, and a hover car that I can steal.

IV.

A. Imperial Blues in D(e)ath

Imperial City is the size of Old America. It doesn't stop. It goes on forever. According to some myths it has always been there, only waiting to be filled in by technology, like natural roads that sooner or later get paved. There is no single map of it, not one that includes everything that's there. Once a holographic interface system was attempted by the Eastern Spherical Quieters involving access of compartmentalized information structures on multiple levels, but this almost immediately reached encyclopedic proportions, and has long since been subdivided into several different task chassis, one of which, including the anomalous recurrence of natural patterns based on transcendental numbers, is the department where Aziz Smithe works in Nexus 543. The project permits an almost unlimited supply of money to be made, as, even while it is being charted, the infrastructure of the city is expanding, and Cheshire Sam has his hands in most of it.

He supposedly lives here. That is, according to the majority of my sources, he is rumored to have lived here recently, or may still have an infrequented residence. But finding someone in Imperial City is like finding a cat whisker in a grass pile. No data base exists for such a task, although it is promised to be one of the subfeatures of the Global system if it were ever going to be completed. Until then the only ones who know anything about the residents are the zone police, blanketing all those they encounter or uncover fracturing their precious behavioral customs, and the very wealthy elite, who watch out for their own in the same capacity.

Finding Countess Odessa Zaob and the headquarters of the Einfühlungcyrberuzgeist scientific priesthood is going to be difficult, but not impossible. I've got one friend who may be able to help me, and that's Ilamencryption, who lives in the upper levels of a warehouse in the Western Bay area in Nexus 4440/8 district 37.

1a) Crossing All Rivers

I pilot my hover car down from the crystallizing condensation of the cirrus stretched atmosphere towards the sparkling serene seas that lap lightly at the scattered shoreline, landing gently on a rye grass knoll in the midst of a clearing in a bonsai park. The wind is blowing from the direction of my friend's apartment as if in welcome, and I take my fedora hat off, letting the wind run through my tangled hair.

In the serenity of this quarter of the world, where the technology is in balance with the beauteous bounties of nature, the troubles of my life and of my case seem far away and easily forgettable. I shed my trench coat and walk down the steeply sloping hill with my holster in the open air, smiling at the passers by, who smile back and bustle off hurriedly, their minds preoccupied with thoughts of various pursuits of pleasures, various passions. Far off, above the rolling land and the spires of glass and metal buildings, I can see the still taller towers of Imperial City scorching through the sky, opening a gaping, pitch maw through which the twinkling of distant stars is visible despite the daylight and, surrounding the base of the city's satellite stations optix linkup, the vast, outreaching relay strands of the communications network. My gaiety disperses into the ether and I return to sobriety.

I climb up a steep incline towards the warehouse. Inside is long and open, sun streaming in through the windows at the height of the rafters. His workshop runs along the far wall the second story up. It is nestled cozily inside a shell of lightproof plexalloy, a combination of iron and steel wedded by a gossamer of plastics molecules, impenetrable to any weapon, made according to a recipe he derived himself. I climb the flight of rusting stairs and give our secret knock. A pleat appears in the electromagnetically charged surface, opening into a gap and finally, as the atoms shift themselves along restructured field wavelengths, a door is opened. Standing in it is beautiful woman, garbed in a kimono, with smooth, bare legs and shining eyes.

She informs me that Ilamencryption is on the boat he rents, but that he just left, and that if I hurry to the dock, which is only a block back in the direction I just came, I might still catch him. I plop my hat on top of her head, asking her if she's going anywhere. She promises to wait around 'till we get back, and I take my leave.

I trot down to the dock where Ilamencryption is only just pulling out from the hangar. His long, brightly plated yacht sparkles in the sunlight. He is on the top deck, a large cigar clasped in his teeth, piloting the craft from the old fashioned wheel. I wave to him as he passes along the shore where I am, and he sees me. He waves back, gesturing that we should meet at the dock. He begins to turn the craft around. I walk along the plexcrete path that winds through miniature zen gardens, strewn with carefully arranged stones surrounding larger, precariously erected, tumbled boulders, so graceful and imposing they seem to breathe.

Inside the hangar encompassing the yacht docks the light reflects in from beneath the raised walls, signing the wavecaps in gold edged white, and painting the ceiling overhead with shimmering strings of greenish blue. He pulls up and parks his vehicle, its partially submerged hull actually cutting the surface and casting off froth. He smiles down at me from the bow, chomping on his weighty smoke.

I shimmy up the rope ladder, pulling it on deck after me, and turn to greet him. We embrace, heavily patting each other's broad backs, agreeing it's been too long, and that this business is to blame. He reverses the vessel's engines and we retreat into the waters, which stir a dark green before us, and on all sides.

Until we are a sufficient distance from the shore we are silent. I sit along the side enjoying the warmth of the air. Behind us the clouds rolling down off the mountains that ring the bay have piled up above the yawning ocean, refracting a glistening prism of the sun sinking low, pulsating blood red and tart white wine shades across the horizon. In the direction of Imperial Central the starry teeth of the night are already chewing away at the plush satin jetstream, digesting it to darkness.

At last he switches on the auto pilot and leaves the wooden wheel to twirl and jerk its self-maintaining course corrections, walking back to sit beside me towards the stern. We talk about my case and I bring him up to speed, occasionally looking down at the water rolling over on itself and bursting into billions of bubbles.

Much of what I tell him he seems to already know. It is old news to him already that Piscator Williams is dead, although, he tells me, they only found his body yesternight. He is also aware of the failure at the Quantum Bubble Generator, but smirks almost wizenly at the ingredients of the final input. At last I tell him about the Countess being abducted, but he knows of this as well, reminding me of the gargoyle statues I had seen everywhere and asking me if I'd noticed being watched.

"It's all been a waste," I confess to him, somewhat unsettled by his reliable omniscience. "I'm no closer to finding Sam than if I hadn't gotten involved at all."

"The reason the data seems dry," he assures me, "is because it's finally finding its natural format. It's a common fact that, as one approaches a potential conclusion, the answers become so obvious they are more easily overlooked."

"Do you think I'll meet the man himself?" I inquire, oracularly.

He refuses to grant me an answer, but promises that he will assist me in any way he can, making all of his wealth of resources available for me. I tell him of the data I had copied from Smithe's disk and stored in the bank of my hat brim. A distressed look gathers itself about him when, after asking where my hat is now, I tell him that I gave it to some girl back at his flat.

"This is utter chaos," he curses, spitting out the refuse from the nub of his cigar and heaving it over the side to entropy. "You see why I prefer computers."

We hurry back to the warehouse, only arriving at the dock as evening settles in, not seeing the ebon snake of smoke weaving up from the district. As we approach it on foot we become aware of the smell of charring plexcrete, and we step up our pace. The warehouse is a husk, its skeleton aglow with tendrils of flame dancing sharp shadows on the sides of surrounding buildings. The walls are all fallen, the windows all broke, the heat scalds our faces, the fumes make us choke.

Entering we find his workshop unmarred. As we mount the steps that lead to it the plex soles of our shoes stick to the grating. He activates the door.

Inside everything is temperate, the climate moderate and cool. The woman arises from a deep, round chair before a large, flat screen where a young children's program is displayed. He walks over to her, the melted soles of his shoes leaving spots on the floor that reflexively remodulates itself and seals over them.

"Angel," he sighs, pulling her close to him.

"What?" she asks, annoyed at the interruption.

I step inside and the door hums shut behind me. The woman looks from one to the other of us with an irritated smile. She is still wearing my hat. I wrinkle my brow glancing up at it, and she jumps to, rushing over and putting it back on my skull.

"Here," she says, charmingly, "kept it warm."

"Thanks for the head," I cannot resist saying, raising it and repositioning it.

She goes over to Ilamencryption, walks past him, and plops back down in front of the screen, the kimono loosely covering her; she holds a pillow and intently chews at her thumb. For a moment Ilamencryption plays the part of the flabbergasted lover, pretending the behavior of his companion in any way constitutes overload to his sensory apparati, then, exhaling pointedly, paces over towards me.

"Well," he says, looking around for the right machine. "Let's watch this disk that's worth a warehouse."

We inject an extrapolated duplicate into one of the myriad machines that line the walls of his shop, which doubles as his living space. As it is uploading I glance around unintrusively. A futon overhung by a small floor lamp, the large chair opposite the central viewscreen — aside from the desk chair in which he is sitting this is all the furniture I see. Everything else is the most

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cutting edge, highest technology equipment available on the black market. Although he would understandably kill anyone who did, one could call Ilamencryption an information pirate.

The disk has loaded up and begun to play on the compact screen. Some portions of it require three dimensional projection, and it occasionally creeps off the viewer's flat surface and sustains a holographic diagram. There is no sound, and very little explanatory text, only a series of geometrical forms that morph into one another through a spectrum of colors in a sequence I cannot comprehend. After it has concluded the final image hangs in the air and Ilamencryption doesn't breathe.

"Well?" I ask, shattering the silence, and only then realizing how pensive it actually was. For a long time the master decoder and classifications expert does not speak, he just stares hollowly into the construction of illumination suspended there.

"We don't exist," he says at last, quietly.

"What does it — what is it?"

"I..." he falters, turning up to look at me, "I can't explain this."

"Why don't you try."

"Why don't you try holding your breath 'till you die?" he snaps rhetorically. "You just can't. Don't even ask me. It's... it's a McGuff," he forwards, "a dingus. That's all. We have it and they want it, leave it at that."

"I'm afraid I can't. I have to get to the bottom of this."

"Then you're in over your head."

"If it's any consolation it means much less to me than it seems to mean to you. Coupled with the fact that I can't even grasp it, it's only one small piece in the puzzle. You may as well at least try to enlighten me a little."

"It's well worth my warehouse," he says dully. He gets up and crosses the room to Angel. He hands her the disk and she takes it, placing it somewhere I cannot see from my vantage, as she is concealed behind the chair. Returning to my side Ilamencryption tells me under his breath that she has a cosmetic abdomen pouch, and that that is the safest place for it. He intends to destroy it...

"Why?" I demand. "What is it?"

He turns to me, blank eyed.

"You have to go to Imperial City."

1b) Vectory

I stick around for a couple more days, sleeping in the enormous chair while for long hours Ilamencryption and his girl embrace noisily. By the end of it I am very tired, having been disturbed by fitful dreams. Aziz Smithe contacts us. It seems that his fiancé has been arrested for a possession charge of which he is actually guilty, although, in a highly agitated state, he only alludes to this with paranoiac subterfuge. He believes the Cheshire to be behind the entire operation, and bemoans at length having ever gotten involved with the Bugs in the first place, though he admits it is through them that he has tracked down Ilamencryption, whom he ashamedly begs for assistance. He wants us to hack the Nexus criminal records data base and have her prematurely released from the psychiatric hospital where she is being held for detox. While this is entirely possible Ilamencryption makes it clear that Smithe is far too hot to help for money alone, as this would only, if they are involved, bring the Cheshire down on us. We are already under heavy surveillance from an unknown party — those responsible for burning down the warehouse — and it seems fairly obvious to all of us that, even though Smithe himself is ultimately responsible, the Cheshire are undoubtedly involved. Rather, Ilamencryption proposes an alternate plan that would lure any other involved parties out into the open, where they could at least then be confronted directly, and possibly expedited.

Smithe agrees, after a great deal of explanatory coaxing. He will perform the hack himself according to a preagreed set of instructions which Ilamencryption will dictate. We, meanwhile, will monitor the information net activity surrounding his workstation. If there is any anomalous transference we will contact Smithe by a phone call which he is told he need not answer. This phone call will follow a series of reroutings and activate a tracer program. As whoever caused the anomaly is tracking us, through an asymptote of shadow links, we will be tracking them, and hopefully our code will outlast theirs, at which point we will terminate our transmission.

Smithe directly points out that none of this immediately releases his lady from the shrink clink. Ilamencryption patiently demonstrates to Smithe that, after the responsible party has been flushed out, it is likely that they themselves will release her in an effort to reciprocate their exposure towards Smithe. At this point, however, if all goes according to plan, Smithe should not have to worry about getting her home alright, as we will be busy distracting the interceptor by hacking them at their source, here in Imperial City, the source of everything, especially malevolence.

All of this is worthless to me, but Ilamencryption advises me to stay around if for no better reason than to find out whether the Cheshire have gotten or are trying to get the data from Smithe that is on our copy of the immortality disk. While they are the most likely candidate, Ilamencryption points out, it could just as easily be the Quetzal seeking closure on the events at the bubble generator, or the BED Bugs trying to regain favor with the Cheshire, or even the Einfuhlungcyberuzgeist mages acting on information they extracted from Odessa. In any of these events our ultimate goal should be that Smithe's research should be destroyed to prevent these factions from falling into possession of a complete copy, which would give them, as Ilamencryption puts it, indescribable power. But what about the BED bugs, I ask him. If it is them can't he find out from inside their organization through his connections and, doing this, even hinder their interference? What of his friends inside?

"They're not my friends," he says, holding up the pouch slime slick disk. "This is my friend."

Surely at least it is no coincidence that, only three days after Williams's body is discovered, Smithe's fiancé is taken into custody. Ilamencryption concurs that he had, himself, worked with Williams, but that they agreed General Tso is only following a routine that hadn't accounted for the immediate usage of the information Smithe had sold him, probably serving as both its carrier and the destroyer of all other competing factions that would come to the conclusion that it had desirable applications, but all the while acting blindly, as it were, for Cheshire Sam.

The agreed upon time comes and Smithe begins the hack, as predicted for him by Ilamencryption. The best advantage of this plan is that Smithe, being both a coward and no professional, will take no short supply of time in completing the procedure. We sit back in the West Bay and watch the encoded sequences rain down on our screen representing the activity of the information net in his vicinity. It projects itself holographically out from the viewer, taking the form of a three dimensional coordinate grid, with Aziz at the origin, and the raw data streaming around him in blocks and along currents of relationship within these.

Presently there is the bright flashing source pattern of a trace program that enters from below the grid. The prowler moves from block to block, sending out seekers along the criss-crossing flow shards of conduction, a jelly fish scouring the subsurfaces of the sea inside a coral reef. It darts about and strikes out, and begins narrowing its search down towards the origin. "It could be anyone," Ilamencryption tells me quietly, as though not wishing to disturb with the volume of his voice the activities of the creatures performing in his networked aquarium, "even the zone P.D." When it moves into the central cyberblock and begins analyzing the data flows including those deriving from Smithe's terminal Ilamencryption picks up the phone and punches a single button. A long, multidigit connection series triggers, and the origin point flashes in sequence as the communications current fluctuates. The blue task processing halo disappears

immediately from the principle source, even while the organically shaped and oscillating trace program moves onto that fixed center.

The point at the core continues to flicker and the tracer takes on its property, reining in its individual analysis chords and beginning to emit a spherical non-localized search ripple of expanding shells. "Here we go," my friend mumbles, punching some keys on the interface console. The view of the data cube pulls back and a flashing point appears in the upper left quadrant. As the ripples reach out, nearing our first shadow link, Ilamencryption reassures me, "they probably won't even connect it to Smithe if we're lucky, just think they happened along somewhere in the middle of an infinity of associated phantom feedback knots of which Smithe's hack was only one of hundreds of thousands and, if we're really lucky and break the whole chain before they get back to us, they might just conclude it was all just some cheese shooter's tesseractual net virus or an anomaly in the weather of the perpetual data current restructuring." He is already a little excited, the chase being as good to him as an actual firefight.

The ripples reach the first shadow link point and a data stream line is attributed between the primary tracer and this subplotting, from which another set of enlarging shells unfolds. The view pans back again and shows our second ghost connection hiding innocuously in the lower fourth quadrant, a simple brighter blip surrounded by the pulsating shifting of the system. It takes a little longer for the second link to be found, as the ripples have to pass back over the origin, and are encompassing a much greater quantity of cyberspace. When it finally discovers it though, undergoing the adaptive chain process and shell expansion sequence it has already repeated, and our overview creeps back to a new vantage, coquettishly revealing the next false target, Ilamencryption's expression darkens. "There's more there," he says, in a deep tone, his brow furrowed, eyes shadowed by the terminal.

The central trace speck and its bent outreaching chord are shimmering through a spectrum of shades, indicating the presence of multiple programs acting through the same junction sprocket. "I'm turning on more machines," he advises, coasting about on his swivel chair and bringing several more terminals of various sizes and shapes on line, the room coming alive with a soft static hum and an array of blinking lights on keyboards and control pads. The same map jumps into display on three more view screens, all rotating in synchronicity with each other and displaying the same situation, merely color coded for the carrier current discrepancies. "There's three more here," he says, "maybe four..."

The original trace is called up on a larger screen and slowly pivots about the origin as the trace program continues. Some of the smaller trace program functions are moving much faster, and have already skipped through ten or twenty of our ghost links. The largest one is displayed in blue, the smaller two in red and green, and the fastest in yellow, according to processing frequency. Ilamencryption rolls back and forth from computer to computer, his hands disappearing in a gravelly blur across the surfaces of the interface consoles, trying to set up multiple courses for the different tracers to follow, doubling the number of shorter term links by coordinate inversion. "Well, they know we're not the weather," he grumbles.

The smaller points begin shimmering shells as well, rechecking the new phantom corrections, which only lead through one or two other ghosts before dying, and provide little delay. As they are concluded the backup shadows blink out and the whole cube starts lighting up with explosions of task randomized color as thousands of links are burned out of existence. "Well," says Ilamencryption, "they know we're not a virus."

The yellow centered cube has unfolded to six expansions, the red and green to three and the blue one twice its original scope. The yellow block begins blinking red and the red and green begin flashing yellow. "And now they're closing in," Ilamencryption grits his teeth and says with agitated irony. He rolls over to the yellow one and calls up in a subprojection a backup program of randomizing links, and the yellow cube flashes yellow. He transfers the programs over to the red and green screens as well and they cease blinking and return to their green data stream status. "I think what we're looking at here," he says, rolling over to me and gesturing to the blue, red, green

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and yellow holocubes sequentially, “is the Zone P.D., the B.E.D. and the quetzal undergrounds, and the Einfuhlungcyrberuzgeist priests. I’m not completely certain — this last one could easily be the Cheshire....” The yellow cube begins flashing red again. Ilamencryption only has time to say, “they’ve decoded the randomization program,” before the first shockwave shakes the workshop. It is followed presently by a second and, even sooner, a third and fourth.

“That’s heavy artillery,” I comment. “Virtual particle Schwarzschild anti-shuttle guns if my ears ring right.” More concussions rock the impregnable deck and Ilamencryption rises from his chair onto widely parted, unsteady legs.

“Nice chop to them,” he adds, making his way over to the consoles, where the red and green centered cybercubes are now also blinking red. “Not my finest piece of work all in all,” he sighs, hanging up the still ringing telephone. Another shot quakes the compartment and the computer banks sway. He looks at me warily.

“Let me get out of your hair,” I offer. “I think my ride to Imperial City’s here.”

“Well,” he switches off the computer banks, which are now showing all clear data streams. “It’s been nice having you. Don’t let business keep you away so long the next time.” I agree, walking with him over to the invisible egress. He touches the wall and it begins to reform, parting slowly. Outside, through the crispy crust of his warehouse and across the street, we can see two strands of smoke rising from the open windows of another similar edifice. The artillery has ceased. He pats me on the back. “Burn down my home again anytime,” he smiles, as I step over the threshold, which he begins resealing immediately behind me.

I make my way down the staircase and start out across the cratered plexcrete floor. From the source of the cannon fire a small contingency of shrouded individuals crosses over towards me, their ebon red robes drifting through the rising smoke and tassels trailing in the gathered debris of their accomplishments.

I outstretch my arms to show them I constitute no threat.

The lead one draws near and throws back his hood. It is General Tso, the fat old bald man, with a mechanical eyepiece over the wound where I shot him.

Without batting an eye at his alarming resurrection I smile, extend my arms towards him and say, “well, General. Look what the Cheshire dragged in.”

2a) Paradise House

There is no sky in Imperial City. The buildings stretch upward, through the atmosphere, turning into plexsteel reinforced transport cables bound to a geosynchronous space station. As our ship skims into the gaping framework even the strands of electromagnetic communications current cobwebbing the electrified atmosphere are obscured by the ominous and overcrowded edifices. We sink into a darkness that is spangled with signs and lit windows. Traffic zooms past us in all directions everywhere around, as fierce as the buzzing of hornets in their hive. Inside the ship the General sits back saying nothing, the gyroscopic cabin’s single light shining downwards casting deep shadows across his face and glinting off his naked crown. The other druidic beings line the narrow room, sitting on a bench, looking down in somber silence. Behind Tso the droids in the cockpit spastically gesticulate their armature, maintaining constant activity on all the surrounding control pads, and beyond them the front portal, where the city zooms by. Huge, arcing architecture curves around and we are guided along causeways lit by guidelights. Caverns flex beneath us where the bustle of open air business is conducted on gravity repulsive platforms lined with hundred story tall pillars notched along by leveled alcoves housing ozone conditioners. They dissolve in a blur as we ascend towards an enormous pyramidal building supporting an enclosed and hovering lightsource as luminous as the sun. In the grotto of surrounding facets where shadows are sweepingly etched and then punctured with a million hues the false sun glints off the cold, dark plexiron walls, reflecting watery obtrusions. We draw in

close towards the pyramid and coast upward along its side, then pull away and orbit once, turning around to penetrate a dimly glowing, anonymous hangar.

We disembark from the craft and the General leads, still not having spoken one word. The monks part that I should walk in their midst, and form rows of two on each side before and behind me as we begin filing out of the bay. We progress through a long series of corridors that are low ceilinged and broad, the walls of a flat beveled stone and the ceiling and floor of grey washed opaline marble. Hemispheres of soft milky light slowly pulsate along the walls at eye level and alternating intervals, leaving faded puddles of dull glow around them. Everywhere we go trembles gently with a distant humming. After making a number of turns I realize we are climbing a very gradual incline.

At last we reach an isolated door along the side of the hallway. It is marked by a colorful display panel which the General depresses with his index finger, and it is scanned. The door slides open rapidly as he steps to the side; the robed figures retreat with their hoods downward, implying a clear path between me and the door.

2b) The Cap Stone of Hiram and Goliath (or For a Fee Phi Foe Fumbles)

I enter, the passage sealing behind me. I ascend a compressed set of stairs that are unevenly spaced to a holographic field and step through. Immediately turning around once I have entered I see the doorway is completely invisible among the rest of the wall. The room is bright, and I face it slowly. The wall to the right is one giant window, reaching up to the several story high ceiling, and the wall opposite is likewise. One of them leans inward acutely, overlooking the bazaar grotto outside. The other leans outward obtusely, looking down on a courtyard concealed within the pyramidal structure. Before the acute window is a desk. Around the room there are some holographic statues and busts on pedestals. From a high backed chair behind the desk a small child in a black robe, his hood thrown back revealing his bald shaven head, approaches me. He walks up to me and, smiling warmly, with patient eyes, takes me by the hand, leading me over to a chair across from his.

"It is good to see you again, detective. I trust your journey here was pleasant?"

"Pleasant... enough," I grumble, readjusting myself in the seat.

"I see," says the child, stroking forward the smooth skin of his skull, which shines golden in the bright light from the artificial sun just beyond the windows. "You don't recognize me. Well, that is to be expected.... I had hoped by sending a body along to fetch you I could cushion the blow. You see, detective, I am General Tso."

A look of amazed confusion cannot but cross my face. He smiles wisely, then half way turns his chair around to gaze out the window at the commerce in the market place below. The look on his face as he begins his explanation is one of bemusement, perhaps with me and my concerns, or perhaps with his entire plight.

"When one is cloned," he says distantly, "one must be sure to be so as one of a set. There are any number of random variables involved," he sighs, looking downward momentarily, "and these must be accounted for statistically. If there were only two things that could go wrong one would have to make six clones, to account not only for occurrence, but also occurrence in combination. If there were six discrepancies in process, one would have to make forty two trials simultaneously to compensate. So the number made, you see," he turns his head towards me and gestures, "is always $n^2 + n$. The number of random variables involved however, is itself a random — a factor of the particular genetic makeup of the DNA sequences of the individual, no two being completely unflawed, and no two identical. Now some of these," he turns back to gazing off out the window, "can be corrected. Others multiply. The results therefore are always varied widely. The body I sent for you that I thought would be familiar to you was little more than a mindless husk. I, on the other hand, you could say, am the perfect cookie. My appearance is based on the presence of

hormone release correcting mechanisms in my hypothalamus and pituitary in the form of the pubic follicle growth gene. I age rapidly to a certain extent, and then after that the mechanism slows, and I proceed to age at a regular rate, determined by the typical processes of hormone production. My age rate is prolonged, however, as a result of the combination of this with the presence in the cellular reproductive nuclei of my pons, cerebellum and medulla oblongata juncture of the vagus nerve with the gene determining finger and toe nail growth, which, for some reason," he smirks, "causes more rapid growth on one side of the nail than the other. Thus, even if the genetic defects allowing disease and decrepitude in old age persist at the slowed rate function of the follicle gene, they are outgrown and outlived by the reproduction of healthy cells fostered by the nail gene." He pauses.

"But now let me speak of cause and affect. To understand the cause of something is not the same as to understand the affect. If one understands the affect, one can only seek to encourage it or deter it. If one understands the cause, however, one can determine how that particular affect arises, or unlock the ability to evoke multiple, differing potential affects. I will speak of death, for example. The opposite of death, if it is defined as the ceasing of conscious functioning in a physical form, is what most would call life. Yet we have discovered patterns indicating the presence of awareness even in what is classically considered inert matter. Therefore the exoteric biological system clearly falls short in its struggles toward a solution pertaining to this process's cause. The esoteric biological system, which is the practice of the Einfühlungcyberuzgeist mages is a little more complete, and the exoteric metamaterialist approach of the Cheshire more consummate still.

"Therein lies the value for our organization of the data contained on the worthless piece of plastic consumed in the quantum bubble generator's systems recycling delay. I hope this satisfies your desire to remain up to speed on the situations that involve you." He turns back toward me, now more severe, seeming more like his old self, somehow more mature.

"I'm not speaking with you until you release Smithe's fiancé from custody."

"Done. He was going to be killed before the disk was destroyed, but now it seems his more immediate services will be needed. It was thought that the punishment/reward system would serve us best on him, and his wife was only being held temporarily to discipline him for having made contact with you. He and his wife will presently be brought here to Imperial City and he will be given a substantial pay increase to concentrate his research on this particular subject."

"And the Countess. I want her released."

"What you want is irrelevant, dear boy. You're here to meet the same fate as she, and you're in no position to bargain about it otherwise."

I remove my gun from its holster and level it at his head. "All this mechanical reproduction has really lowered your value on human life," I observe.

"Quite right," he rejoins, "feel free to fire. Furthermore the walls are auditory reinforced, so you needn't worry over being heard." I drop my aim to his shoulder and squeeze the trigger. The bullet leaves my gun and flies up at the ceiling, which is hidden in shadow, and disappears in a dense and muffled boom. The young General smiles at me, his head cocked to one side. "Gravity," he muses. "The weakest force...."

"Take me to her then. I'll take my chances with your schemes."

"As you wish," he sighs, and depresses a switch on his desk. The monks led by the un-General file in through the invisible door and take hold of me roughly by the elbows and shoulders. They forcibly abscond me out into the hallway and shove me along further in the direction of the artificial sun. I holster my weapon when I can, and they do not prevent me, knowing it's uselessness. Tso's shell brings up the rear this time, and I am pushed out to the front of the group.

The difference in the light of Cheshire Tso's office and the hallway is such that it takes my eyes a long time to adjust, and for a while I am led along blind. When they finally begin to reacclimate there is a bright yellow light coming from the end of the tunnel, which has turned

around several corners along its climb, each hallway growing shorter as we near the end. Columns have appeared to support the roof, or perhaps to hold it down, opposite the small glowing orbs. They pulse a quiet throbbing hum, emitting gravitational waves that stabilize the corridor. A holo-door.

I am in a small antechamber of a much larger room. The walls are holographically illuminated quartz and the room is slowly rotating. The forms in the walls shift like the wind and assume all manners rapidly shuffling through an identifications database before scanning me in as a new specimen. As it finishes doing so the room completes its rotation. The monks and the shell have stayed out in the hall and I can see them upside down now, seeming to stand on the ceiling, only briefly, before regrouping and moving away. The doorway on the other side of the small closet opens and white sleeved arms reach in with cold hands to grab me.

2c) Wisdom's Aura's Room

I am in a huge, golden room, turned upside down, the ceiling of which, that should be the floor, is a broad observation dome supported by an array of plexmarble pillars. The floor, which should be the ceiling, is transparent plexsteel revealing the scorching surface of the artificial sun. The Countess is strapped down to a chair in the center of the room that is suspended by a collection of wires from the ceiling. Beside her there are several bags of liquid attached to her intravenously, sending fluids in and out, and her eyes are kept open with lensless goggles that spray her intermittently with a clear scalene solution. A few monkish beings populate the room, garbed in white robes lined jet, their hoods thrown back. Their faces, like their counterparts in the castle, are merely enormous, single eyes, without nose or mouth. Their heads are bald and their ears surmounted with an additional whorl.

Two of them hold me on either side while three surround the Countess. They are incising her throat with laser scalpels on either side and, as I am led up to her, they yank harshly on her numb flesh, pulling it back to her nose, revealing the bare musculature beneath, and her naked glistening teeth. They replace it with a graft of more aged flesh, and seal it with their cauterizers. The skin begins to writhe with life, remolding itself to its new environment, and regresses its age, growing younger. The scientists mumble off to the side. The Countess looks at me with fear in her eyes. Tears run down her cheeks, coursing along the wrinkles of her new flesh and then running freely as they remesh and disappear. They unstrap her from the chair and thrust her into a cage which they then raise along a chain suspended from the roof. They force me down into the chair and apply the plexleather straps.

Before they can restrain my right arm I unholster my weapon and strike one of them across the face, concaving his pupil. The pores around the socket open wide as he bellows, his hands raising to cover himself. I aim above the head of the second and blast. The bullet arcs upward at first, before barreling downward in the direction of the fake sun, tearing through his brain tissue and burying itself in his torso before exploding, bathing me with his blood and tissue. I unstrap my left arm and turn to seek out the Countess. They have activated a machine that is running a nullifying current through the bars of her cage, spasming the puttyish skin of the lower half of her face, and two of them man another console that opens a portal in the floor revealing the heat and direct light of the sun. As I unstrap my legs they begin to channel a mentally actuated proton pillar that weaves its way up through the square in the floor towards her cage. They stand around it and circle, chanting, their hands joined, coaxing it to rise. As it does so it strengthens, and, nearing the cage, sends off magnetic currents connecting the proton surge to the antiproton field. The cage begins to swing like a pendulum, and to spin, upsetting her, and she falls to her side on its floor. I free myself from the chair just as the serpentine swell joins with the swirling dark field. I race toward them, but the hole in the floor has increased the gravity in the room, and each step is more difficult than the last.

The matter-antimatter interface completes itself and the cage begins to implode, the bars dissolving now into a womb of raw energy surrounding her form, her eyes turning black. She is suspended there in the midst of it, at the apex, or rather the nadir, of the writhing stream of reverse orienting particles. They begin to accelerate, giving off incredible heat, and increase their entropy, filling the room with sparks and bolts of random, ionized electricity, photons and electrons spinning off wildly. The monks begin to change also, glowing brighter, seeming to become one with their white robes, emitting a blinding radiance.

Remembering what Williams had told me of fact and fiction I take aim at the Countess and discharge a cartridge. The bullet strikes the energy flow in its center and detonates, upsetting the force particle exchange. The beam inverts on itself and turns upon the priests, splitting into a scattering of dark fringed virtual proton rays that connect with them where they stand and fry them alive. They ignite and crumple, screaming over the roar of the scorching strong nuclear waves, going up in white hot flames that consume them instantly. The proton flare curls back on itself and retreats through the hole, bringing the Countess down with it. I wade towards her as she plummets and extend my arms over the cavity. She falls into them with increased weight and I lean back heavily to prevent us both from being swallowed up by the pull of the sun. I kneel down with her on the floor as the console begins to automatically close the plexsteel panel, the timer for the experiment having triggered by the presence of no further Zeeman activity in the room as measured by the sensory detectors. I crouch over Odessa, stroking her singed hair.

She is not breathing. I check her pulse along the carotid artery of her neck, but cannot find it. Her blackened eyes have rolled back in their sockets. The skin of her lips is still squirming though, and convulses about on her face as though under a sustained electric current. It forms words, tugging desperately at the tissues of her neck and her vocal chords.

"I'm not dead," it says. "I've seen it. I've seen it. I've seen it." The skin itself seems to have developed sentience. I level my gun above it and shoot. The differential rotation of the bullet stops at her uvula. It splatters her everywhere in a red cloud.

I make my way to the rotating chamber. Looking back I see that where it collapsed into the sun the anti-matter tainted stream has opened a single, non-paired sunspot. Its darkness grows across the bright face of the sphere. I leave how I came.

2d) The Changing Mind

In the hallway the glowing orbs are blinking red. The dull hum of the gravity sustainers is washed over periodically by the shrieking of a frenzied alarm claxon. The building begins to tremble as I stumble down the hall, bouncing off the walls.

Beyond the General's doorway there is a flurry of activity. Monks in red and white robes race about, some with their hoods fallen back, clamoring past one another and passing snippets of hearsay. I see a small child in their midst, tugging at their loose sleeves and trying futilely to instill order. As I approach some of the monks are hurrying past me, but take no notice. The General stops and slowly turns.

"You," he says glumly. "I should have known."

"What's going on?" I demand, looming over him.

"Our artificial sol is turning into a black hole. There appears to be some disagreement as to whether or not evacuation is called for."

"I'm gone. You want to come with me? You did let me live in Limbo, afterall."

"No, although I am aware of that error. I must stay here regardless of the consequences. Our research is far too important to abandon. If, however, we are, by some miracle, not destroyed, you can expect me to personally find you and correct my past generosity. What you have cost us today far outweighs the humor you gave us to only briefly prolong our existence. Laughter is, I understand, the best medicine, second only to death."

"You know," I point out, "for a kid you sure talk alot." I scoop him up under my arm and tote him with me towards the docking bay. He hollers and kicks, failing to attract the attention of his more focused, less organized cohorts. It is all I can do to hold onto him the whole way there without wanting to give him a bonk on the head.

There is a ship, like the one we arrived in, parked in the hangar. Monks are scrambling about it, up and down the loading ramp, stumbling over each other. I pull my gun out and fire into them. One falls across the ramp, half on and half off, his shoulder exploding and sinew hanging down across the pistons. They scatter, running off in all directions, some taking cover inside the vessel. A few are armed and begin to return fire. The building trembles as above the sun is consumed in the pooling anti-matter flame, contacting and terminating every particle it touches and doubling the spin of each to square the gravitational force emitted.

Bullets whiz by around me, striking the plexsteel walls of the hangar leaving tiny fires that pock the surface. I hit one of them at the top of the ramp in the knee and he collapses, rolling down the ramp leaving a blood trail. Another stands up from behind some unloaded shipping crates and I manage to hit him in the pelvis, severing him in twain. He falls across the crates and his forever parted ocular pores disgorge a dwindling river of black blood. One more crouches beneath the ship, cowering behind the landing gear and, seeing his fellows dispatched, decides to flee. He makes the mistake of pausing for a moment to keep himself covered as he does so and I discharge a shot in front of him, striking the other front landing strut. He stops, unsure as to whether he should keep going or turn back, and I end him there.

I charge across the now cleared deck towards the ship, the General under my arm still writhing and promising revenge, having grown at least half an inch in the time it took to finish off the fray, and race up the slippery ramp into the ship. Some monks are squatting in the corners of the long and narrow cabin, I wave to the doorway with my gun and they run out. "Alright," I growl at the little General, sealing the ramp, "how do you fly this thing?" He stands there stoically and crosses his arms, looking up and off with closed eyes. I grab him up by the armpits and buckle him into the bench, returning to the cockpit and finding a green lit indicator switch. A holographic projector activates displaying known courses surrounding the building. I select one by touching it in the air and the landing gear begin to retract. A shockwave issues through the hull of the complex, dust raining down from the ceiling of the hangar. The ship backs out into the diminishing daylight of the square and comes about to face the emptiness of the architectural grotto. We speed off into the skyways of Imperial City and enter a causeway. I guide the ship with the holographic interface until we have exited the city's domain and then lock in a course for the Western Bay area. With one eye on the General I rest in the chair.

3a) Conscious Electron Binary Encoding, Transmission Synchronization and Hilbert Spatial Assemblage

It is dawn before the ship gets to Ilamencryption's. I park it near the dock where his rented yacht is stored and tie the General's wrists behind his back. We walk the three blocks to the warehouse, where Ilamencryption and Angel are working on installing new plexsteel wall panels. They are welding, wearing overalls and masks with hard hats. They are happy to see me, and help with the General. We all go inside the impregnable workshop. I describe to them the events that transpired, and we keep a news channel from Imperial Central on in the background to see if they report on it. As I am finishing my narrative a story comes on, with live footage from the scene. Ilamencryption smirks wisely, guessing how perturbing this exposure must be to the introverted magicians.

The artificial sun above the pyramid has collapsed into a minuscule black hole, a hovering dark orb with a distorted corona where its gravitational field warps the light rays that surround it. The pyramid is undamaged, unrevelatory of the experiments going on inside. There are no interviews with employees, and it is attributed to a phenomenon of information weather, an

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overload of data causing feedback in the solar reuptake turbines. The reporter is cheerful and stupid, and skips explaining how this alleged malfunction would have led to its apparent result.

We all lean back self congratulatorily, but it is the General who is the first to boast. “Perhaps if you had allowed me to stay you could have caught Sam. He was there then, you realize. He was in the observatory room just beyond the golden dome of the operations room. He always attends the experiments. He takes a great interest in them. And if you had passed me by, perhaps your timing would have been different by just enough that — but alas! Now we’ll never know! He’ll have increased his security after that debacle. I had personally brought you in, baited you with the Countess, as a surprise for him. You are only such a small thorn in his paw, afterall. But now there will be no way to repeat it — your getting that close to him, I mean. If you had killed him, I would have benefited, as would many of the other Cheshires in our organization. We would have been happy to have looked the other way. But, as I say, the chess board has been completely reset now.”

“You’re lying,” I inform him.

“Certainly not. Allow me to reiterate. The fact of the Countess’s demise? It’s exclusion from the news story is easy enough to account for. Her autopsy will be fixed, so there is no reason to worry over our experiments coming to light. Even so, her death could be accounted for in connection with the solar turbine accident. So why exclude her? The answer is obvious. To protect the secret presence of Cheshire Sam. If there were a death admitted at this time it would only lead to further investigation by the Zone Police, which would reveal two things — the first is, simply, that there is nothing illegal going on inside the Einfühlungcyrberuzgeist metaphysics research institute, a fact of which, I might add, we are quite proud and would readily admit without impositions. The second would be the presence of Cheshire Sam, which, while also not illegal, would cause him considerable financial unrest, pressure and upset as his competitors made prey of his conflicting interests.

“Naturally the only logical solution, and the one I’m sure you’ll see carried out, is to wait a few days and then dispose of the Countess’s body in a dumpspactor somewhere in another Nexus, placing her clearly out of the vicinity, even if her time of death were still traced and found to coincide with this incident. You see,” he says, turning to Ilamencryption, “we Cheshire do not fear the media, but treat them with all the respect one should give to a finely tuned weapon of mass destructive capability. The leakage of this small piece of data would, afterall, inflict damage on both sides of the issue — not only unveiling Sam, but placing, by ballistics match and recent connections cross reference, you at the scene of the crime, as, if my memory recalls the viewer’s recording accurately, something of a posthumous murderer?”

“Why don’t you give us some really useful information?” Angel says, surprising me. “Why don’t you tell us why you’re all into what you are anyway?”

“My darling I wouldn’t grant you the time of day,” the General reclines even further in the desk chair where he is bound. Ilamencryption leaps forward as unexpectedly as Angel’s question and unsheathes a serrated dagger from his boot, leaning in close to the General’s young throat and holding it with an extremely flexed grasp against the shallow throbbing that dwells there.

“But you’ll tell me, won’t you? If you don’t I’ll just respect your training so much I think I’ll have no choice but to salute.” The General squirms uncomfortably.

“Alright,” he exhales at last, “but you must untie me. I’m in the body of a small child. It’s not as though I’m going anywhere.”

We concur and free him from his bonds. He rubs irritably at his wrists. He looks around at us. Ilamencryption and Angel are sitting on the futon, and I am leaning back in the immense chair before the information network viewscreen, which is still activated. The General picks up a control pad from the desk top that rings the workshop and Ilamencryption bristles. The General waves a flat hand, palm down, to assuage him. He continues moving the small device about in his hands, as though merely to have something to touch for comfort, perhaps as a reflex of youth.

“We believe that consciousness is its own cause. This theory goes far beyond our station in

this life, but it is the result of a luxury we have earned by improved survival. By practicing compromise where others practice savagery, and encouraging economic competition, which is easy both to manipulate and to control, rather than open violence, which is entirely unpredictable and founded on the most well funded weapons technologies anyway, not to mention information gathering capabilities. This civilization, this gift of the Cheshire, has earned us quite a scandalous reputation. Our society is viewed as dealers with the demonic. Our culture is rejected altogether, which we have accepted, in the spirit of our compromising and placid nature, as merely a fact of coexistence with the less comprehensive. We have made due, and thrived, in spite of being seen as the harbingers of any number of erroneous slanders and well-intended apocrypha. We have merely floated along on our little platform of unwelcome livelihood, our lips tightly sealed lest our fraternity of equality and luminous curiosity be persecuted as anathema. In this condition we have made what humble breakthroughs we can, neither upsetting the balance of our station, which rises steadily upon the sea of high finance which we have always done our share to foster, nor generating more than an expected and containable amount of disturbance on those waters. And for this we are scorned, nothing more.

“It is tradition among the Cheshire that this core idea of consciousness is not inherent to us, but was given us by the same source that instilled in us the desire for a relative amount of behavioral structure. It is said that guidance of any kind, although there are many varied methods that can be organized in differing ways according to desired affect, encourages the growth and well-being of consciousness, and that the mind itself is alike a plant given to our species to tend.

“While this belief, or a similar one, is shared by both us and our some time detractors, it is disagreed by them amidst themselves what purpose this could serve. The Cheshire differ in our pursuits, for, where they look blindly forward, we look over what already is, and are deeply enlightened. Where they would treat it as if it were a disease, we treat it as though it were a baby. Where they strike at its branches and fancy themselves kings of the air, we dig at the roots and till the fertile soil, turning over new seeds. This is the way it is, and this is the way it always has been. It is not the way it always will be. Understanding of a thing implies awareness of its opposite. The opposite of consciousness is death, and we struggle, by finding the cause of consciousness, to eradicate death. Now had they so noble a pursuit in mind with their studies and sporadic conflicts, the varying factions involved along the way would immediately earn our deeper respect. Sadly they have not, and are therefore all as good as lost as we are concerned. They are good only as messengers, or for what little entertainment they can provide. But we are superior....”

He has been widdling unnoticed with the wiring of the device in his hand and now points it at the large view screen behind me. A security camera inside the pyramid complex jumps to life in black and white and he begins running toward the screen. As he passes me he touches his first two fingers to his forehead. I reflexively stick my foot out to trip him, but it is too late. He begins to dissolve into a pattern of binarily organized electrical impulses and, as he becomes horizontal across my foot, falls into the view screen and appears in the room on the other side. He turns to face the camera, reassembling himself from pure electrons, and makes a small show of dusting himself off. We turn about and look confused at one another, helpless to do anything more. “How did he do that?” somebody asks in awe.

After a moment we relax somewhat, still unsure of ourselves slightly. Ilamencryption is the first to speak. “Well we got the last laugh anyway,” he says.

“Tso had no idea how close he came to getting the immortality data,” I agree.

Just then the air cracks electrically with the sound of a horse whip. It seems to charge as the electron activity surges. On the other side of the camera the General looks up. His lips move but the voice comes from the popping pockets of ionized oxygen around us. “I do now,” he smiles, and bursts into regales of chilling guffaws.

For a long time there is silence in the room. Angel crosses over and switches off the viewer while Ilamencryption studies the modified control pad. I sleep there that night.

3b) Angelic Grimoire

In the morning, still exhausted, we discuss the next step in my investigation. I hadn't planned on coming back here so soon, but Ilamencryption's seemed to be the only safe place to interrogate the General over an extended period that was still in the vicinity of Imperial Central. I had intended to question him regarding the role Sam actually played in Cheshire Incorporated, but apparently I was to remain in the dark on that score for the present. I propose the idea of returning to the pyramid complex of the Einfuhlungcyrberuzgeist scientists, but it is agreed that this would be too difficult to do incognito and too risky to survive otherwise. The alternative is to contact Smithe and pressure him into acting as a mole for us in the organization. We are in a very good position to do this, but the Cheshire are in a better one for reprisal if his actions were uncovered, which, due to his sloppy handling of the affairs of his personal life, would be only a matter of time. Nonetheless it is at least worth contacting him, if for no more practical purpose than to find out if Tso has been true to his word and released Smithe's fiancé. It is possible that, in this conversation, we can discretely convey to the none too subtle Smithe that we are still in possession of a copy of his data, and convince him of its value in such a way as to, at least, sabotage his further relations with the Cheshire / Einfuhlungcyrberuzgeisters by inflating his ego.

The second day of my stay we set about doing this. The monitor proceeds ringing through and he answers groggily from his marriage bed.

"Do you know how dangerous it is for me for you to be contacting me?" he demands, and, answering our already moot intentions, adds, "do you know how important I am?" He turns the monitor around as if to conceal the conversation from his sleeping spouse. "Why, the Zone Police alone —" he begins, immediately exaggerating the conspiratorial nature of the call. Ilamencryption loses his patience immediately, being accustomed to dealing only with other professionals or with uninformed clients for very brief periods, followed by heavy drink.

"No one is monitoring this call," he spouts. "Would you like me to tele you the visual readout for network activity? This isn't a hack; there isn't even jurisdiction. We've called to talk about the disk you were trying to sell to the Cheshire."

"I don't know what you're talking about," he begins, whispering. I pull the viewer around so he gets a good look at my face, so he knows there will be no fooling.

"Smithe, this disk," I explain, looking around to feed on his sense of drama. "It's very important." I myself don't even know how important, but this is really irrelevant. "It's hot information, and I'm speaking to you as your friend here. You can get alot more for it from other sources. There's even dissent amongst your buyers that can conceivably increase its value. But you have to act on this. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity. If you take the first deal you're offered, well —" I trail off with a distasteful expression. Ilamencryption repositions the view screen.

"What he's saying is true. If you think you're in the big leagues now you should wait and see what the offer grows to if you play hard to get a little while. These are really big time players you're dealing with here, Aziz. They're used to greedy techies and they're in no short supply of potential funding. You could be looking at a much bigger piece of the pie than you'd at first even imagined."

"I'm not sure I understand," Smithe whines reluctantly. "What's in it for you anyway? Why are you —" he lowers his rising voice, "why are you telling me this?"

"Smithe," I grumble, yanking the viewer around again playfully, "We're you're friends. We've done you two favors, and now we're doing you a third. We're just nice guys over here. Why are you trying to read more in to it than that?"

"What was the second favor?" he hisses.

"What?" Ilamencryption deepens his voice authoritarially.

"There was the hack that got Dvipa of Asamkheyya out of the clink, and what other?" he

demands cautiously, still looking around his darkened room, bars of yellow from the light outside his venetian blinds raking across his agonized visage.

"Do you remember the taxicab, Aziz?" I ask dourly, slowly turning the viewer toward me. "Perhaps you're familiar with the common law of capitalism pertaining to the second class competitor being more willing to resort to untraditional methods of meeting demand?" Smithe swallows.

"I believe so," he chokes.

"Well, a favor doesn't immediately demand a favor, but it does imply relationship. And like it or not, Aziz, we're related now. So be a nice guy, like we're trying to be, and just appreciate our insight. You can take it or leave it. Trust me." He terminates the feed. I turn to Ilamencryption. "Well I think that went well," I conjecture.

"As well as we had the right to hope," Ilamencryption agrees.

"Perhaps you boys are looking at this all the wrong way," Angel interjects, approaching us from the deep chair in the relative shadows behind us where she was couched until the transmission was terminated. "Try looking at it from a woman's point of view." Ilamencryption and I both tilt our heads to the side and go glassy eyed, incapable of even beginning to comprehend how to follow such an instruction. "It's clear that there's no love in the Cheshire / Einfühlungcyberuzgeist conglomerate. Tso is alone, married to himself as it were, with his cloning. The priests are all celibate and perform their experiments on men as indifferently as upon women. Aside from you, darling," she says, sitting down in Ilamencryption's lap next to where I am kneeling, "Aziz Smithe is the only one fool enough to bring love into this crazy situation your tangled non-generative relationships have concocted. And look at what it's cost him already. In his mind the risk of his bride to be probably equates right now to the gain of his transfer and promotion. But we all know that isn't an accurate assessment of the situation, except, perhaps, from a superstitious perspective. So, rationally, what's going to happen to Smithe now? The first idea that will enter his mind, due to recency, is to endanger his relationship again. You've given him the perfect excuse to do so, despite not having been aware that that's what you were doing."

"I think I'm beginning to see what you're saying," Ilamencryption says, almost in awe. "As soon as he starts acting to relieve the pressures we've instilled the first and closest barrier he'll encounter will be his wife's conservative opposition."

"It's typical boy behavior, to expect better than you deserve," Angel continues, "and if she wants to be a good wife she'll think it her duty to point that out. Similarly Aziz, if he wants to live up to the imaginary standards of husbandry, will have no choice but to assert himself all the stronger. He'll thus be put, immediately after his very wedding, into a situation where he can either win with the boss, or win with his wife, and not both. It's a tremendous amount of psychological strain on a person, one both unexpected and, in truth, undeserved, by someone whose only real function in life is data processing. But it's what comes of his having wanted to get involved in troubles himself, and he'll know this, even though he'll have no one to tell. And that will increase the overall feeling of tension until it will be impossible for his wife, or any other living being who was cohabitating with him, to not notice. At that point there will be an argument. It will either be a second argument, should he have resolved his conscience one way or the other, or, if by that time he has failed to take action due to existential crisis, it will be a much greater argument indeed. All of this is fated simply enough by the factors of their conditional relationships and their convenience based furtherances therein."

"So what's going to be the predictable result, then?" I ask.

Angel replies simply, "either they will resolve it in a clear victory for him or by separation. If he has acted already, it will almost undoubtedly be in your favor, which means she will have been, how do you men say it, 'put in her place?' But if he has failed to earn his manhood through decision, then the conflict of goals between the two of them will have escalated to such an extent that he will appear to her to have degraded himself in an irreparable way. The risk to their

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sanctity that his economic distractions will constitute will be magnified to impossible proportion, at which point the only viable alternative to her would be to seek another mate, or consign herself to living beneath the tarnished heel of a credit ante nobody.”

“So how long would you expect we had to wait for a resolution?”

“Ordinarily a situation like this would hover above a relationship for years. But with somebody as deeply in over his head as Aziz Smithe is, I wouldn’t say even a week.” Angel tosses her arm around her lover’s shoulders and leans against him.

“That’s what I don’t understand about you women,” he starts in, completely overlooking the implications of her lecture on their relationship, either unintentionally or by genius design. “Whenever you give advice it always amounts to the same thing as if we were to wait and see.”

“Exactly. Cats always land on their feet and women are never wrong,” she says, transforming his idiotic comment into the compliment she rightly deserved.

3c) The Arc Crossing the River of Rose

I stay there a couple more days. It comes over the B.E.D. Bug underground wire that the Countess’s body was discovered in a dumpspactor in Nexus 72.9/360. It was mangled almost to the point of unidentifiability, and was finally tagged only by her DNA, which matched an extract from her last known residence in Deutch Nepal. There is nobody left to mourn her, except perhaps a few that knew her in the Quetzal.

After four days we hear a dispatch pertaining to Aziz Smithe. He has been found dead in his apartment and his wife is missing. They held no joint accounts, but all the money was withdrawn from hers and his left untouched. The apartment was left in disarray, as if there had been some scuffle. Police are combing his recent information net communications to determine potential suspects and assess the whereabouts of his wife. Apparently there were connections in her childhood linking Dvipa Asamkheyya-Smithe to Einfuhlungcyrberuzgeist neurotransmitter vaccination programs, perhaps implying a sleeping agent syndrome, as well as in her formative years to various religious practices including the Quetzals and what the Cheshire called the True Blanks, implying that it was she herself who had first put Aziz in contact with Elepso Fucto and the Cheshire. Angel remarks that the true virtue of woman isn’t her capabilities of prediction, but her own unpredictability.

That evening we are contacted by Mrs. Asamkheyya-Smithe. She sounds desperate and her projection is largely drowned out by static. We establish a meeting time, llamencryption worriedly monitoring tracers on our end and trying in vain to track down her location. She hangs up. We will meet her tonight.

4) “Never Met a Wise Man” (or Really Coming Down)

The rain begins before we leave the building. The stars blink out as the cloud sweeps over, stirring light in its great girth, sending splinters of white fury down to sting the soil, and pummeling the miserable streets with a chubby, impenetrable torrent. Static blurs the air, the lights in office windows all obscured by solid grey. The gutters gush like overfull veins, splitting into a solid sheet of oil slicked water. The chop on the bay rocks boats onto their sides, and the bridges sway. Blackness takes the sky like a returning love, and the cities flood.

We pilot the car I stole from Einfuhlungcyrberuzgeist southeast to sector 37 through the howling deluge, into the desert. As we sink deeper into the wilderness the twinkling lights of the city gradually fade and disappear. Aside from the rain, which was almost entirely absent, except in a highly acidic form, the conditions are remarkably similar to Limbo. We drive for a long while, maintaining a low altitude above the plains of joshua trees and cacti, until finally, in the distant buttes, we see a tiny light. As we near it divides itself into two headlights of a car. We circle around to park beside it and see it is abandoned, left as a beacon for us, beside a rustic

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cabin of Japanese design; bamboo blinds hung in the windows show no light inside.

We sit in the car for a moment and presently a female figure runs out of the cabin holding a briefcase over her head to keep dry from the cascading storm. She opens the door of the car and switches off its headlights, then sloshes through the standing puddles to our car and climbs in, drenched. As the cabin light comes on for a single instant we see wild eyes, red from crying, makeup stained down her cheeks.

"Drive," she says, closing the door behind her and discontinuing the cabin light. All we can see is the fifty feet in front of us shone by the headlights, and this shot through at every perceivable depth by slashing, wild rain.

"Where?" Ilamencryption asks, leaning over the seat to her. She throws the briefcase up before her face.

"Just drive. I'll tell you when we're almost there. Go straight, in a straight line. Just punch in the course and drive in a straight line from here. Do it." I obey, punching a set of buttons on the steering console. I turn half around as the car starts to move, lifting us up into the fecundated darkness. She lowers the briefcase slightly. "Look straight ahead," she orders. "I mean it. I have a gun. I'll shoot you. Do as I say." We both turn around and stare out the windshield into the dreary nothingness. We hear her set the briefcase in her lap and cock the hammer on a gun, setting it down on the seat beside her. "You really don't know what you've done, do you? You haven't any idea?" She shakes her head and we hear the water spilling from her hair onto the plexleather of the case. "That's probably the hardest part to accept. You haven't seen it at any step." The darkness of the cabin is absolute. The rain outside is absolute.

"What do you need of us?"

"Of you? Nothing. Everything. You know, predictable stuff. Or no, I guess you don't." She draws in a breath through her teeth and holds it. "Got anything to smoke?" I give her one of my own home rolled from a pack I carry with me next to my gun. She takes it from over my shoulder and we hear the striking of a match. She blows the first inhale up into the front and it fogs the window, the tincture immediately correcting by rearranging the glass molecules suspended in the plexsteel windshield into perpetual motion. She breathes out deeply, slowly.

"What will you tell us?" Ilamencryption invokes.

"Want to tell us about Aziz?" I second.

"You would make lousy officers," she grumbles. "I should think you would first want to know what's in the case? The answer to that is the simplest, and ought to be put first anyway. It is to Sam what he possesses is for you."

Epilogue

So, what do you think?

These stories derive from the first two of what will ultimately be collected into a three volume work. The first story is the introductory piece for the whole, occurring at or very near the beginning of the first book. The remainder occur towards the end of the second book, and take a noticeably different tone. The work itself will follow a course ascending through the levels of a vast conspiracy and penetrating the layers of the main character's sanity. I have not completed the first work to my satisfaction, although the majority of it exists in handwritten format dating from the summer preceding my sophomore year in high school. Aside from the stories included in this edition the second book remains entirely unwritten. I have yet to begin work on the third volume. This story is intended to culminate several years of creative input, and result in, hopefully, a directly related amount of satisfaction for its readers. I know that I have enjoyed writing it very much.

Some follow up notes on the more technical loose ends are required, so that the science if not the fiction of the stories does not remain in serial format.

The first comment I think is necessary regards the black hole created at the pyramidal Einfühlungcyrberuzgeist/Cheshire compound. This black hole will subsequently be proven to be singular in nature, due to its size. In reality a black hole created from a sun the size and magnitude of the one described in the text would probably not be much larger than one atom, if even that. I haven't got the computational capacities to calculate such an equation, but it would certainly be too small to see. The black hole described in the story is quite visible, and the explanation for this is simple. It is not a true black hole. It may or may not possess a singularity inside it (but this is no break from tradition, as singularities remain an unproven theory anyway — if they do exist, as the mathematics of general relativity indicate they should, they remain concealed behind the as yet impenetrable Schwarzschild radius), but it does not have any form of event horizon. Rather than being well defined in this way, it exists in field form, without a specific boundary marking where it begins and where it ends. This is because, due to its size, it has not collapsed to the quantum gravitational state of a true black hole; it is nowhere near as strong. Rather, it is actually emitting energy, as black holes themselves are thought to do, but not in the highly excited state of x-rays, as are generally the signature of black holes. The energy emitted by this hypothetical black hole is the result of electrons leaping between subshells, as in from the 3d subshell to the 4s subshell, which is actually a lower level of energy than its lesser numbered partner. This releases energy in a quanta, but not as ambient radiation such as x-rays or photons. It instead generates only the minimal amount of energy possible, releasing gravitons. In other words, it is not because of the density of its matter that it acts as a gravitational force, but because of the slight charge of its particles as it takes in radiation from around it. As this function occurs according to the radius (for the transfer of the electron charge) and phi (ϕ), or azimuthal angle, (for the graviton transfer) coordinates, the particular type of black hole described here could be termed a F black hole.

The need for clarification on this point is pertinent because it means the hypothetical black hole in the story, which would, in reality, be too powerful to remain stationary in the earth's electromagnetic field until it had settled in earth's core, is really only as powerful as the quantum bubble generator in Deutch Nepal. This was actually the Cheshire's intention all along. After all what immortality experiments could be performed with a working star? Whereas, in a black hole, an astronaut may get "stretched out into spaghetti" (as is the gravitationalist theory) over the course of a million years, if the same astronaut were to fall into the pull of an average star, his life span wouldn't be very long at all.

This brings me to my second point, and that is that the Cheshire are manipulating the detective. He serves as their random variable, their chaos factor as it were. This is why he was allowed to keep his gun inside their complex.

Another point worthy of addendum regards the soul of Sam, the head of the Cheshire, which, it will be revealed, is communication itself. This was foreseen by Williams in Limbo, and accounted for by the role the Cheshire play in the conflict between the Bugs and the Quetzal — it is their axis of symmetry. The contents of the briefcase at the end of the last story are revealed in the picture of Nexus 543 where Dvipa Asamkheyya-Smithe is represented as the oracle of Alpha Centauri, surrounded by a collection of young Blanks.

The animalist factions, as may be implied by the history given for Elepso Fucto, many of the time and calendar references, as well as the name of the Quetzal, are derived from South American shamanist pantheons. They are meant to symbolize at once the food chain, the method and affects of domestication, and the process of evolution. In this way the microcosmic genealogy of the conflict is extended through anthropomorphication to become an equivalent macrocosmology, which, I believe, is a natural function both of all evolution, and of religiously oriented organization of metaphysical revelation as a side-effect of consciousness in particular. In short this is meant to symbolize that any species, if given time or conditions suitable to evolve

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by: Jonathan Barlow Gee

a consciousness comparable in comprehensive capabilities to humans, would develop explanations for the universe that would include correspondences to the history of their own formal development. This is meant more as a metaphor for contemporary religious unification than either a prediction for our world's future or a statement on the messages of existing cosmologies. As such, however, it was convenient to make reference to the Mayan system for some of the connections and relationships between animal species on a metaphysical level. Also, reference of the Cheshire to the smiling cat in Alice in Wonderland is equivocal and intentional. Similarly, the Einfühlungcyrberuzgeist scientist-mages are meant to represent the domestic dog, who answers only and unquestioningly to its master. Finally the True Blanks may be thought of as equivalent to angels, from a human perspective, or the role played by humans from a naturalist perspective.

It is interesting to note in the context of the stories how the different interactions of these groupings occur in or generate changes in different technological, geological and ecological settings, as is accounted for by djinn in the Muslim religion, the Mesopotamian-Sumerian descriptions of wars in the heavens, the trigrams of the I Ching, and the nature deities of Shinto.

The final point I would like to make mention of pertains to the amount of death that occurs in these stories. While it is stated as a commonplace consideration for the main character, it remains, for me, an unsatisfying necessity of fictional plot progression. Death is always a sacred event, and should not be belittled by the context in which it occurs, as is only too common in the fast paced market for action based experiences of today. This is only an opinion, but I can, in closing, provide a few quick examples of what I mean.

Death evokes a response from the environment. This takes on both social and personal forms. Socially the loss of a loved one serves as a symbol for threat to and therefore a call to protection of the archetype of Love itself. This accounts for the passion of warfare, the splendor of victory. The reasons for war are always only clerical errors in expressing the emotion of patriotic love which is shared by all peoples. It is for the expulsion of surplus in this emotion that the people whom actually experience it are sent into conflicts over the clerical errors of politics in attempting to legislate it. Religiously, also, the archetype of Love is offered in a submissive and threatened form in the practice of sacrifice, where a loved one or treasured object is given up to symbolize faith in the greater environment. I have observed that the loss of a loved one opens one up personally for deeper experiences.

“The Cheshire Trilogy”

Book 3:

“Infinity Inverted”

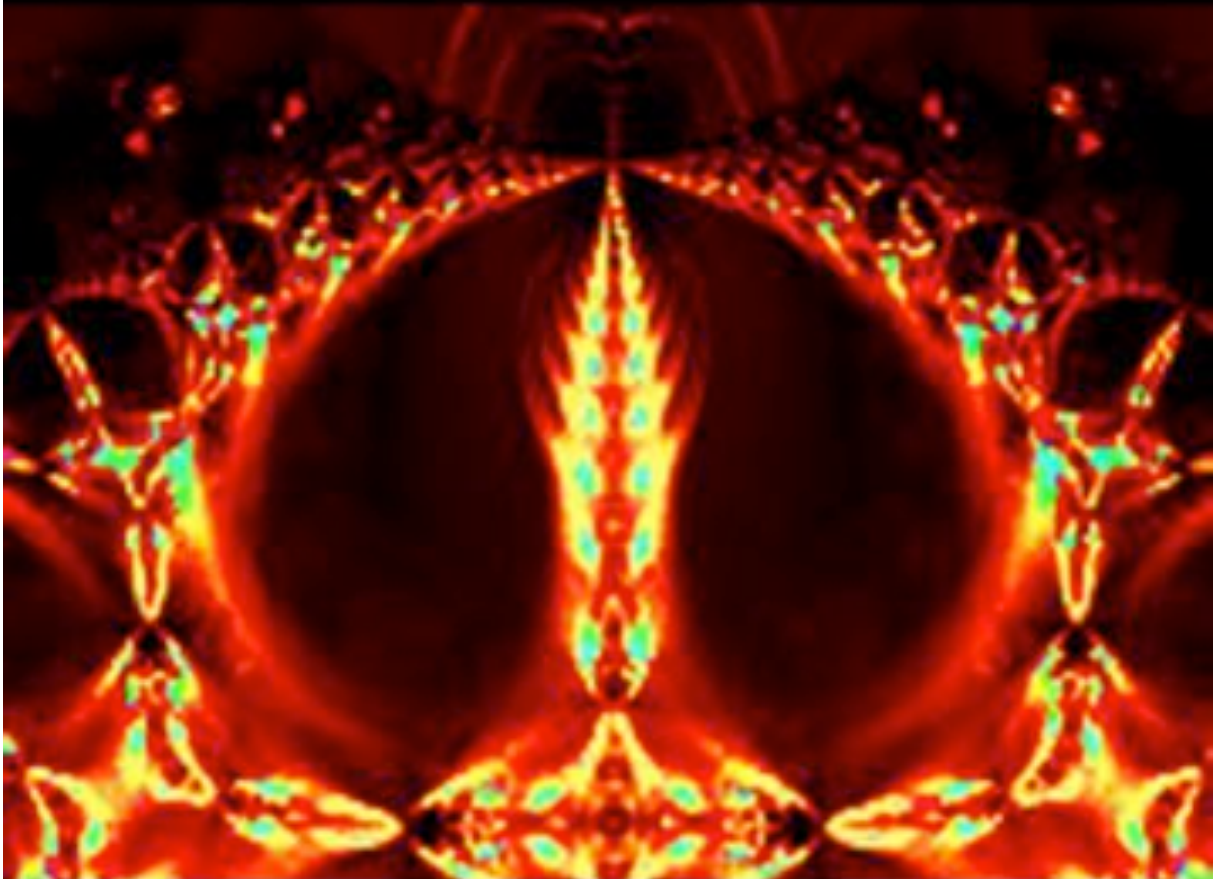
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infinity inverted

(Cheshire Horizon)

by: Jon Gee



happy readers

In order to produce a suitable work of literature, something that will be inextricably related to everything held most dear, in order to compile something considerably classic, one must endeavor to create material that can be consumed consecutively to all the other life-functions of the target audience. What are these for the average reader? Quite simple: sleeping, bathing, eating, working, loving, consuming other media, and of course, relieving themselves.

Now you might wonder how it would be possible to accomplish some of these things with a work of words. Others of you might wonder why you should want to. But these answers are as obvious as are people's daily routines themselves.

People need inspiration while sleeping, while bathing, or exercising. People's minds are almost never fully at rest. It has been demonstrated that even many coma patients respond favorably to being read a good book now and then. People sing in the shower and watch exercise tapes. A book is little different, for it feeds the mind as fully as a meal can the body. A book can, and even should, provide you a bounty of stimulus while you're out on the road. Time will really fly when the clock's freed from your eye.

Yet on to more serious matters: working. The information contained in written tomes is vital to the work environment. Most companies generate annually such copious tomes that, where they all stacked together, they might replace the rain forest. And this is just in-house information. The reason the workers can stay frisky and pert is due to the outside stimulus they bring in, and what makes one appear more learned than sullenly mulling over the soul of some dandy cult pulp?

What more is the gauge of intellectual stimulation than sensory arousal. A book should be like a bouquet of implications, opened before the reader to enliven them to the tips of every nerve, to be at least as good as a genuine experience, or else all books would be for children too young to have lived them. Therefore imagine your readers to be at their most gentle, their most savage, their most philosophical, and bestial, the moment of their climax. If you at least attain to this you will yield fruits more succulent than all the killing fields of culture combined.

We must not forget that a book can always be read while consuming other media. The effects for this vary, and with great luminosity. One can read while listening to music, or while watching television, or while on the computer, or any combination of these, at least. And the connections between the set and the setting may not be entirely coincidence, right?

Lastly it is fundamental to examining the matter of consumption during excretion. It is important to gear the text to include descriptive phrases and plot twists that mirror the likely mind-set of the reader in each environment, and the toilet is no different. In fact, it is perhaps, the essence of all the rest.

In short one should imagine their readers, when writing to try to please a target audience, as mice in small cages, to whom you as the writer are generously administering large doses of suspended information through the precise syringe of your insight. In this and no other way should one proceed when writing a work with the intent to please a target organism in mind. Oh, and Dr.? Try not to kill them.

On Literature and Evil

In the realm of fiction there exists in pure form the essence of what man can distill from and place external and in opposition to himself. In one word, what has come to be called by the term Evil. It is not the act of distillation, nor the externalization of the idea or set of symbolic images associated with this term that

earns it its unpleasant connotations. These processes, it will be demonstrated, are not even inherent to fiction, but are a fact of consciousness beyond a certain creative stage in its evolution. Evil, as can be illustrated using the model of fiction, derives exclusively from the setting up of forces in opposition to consideration.

Firstly let us deal with extrapolation and integration. These are the actions of the formative behavior native to man and certain related primates whereby they can discover useful objects in their environment and incorporate them either into their goal-oriented tasks or their larger, often goal-oriented social networks. From these acts we can pinpoint the moment in evolution at which the projective nature of the thalamus and cerebellum come into effect. Through these activities it is man alone that has come to apply his potential for organization to the ideological realm, distilling useful data from his own mind and constructing it external to himself, often according to pre-established frameworks of contextual relationship. In this way the atlant and stoicism may both be seen as merely extensions of the same mental energy through similar molds of impression upon the pertinent realm involved, either physical or philosophical.

This being said then, let us examine the particular distinction between the realms of fact and fiction, both of which are mental creations of man that overshadow his physical environment, but remain themselves largely safe in the realm of philosophy. In the case of fact, the action involved is largely the cataloging and arrangement based on similarities of form or function of observable data that is already existent in the surrounding environment, including previously referenced materials of a more intellectual nature, such as works of comparative theology and relative metaphysics. Here there is little room for the existence of Evil, though there may appear to be in the short-term great disagreement between researchers, a scholarly perspective reveals that whatever hypothesis tests the most reliably true is inevitably concurred upon to be the most accurate. Thus, even during the evils of the inquisition, the light of science was never extinguished, and can be seen, as a result of these trials, to have in fact been strengthened. Often, although again confined only to an ascholarly, short-term perspective, the most recent results are concluded to be evil, as was the case during the inquisition, but once again this type of reactionism is inevitably inverted as soon as beneficial applications are found and shared.

In the case of fiction, however, there are no such standard guidelines for the integration of newly extrapolated material, nor are the disagreements set in so convenient or settleable a situation as academia. In the case of fiction, rather than the assumption of the existence of a measurably observable material universe which has hierarchical interaction with the consciousness, it is the very essence of Evil that is taken as the pre-existent constant. What is meant by this term is, loosely, the triggering of a retreat mechanism in the bio-survival circuit, or the experience of some unpleasant stimulus. Without this assumption there would be no conflict, and without conflict there would be no energy for the progression of a plot line.

The result of this is that, while writings of fact are bound by their history to eventually and reliably provide working tools, fiction is free to create whatever forms or vessels it feels would be useful in fleeing, confronting and/or overcoming this implied negativity of curious desire. Without the construction of such avenues of resource there would be no conclusion to the work, and it would fail to come into existence in the library of its genre. The constructs that it forms are, therefore, determined by the approach-retreat binary circuit, and are invariably either toys or weapons. The toys defeat the evil by miniaturization, rendering it harmless in a scale of relativity. Weapons usually pit the characters involved against a force larger than

themselves, offering greater apparent rewards for their victory.

Usually the essence of Evil being confronted in the context of fiction is not necessarily negative stimulus to the reader, as the reader remains objective. It is negative stimulus to the character or characters, usually expressed in the form of or overcome by harmless play or by destruction. While the variable components and results of this are apparently infinite, there is a cap that can be placed on them, an unspoken corner where writers usually draw the line and turn their writing back on itself, limiting their readers. Of non-real negative stimulus to the characters the most unimaginably horrifying is ultimately a realization of their true condition as nonexistent characters in a work of fiction. In other words, the essence of Evil embodied in fiction is fact.

The same is true in the inverse relationship. For the common reader of fiction they will find their preference frowned upon by academics as escapism, implying some unprovable defect in existent reality. Similarly, the most unspeakable crime of the statistician is the fudging of results to arrive at a known misconception, or an unprovable theorem. So, for the student, cheating on an exam is punishable by reprimand, but the attempted fiction of passing off plagiarized materials as their own invention is often of consequences much more severe. Thus, it would seem, the only Evil feared from fact is a tool that will not function because it is not real. In short, the only Evil in fact is fiction.

The reason for this is that it tests, or strains, man's capacity for meaningful extrapolation/integration. It is of approaching impossibility to distill and externalize an idea if one cannot determine the extent of their own environment, for example, the difference between internal and external.

scene 1

"What are you?"

"You can call me The Goat."

"Are you some kind of clone of me?"

"I am like you, Sheep."

"You're what they expected me to be?"

"And your ancestors."

"They saw you?"

"They saw in me you."

"Did they see you as I do?"

"They saw me in what you could be. In what you could have been."

"And you think you're God."

"I am what you would expect of me. I am that which I am."

"Well, I'm not impressed."

"So you have understood my plan for you? For us?"

"There can only be one end to this, Sam."

"Oh, but I beg to differ."

"How so? Did you really think I would give up my life for yours?"

"But if you have already come to the conclusion you shall not do so, what makes you think that I wouldn't have come to the same conclusion myself?"

"Oh, but I beg to differ."

"How so?"

"I know what I'm holding in my hand, and I don't see you with a gun."

"Oh, but I beg to differ with you there as well. Just because you do not see a thing doesn't mean it isn't there. Or rather, it doesn't mean it isn't what you think it

isn't."

He holds up his palm at me and the air fizzles and then sparks and crackles. Ripples of energy distort my view. Then I feel the waves hit me and I realize it isn't just my perception of the room they are distorting, but the underlying reality of the room itself. Everything warps and bends and I realize he has managed to find a way to harness the proton-proton pillar released by the artificial sun through his own body. It was the effect that had occurred immediately before the sun had collapsed into a black hole.

"Are you insane?" I demand, "You'll kill us both!"

"Death means nothing to me. Soon you shall feel the same."

"To Hell with you!" I scream over the gail as the atoms begin fissioning at the seams. I level my gun at him and blast off a round. He just throws his head back and laughs. The bullet struggles ahead against the concentrated matter waves. Sam gives me the evil eye and clenches his palm into a fist. The bullet demolecularizes and its constituent atomic components implode in a sparkle until all the dust that's left of them have been vaporized into utter obliteration. Huge empty tears open up in the fabric of spacetime which have enough gravity to left us both off our feet.

I use all the strength in my body to pull my now exponentially heavy arms towards each other and flick the automatic switch on the firearm. Although he is unchanged by the electronic disturbance and therefore is making an easy target, everything else in the room than Sam is being lifted up and spun into the widening crevices in the dimensional fibers of the local universe, and as I try to level the weapon at him to squeeze off a second volley I realize that my own particles are being torn apart too. The sound of the gun going off is swallowed up in a muted gail of molecule length waves being absorbed and dispersed by atomic nuclei length waves. The bullet arcs out of the gun in a path that is aimed to cut Sam in half. Each meets with the same end as the first had, only even sooner after leaving the cartridge until the final one is triggered while still in the barrel. In each place where the bullets disappeared into the aeyther a new small spiralling vortex opens up in the air, and as the bullet goes off inside the gun I can only watch helplessly parallized as my arm begins to be swallowed up around the outside of a miniature black hole. It should be scorchingly painful for my atoms to be ripped apart, but because the nerves to do not have the opportunity to cathex the message to my brain before being disassembled down into subatomic quanta and then evaporated, I can only watch my right hand be spiralled around the zero point event horizon of the pin sized, pulsing hole in reality like bloody water flowing down a drain.

"As I would have told me if I were you, Detective, there isn't room enough for both of us in this universe." He smiles a Cheshire grin as the rest of my body and the room begin to disappear, and all sinks into a glowing darkness.

"Let me make things a little more clear for you, Detective," the smile whispers, seeming to come from everywhere at once and echoing in infinitely different vibratory tones, though still only faint as though carried on the winds from somewhere far away.

Suddenly everything becomes shimmering. I can see Sam standing before me, somewhat faded around the edges by the omnipresent pale halo, but when I look down to see my own body there is nothing there. Sam is approaching me.

"Do you see my weapon of choice now, Detective?"

He holds up before my field of vision a minuscule speck, so small in his hand it could be smaller than a grain of sand. Inside it I see glittering. It seems to grow before my eyes and I can see inside of it. There are filaments of twinkling jewels like electron sized diamonds spun like a spider web knit on mescaline spewed across the

opaline volcanic glass blackness of the voids between them, and I realize the little diamonds are entire galaxies, full of hundreds of billions of stars. Just then I am pulled back away from the piece of dark, shining dust. Sam holds his face mere inches from mine and I am confronted by my own visage, a startling jolt and very odd experience.

He looks down at his open palm, and I watch as he closes it gently around the baby universe. When he opens his hand there is a pile of the evanescent powder. He makes a fist around it, then unfolds it into the shape of a gun. My gun.

"Do you recognize this, Detective?" He aims it at me, then blushes, smiling.

"I never could kill myself." He moves the gun about between his hands and it is become a chalice overflowing thick, clotted blood. Then he holds his hand in a cup shape above the brimming bowl and twists both his hands in opposite directions. The cup is molded up as though it were clay on a wheel into the form of an hourglass.

"You do realize now that I am God? Do you not?"

"You fucking shit," I hiss out of the apparent nothingness. "I saw my reflection in your eyes." I surge toward him in whatever form I am and force my consciousness through the pupil of his eye. There is a horrible sound of indescribable violence as matter and antimatter fuse.

Suddenly I am floating in the air in Sam's office opposite where I was, in fact, opposite, quite literally, myself as a hail of bullets leaves the gun in the other me's hand and they begin to involute and enter hyperspace. From where I am everything looks normal. Apparently I am in Sam's body. I have only enough time to wonder if he is reciprocally in mine when I realize the bullets are reforming in the air. The gun, which had begun to explode between us and become shredded into its constituent components, now reconstitutes. I feel the pressure in my ears pop and suddenly I begin to see the rippling proton chains, only, they are flowing in the opposite direction now, or rather, the same — towards me.

The other me smiles and hovers lightly down to the floor. As I see him lower the gun, I realize it is still me, only I am moving in reverse. As I begin to speak I realize the words coming out of my mouth, even though I am hearing my own voice reversed, are being spoken by Cheshire Sam, in his deep, rich voice, in the right order.

"I have always been with you. We were simply reversed, you see. While you were living linearly through spacetime, I was living in the opposite direction through timespace. Now you have done it. Now my plan is accomplished. We are switched. I have tricked you, the ultimate jest, I have fooled myself. I convinced you there was no other way than but to give your life in exchange for mine. Now I have but to set our times in opposition again, and you will cease to exist in my universe, and I will seek to exist in yours. May we never cross paths again in the sum over histories."

He raises the gun again, and as he is disturbing the dimensionality of time by doing so the arm, my arm, gives off translucent afterimages which quickly fade away between the harmonic vibrations of superstrings. He pops the cap.

Realizing I am now seeing what he saw before I had shot at him, before he had turned the flow of the time stream away from the massive gravity well he had become by absorbing the power of the artificial sun and towards me, I also realize that I now have his power at my control, just as he has my gun. I lift my open palm to stop the bullet with a fist.

As I repeat what I had seen him do to the round that he was now shooting at me, I see the flow of time reverse again. By repeating his action I effectively create a knot in the arrow of entropy. Time doesn't know which way to go, so it starts flowing

in all directions simultaneously. The proton-proton pillars flow along these channels of occluded current and there are fissures and gaps in the air which begin growing and healing over, only to reappear again, while all the atoms in the room begin exploding and then reforming, only to explode again.

Now, however, we are both displaced, and I hover lightly to the floor.

"Are you insane?" he demands, "You'll kill us both!"

"Death means nothing to me. Soon you shall feel the same," I remind him.

The fissures evaporate the boiling atoms on contact, and, rather than their being darkly faster than photons, the same shimmering evanescence now pours through them as was outside the universe Sam had held in his hand, and as it begins to fill up the space it seems to be slowing down and congealing into liquid, though it is only flowing in flaming streams between the fissures. One pierces my body's hand that is wrapped around the gun handle Sam holds aimed at me and he screams. The metallic plastoid circuitry of the hand is ruined, but even more so, the cartridges in the clip are lit, and the whole gun explodes, peeling back into tatters the remainder of the arm up to the elbow.

"You thought you were the God of the universe?" I scream at him over the gale of hellish chaos.

"I brought the universe up, but you are the one who is bringing hyperspace down. As much as you are bringing about the destruction of everything you've ever known, so was I only working to create a new life for myself, away from your failures. As much of the devil is in you, so am I God! Now do you see?"

"There isn't room enough for both of us in this universe."

"Soon enough, thanks to you, there won't even be one universe between us. You've toyed around with a force you cannot possibly fathom. You should have just let me kill you."

We run towards one another and, as we grapple, we are spun around in a spiralling vortex.

The liquid light has settled into its lowest common denominator vibrational frequencies and is being conserved between the white hole fissures into a fourth spatial dimensional regular polyhedronal exoskeleton, inside of which Sam and I are running into one another, our realities overlapping, superimposing, sometimes blending together, sometimes lashing out against each other.

excerpts from the minutes of the first meeting of the cybourgeoisie

McHargue: we now must turn to addressing this problem of the humanimals.

Brock: They are in constant conflict. They will not address the issue of order between themselves. Instead they wage futile and pointless wars, often terroristic in nature, against one another.

McHargue: To end this struggling between them we have begun funding for universals, where they may study together under teachers which we shall appoint. We have selected a number of our own to serve as faculty for these borads of education, and they shall be in charge of appointing staff from the volunteers from the humanimal factions.

Brock: It is sincerely hoped that, should the wars and strife between the humanial factions be put to an end, that they will turn their attention towards creating a global

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by: Jonathan Barlow Gee

homogenising government. This government, then, would be comprised only of us. Hence our hegemony will bring about a lasting age of peace between the factions.

McHargue: To this extent, it is proposed that a single one of the humanimal factions should be brought under our sway at this time. Our support for this faction must be kept as covert as possible. It should be handled through funding alone. By supporting one faction over the others, we will seek this faction's hegemony over the other factions. The one faction hegemony will be more easily toppled once we withdraw our support.

Brock: Having toppled the one world hegemony of the humanimal factions, we will then institute rule by our global government.

Gee: I propose that we back the Cheshire.

Monkey Boy's got the Cave Man

"Dry now. Long time. No... effect. Flat affect. Affections cindered. All clones calling on all wavelengths simultaneously produce a zero point energy. Scalar wave entropy. The sky has stopped its transmissions. I am lying. I am lying in the desert. The worst place to lie.

"I can still see. See everything clearer, they say. The Blanks, that is. Not so much say as think-talk. like think tanks but without word-glyphs, weapons of mass distraction to hold them back from pure communication, the obliteration of the source for the sole purpose of receiving and decrypting encoded transmission. I am on a trance mission. A beam time. Like Ozymandis. A praying mantis.

"I can't so much see as think-see, now. There's nothing around me for a hundred miles in every direction. I chose this location for the consecration of a sacred ritual. If only I could forget which one. It eats at me. It haunts me. It eat-haunts me. It has become all that is left of me. I and it are one. I am it and it is me. I-it. The me-ritual.

"Serve now for better times. Fallen comrades. Blatherschyte. I never met an insectile woman I didn't like. Like them best frozen, cold as revenge, tasty oysters, salty clams, slimy mullosks, fish eggs for eyes. Millions of millions of eyes. Millions of millions of millions of images of me. All reflecting me.

"The empty sky blows vapor fumes through dead nostrils. I would breathe if it were air, and for various other reasons, too demoralizing to be mentioned here. Here, there. There, there, now. Now and then, but then again. At least that is the plan. I sit here dwindling away, a wither there nor anywhere, doodling on Xtian girlfriends, and others who I could have boned, if only I hadn't had to walk and roll, the path less traveled never leads to Rome.

"Old friends, long gone. Still part of the encryption. Seems like I've already been here long enough. If the dame was tough. If she was me I'd a-figured it out. By now at least if not forever and an already ago. Stupid skirts. Never trust em. Show you just enough of what they know you want to see to keep you coming back for more, but once they finally lift up the curtain on the three ring freak show and sink you inna ditch, it's always with the lights out. I mean, gawd! Like they wanted their outer space. I've got a glow in the dark plan for all of them. The Mayan Capers! Haw! Death rides a pale horse by comparison.

"All washed up now. Dry and in the desert dead. No one around to comfort me, keep me company. Just me alone with the contents of 'my' head. There now, that's got

to be God. Only the Maker would have such a stiff sense of humor, to leave a man a dry martini shot here on the cutting room floor of the cosmic oasis. Still, even the best think I'm talking gibberish. Nostradamus got nothing on me. Nothing. Got... nothing... on... me..."

a car goes whizzing past

Somewhere else a car goes whizzing past, cutting through the thick haze of the wasteland night. Of course, I am inside, and my friend, Ilamencryption, and in the back seat that crazy hats off gash Dvipa of Assemkheya Smythe. She's wasted, and truthfully Illy and I aren't faring much better, but we're taking on the brunt of her affliction, faltering paltry malediction. She's wavin' the gun around.

"Shouldn't 'a got involved!" she remands us. "I was a friend of Odessa. We worked together on our tiers. Made them count, made something that mattered. Why did you have to kill her?"

"Shut up! Will you shut — shut UP!" Ilamencryption and I arise in unison.

"Wait a minuet," I hush down, "Whachu mean, me kill Odd Ball? Me no kill Eight Ball. Sammy Samerson. He..."

"Oh give it a REST, wouldn't you, you TIRED MAN! I saw it on the videoscreen."

I, turning to Ilamencryption, speak as if alarmed, "if they released that, then it must mean..."

"Sam's got you pegged. Right up the old towel hole, wouldn't you know it if he hadn't been so sneakypuss..." she is fading in and out of sanity. Obviously the effects of radiation exposure.

Ilamencryption adds, "the general. You two came up together. You told him where to find Odessa, didn't you Dvipa?"

"Found her in a trash can, same as I left her. I don't know what you're talking about offer, sir. Go french a poodle."

"Listen it's like talking too mauve gauva with or without her. I say we blast her," I helpfully suggest.

"Do and you'll be so-or-ry," she sings childishly.

"I'll pull this car over. I will. Don't think I won't. I'll do it right now."

"Things are so screwed up."

"You don't even know where we're going..."

"Hey Dvipa! Where we headed?"

"All armed, all armed, somebody pulled the all armed! No, I'm just yanking your legs. I see, I see, Icey icey icey, we all scream when the general puts his big black boot down."

"I'm not taking you to I.C. till you tell us what's in that case."

"This case, in case you didn't notice who was my handler, is for the general. He's the only one of the Cheshire I can trust. I can't even trust you."

"That's right anyway," and Ilamencryption puts a gun in her face.

She laughs and shoots a hole through the back of his seat. The load finds its way through a sequence of subluminal wormhole inversions into one of his lungs, where the bullet turns inside out releasing a nanovirus. At the same time she does this he reflexively squeezes the trigger and now there is no more such person as anyone ever named Dvipa Assemkhya Smythe.

At the same time the briefcase, now splattered in the corpuscle equivalent of after-birth, pops open at the latches. There is a bright flash and my ears pop. Then everything goes dark and I'm all of a sudden quite deaf like.

a car goes whizzing past redeux

A strange man with eleven faces and forty two arms pulls my body out of the car. I am badly burned, I think, as I cannot feel myself. Then I perform an epoche on manvantara and everything becomes painfully obvious. Why must I keep coming back to this body? Bloodflop continuity.

The car is a ways off, smouldering. The man explains he is a gas collector for the E-Squire's census and he just saw the car go whizzing past. "Strangest thing," he says, scratching half his faces with half his hands, "seems like I saw go whizzing by twice, and it only crashed the second time. Lucky I came upon it, though. Eh?" He puts twenty one palms out to collect his luck.

"Don't come to me need a lies. I just came from Dizzyland and all I got was this lousy suitcase."

I stumble off in the direction I project as hard as I can upon it is west.

Good Times Ten

Angel opens the door. God what a sight for sore eye. I fall into her arms, dropping the suitcase, my neatly singed hat drifting gracefully floorward.

We make love for what feels like weeks. I don't have to tell her about Ilamencryption. Eventually she just kind of figures he isn't coming along behind me. She is a yogi, with alot of extra holes grafted, not to mention her pouch, which I lick sensuously. I don't think to ask her age, but she seems younger when she's refreshed. She probably isn't even here. This probably isn't even happening. I'm probably lying dead in the desert and none of this is real.

I don't know how to use Ilamencryption's computers, but she does. While I smoke a home rolled one she posts on and puts the word out about his dumb eyes. She comes over to me crying and says I have to leave now. I don't complain. I just steal her car.

I drive around for a while because I have no place to go

I drive around for a while because I have no place to go. Having come so close to my collar and then having him slip through my fingers. I guess the case is closed. I look at the satchel. It is locked again. I sit on the beach for three years or so thinking about opening it or throwing it into the red tides.

Finally I climb on board Ilamencryption's yacht. It doesn't pilot like a real hovercraft. It has some kind of wheel that's made from the bark of trees. It must have cost him a fortune. I didn't even know there were still trees.

I run it aground on a tiny island with high, old walls. I carry the case deep into the catacombs of the cavernous ruins. I curl up and lay my head down on it and go to sleep.

The Dream Bag

I roll over on my couch, weariness still within my eyes, the glue residual from the slaughter of nightmares. I see her picture, through a deep fog of static haze, the stage of delusions slow to dissolve. I don't like to start the day this way, and so it must be done. Reality creeps over me like the pain of a drunken brawl. I stare up at the ceiling where the spackle speckles whirl around, some sparkling, some darkening, interchanging daggers in my brain. I've stared at that picture so much it may as well be her. It speaks to me, when it wants to. I know its moods and it knows me. Maybe better than I ever could myself. The chaos around me is calming. I sit up and swallow some vodka left out from the night before. Before what I don't know. I roll myself

one and ignite it with a terrorized humility.

My place is a shambles. Bits of other peoples' lives are all around me. If I hadn't avowed this course I'd clean it up by burning the entire squallor down, but none of it's insured, so there's no point in considering it anyway. My temple throbs and for a single second the whole arena swims in movement. Half consciously I let a wandering electron lead my gaze around the room, observing peripherally the afterglow left on what it passes. As the quavering calms down I take another sip of vodka, sitting back and stretching out stiffly, the burned path of the messenger neuron slowly melting light on the surface of my eye. I glance around, applying the pattern in various perspectives, as it gradually dulls in luminosity, and its tintured aura pulses back into the ashen onyx atmosphere, useless and dull.

My head falls back and my eyelids lull, submerging my mind once more in the tepid murk of a faltering consciousness. The last vestige of the ennegram blurrily floats in the semi-gloom, strobe imposed upon the splattered patternless ceiling. Outside the sounds of the city, as spirits rise up just beyond the scope of one another, interact, only to redissolve in the formless noir of independent perception. Of the former there are all kinds; I put my foot up on a stack of phone books. Of the latter there are very few. Involuntarily my right eye sees her picture through a nervously opened slit. So long as I don't think about it, there's really no great mystery. It's whenever I do my head aches. Funny to have to live off headaches.

How long do I have to sit and wait here between leads? No appetite, no patience, only raw and autophagic need, with no way to release it. No satisfactory stimulus, no hope for regular sleep. Everytime I step outside I am besieged by deformed resurrections of previous dead ends; serpentinely intertwining tails and heavy hunches struggling to emerge in every dim glimmer of recognition from behind the souls of every stranger. Questions haunt periodical hunters in the ripples of ellipses... yet I reinforce my karmic training and give none of them the time of day. I cannot tell if this is healing or dying, my investigation has made crystalline all such natural patterns, however without affecting anymore than symptomatic alteration. This makes it no easier to survive. Only possible.

I rub my eyelids and the same pattern reappears. This time I open my eyes and stare directly at her picture, centering my focus to establish a stable frame of reference. The solid wave-form warbles momentarily, warping through several shades and fading shapes, dizzying me, until it finally settles on a thrice looped sweep, appearing to overlap itself in the center, some arcs appearing thinner as though they were more distant. The band itself is not a smooth stroke, but oscillates within each arc, describing various positions both above and below its average. Behind it the small photograph of her seems to move along the pathway of illumination, stuck to my inadvertantly meandering focal apex, ever at the heart of the horizontal doubling reflexivity, like a pair of olive outlined wings unfolding from infinity.

It is not what is directly behind them that eventually attracts my attention, but what is beneath the center of each. To either side of the picture, although the image itself, as it so often does, has detached from the frame and is suspended outside time, there are a pocket-sized leather bag and a small wooden box. I am reaching for the leather bag when the phone rings. For a moment I continue gaping groggily, waiting for reality as it stubbornly refuses to return to its conventional apprehension, only amending my grasp once everything has settled down into the most mundane of quantum-vibrational frequencies, the comfortingly chaotic clutter of a common work system in a sub-routined, self-perpetuating state of entropy.

"I'm not here." I say coldly into the receiver.

A Wake, A Ware, A Loan

This has been a test of the autonomic nervous system. I repeat, this was only a test. In the event of real nervousness, take two horse pills, or bull testicles, whichever comes first, and call self in the morning. Wait for answer, then bark coldly, turn to the right and cough.

I don't know how long it's been. I had thought.. wait... what had I thought. It was right before the phone rang. But that was in a dream. I was thinking... in the dream... ah... that's it. I thought that the briefcase was the McGuff. But now I'm awake and I think I've figured everything out: maybe I'm the dingus.

I open the case. Guts are flowing through the pipes of alcatraz. All there is a fine white powder.

I walk across the water back to the stolen fly-ship from Imperial City and plot a course there.

Women: semper in media res

"And what exactly would that be, sister?" I intone, warily.

"If you don't know by now, then we really are lost. All is lost," she sips pensively on the flaming paper-roll.

"Look," Ilamencryption points out to her bluntly, "we're not your couple of Lancelots, here. We're in this thing for our own reasons. He's got his, and I've got mine. Are you clear on that? Your concerns don't mean a penny to us, not to him, not to me, you got that? Now you go ahead, and you sulk all you want. If you're not going to lead us to the information we need I'll ventilate you faster than you can wrap your tongue around your next riddle and leave you out here to rot in the acid rain."

"This is about Sam," she rubs her eyes. "Not me. If you can't see that, then..."

Ilamencryption seizes the gun in her hand and she pulls the trigger. From the look on her face I would say it was just instinctive reflex, because she screams. It's really more her scream that startles me than the gunshot right next to me. Gunshots; I get those all the time. But when she screams out, "father, no!" I half turn to look at her. That's why I'm not thinking about the gunshot.

The fusion round flies right through Ilamencryption's right hand like it's made out of surgeon's putty-guaze. His blood comes out in a red cloud, illuminated in a halo by the concussion-round bursting out of the hand-cannon. That's the last thing I see, but out of the corner of my eyes as she says it I see this crazed Lady MacBeth look in Dvipa's eyes.

Then the round cracks the atmosphere shield.

The weather in the wasteland isn't as bad as in Limbo. To tell you the truth Limbo makes the war's wastes look like a jaunty vacation spot. But on a night like this it's easy to forget that, and a person left out in the wastes without a way back to civilisation, well: they may as well be in Limbo.

The storm is rather mild, too. Compared to the ravaging furies the canopy can really lay down, blowing straight in off the seas since the mountains are gone. All that got wiped flat in the war. Now the southwest is one big drainage ditch for the submerged volcanic triggered hurricanes that blow in off the Pacific. And all that toxic smog over the islands just seeds the clouds with condensated death. I mean, I love where Ilamencryption picked to live, don't get me wrong. The sunsets over the green run-off bays and harbours catch the glint at just such an angle from the low-lying firey smog churned out by the coastal silicon refineries that from about a few hours after high noon until a few hours after sunset it looks like the whole island is raining rubies inside a magnetic particle accelerator. It's just that, by the time all

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that super-conductive smog blows a little south and east of there, over the soot silt swamps and fungi and algae of the rubble fields where the great mountain range once was, and over the great alkaline Lake, it's fed the air more than enough absynthe for it to vomit out battery acid consistency piss juices all across the wastes as far south as the sierra merde. And no one's gotten any further in that direction than the sierra merde.

So, when the atmosphere barrier breaks from the cold fusion round, sending melting silicon shards like grains of crystal peppering all into Ilamencryption and I, and the scalding tumescent putridity of the storm detonates in on us and rips the roof off the car, I really can't complain. The pressure differential pops a vein inside my ear drum and I pass out at the same time as chundering up a lunch load all over myself, but then, the rain will wash that away, so that really isn't all that bad either.

The real problem comes when I lose control of the car after nodding out and the mobile spins gyroscopically around on itself in at least three directions at the same time. That's when that bitch mistress gravity sinks her teeth into us and lulls us into a downward spiral. I wake up again and shake the nausea out of the corners of my pus seeping eyes just in time to see the ground, lit an eerie gold by the flames of the car's disintegrating engine as we plod downward, flying up to meet us.

Nice Dreams

We got lucky.

Because the bullet had blown the atmosphere barrier out before we hit the ground, we were all thrown clear of the car before it explodes. I wake up with a splitting migraine, thoroughly confused. Reality sets in like a hang over and the migraine does right along with it. I lift my aching torso up into the leaning pressure of the slanted acidic rain. It burns, alot, but I know it'll get worse for a long time before it gets better. I flop over and look back at the car. I was thrown the furthest. Ilamencryption has already stood up and is pacing around though. I shout to him over the combined tumult of the downpour and the smouldering auto. That's when I realise he's in shock. He's wandering in circles looking for his hand. He's clutching what's left of his wrist up to his chest, and it's spurting. What a baby. He's probably only missing a few fingers. I struggle quixotically to deepen my focus and see Dvipa. She is the worst off of us. She has been torn in half by the impact. I guess her legs are still in the back seat. Her upper half, well, except for her left side, is about twenty feet away. Seeing as how Ilamencryption is useless I heave myself upright. The steering console must have broken a couple ribs. I've felt worse, but I've also felt a considerable amount better. I stumble toward Dvipa, raising my hand to shield myself from the blistering blaze of the auto inferno.

She still has the briefcase in her right hand.

Good girl.

I stoop down beside her. Unfortunately for her, the brief case isn't all she's hanging on to. She's gushing a steady flow of blood from between her once rose petal lips. Her eyes are glazed over and her focus is fixed on infinity. But her breasts are heaving and the blood gushing from her gaping, fractured jaw bubbles with oxygen. I spit the copper taste of my own blood onto the puddled desert scene beside her.

"Dvipa," I say calmly to her, trying to pry the briefcase from her hand, "let go." Her splintered spine slumps toward me and her eyes swim. Her lips, now caked with black blood blisters, move as if to speak. I lean in close, putting my ear right against the bloodflow. With her last breath she sputters, "shekinah..."

By the time I have knealt up again to look down pityingly on her she has

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given up her ghost. I take the briefcase from between her interwoven fingers, now relaxed, and stumble back over to Ilamencryption.

"I, um," he stares through me into nowhere, "I seem to have lost some of my hand."

Pathetic.

I tell him, "Dvipa's dead." He blinks once, then goes back to looking around in a daze. I grab him by the shoulder and push him to the ground. He lands with a splash. "Forget about that now," I bark. "We've got a bigger problem."

At first he seems confused. Then I see some cogency return to him. He looks around. "We're stranded... aren't we?"

"Your grasp of the obvious is admirable!" I holler over the gale.

"Well?!" he shouts back. "What are we supposed to do?!"

I blink, and then take my first look around myself. Outside the little globe of iridescence sent out by the now ebbing auto fire the utterly empty blackness stretches out for a hundred miles beyond either of our imaginations ability to get us out of it. The full sobriety of our situation begins to dampen my demeanor, even as the howling winds reassert their shrieking onslaught ripping at our drenched clothing with the fangs of an undine banshee.

"Yeah!" Ilamencryption rejoins. "That's what I thought! Why don't you help me look for my hand!"

"Eh," I turn back to him, hunching over under the weight of my own soggy ontology, "why don't you just rot in hell."

I fall backwards into a sitting position to open the briefcase.

Wake and Bake Chicken

"Those fools. Those silly fools. They know nothing of the true Cheshire ways."

General Tso is bent over a glowing lamp in his darkened office in Cheshire headquarters. Before him on the counter top is the opened brief case.

He withdraws the shimmering original disk from inside, and holds it up to the office light. It glimmers ten trillion shimmering irradescences. He glances down.

Inside the brief case there is the mouth of a wormhole. On the other end is the implosion of the breathing sphere of the city at the bottom of the sea.

He stares mesmerised for a moment, and then recollects a phial from the cabinet. He holds it up to the light as well, and it glows a dull red.

"The blood of the High and Mighty Quetzal, Odessa Zoab," he remarks, to no one.

Suddenly he jerks his head, as if he has heard a noise, or perhaps, sensed being watched.

He turns into the darkness.

Entering the operations room he fondles the phial in his pocket. He punches in the command code, and enters the room that turns upside down. Again, he examines the disk. The complexity of it! The simplicity of it!

Ah, there now, the room has turned completely around.

The heavy plex-shielded doors slide apart and a blinding glare of ultra violet light instantly permeates the antechambre. General Tso, wearing a pair of rose red goggles and a Hawaiian shirt, enters the anti-white light of the room, lifting his arm above him to shield his eyes from the most intense, direct rays.

Above him there swirls the immense black hole. The event horizon is as large as the entire ceiling.

"She's coming along nicely, I see." Tso smirks to one of the white clad techs, calmly maintaining his duplicitous demeanor.

"Infinite power..." he contemplates to himself, standing directly beneath and staring up at the immense phi black hole which they had created.

Upon its slithering surface lurked a tau sub tau of wormholes, leading, who knows? This way and that, surely. Tso chuckles. "And this lab is just one of many, lads," he gestures over his shoulder.

He listens as the Cyberian labs mumble agreements to one another, and then he hears the sound of numbers being crunched. He turns completely around and sees that the white labs backs are all turned toward him.

He reaches slyly into his pocket and extracts the little phial of the blood of Odessa Zoab. He sprinkles it upon the disk, and it glows black upon green in the purple darkness.

"Isn't it about time we gave this one a whirl, lads?" He swirls on his heel as the technicians' heads begin to turn. As their eyes watch, he inserts the blood soaked disk into the Proton-Proton chain emanating from the focused oculus in the floor, connecting to the black hole, chaining and harnessing it.

The disk, placed in the cosmic harmonic beam, begins to spin. The technicians look at one another in wonder. They dethrone themselves and wander towards the General, scratching their heads.

"Behold," he beckons. "I give you: Light from the Darkness and Life from the Abyss."

The spinning disk begins to flutter in its orbital spin. It butterflies, refracting dangerous prisms everywhere, searing those upon whom they descended. Finally, the disk whorls about like an unbridled sphere, and then shatters into unfathomable crystal-like shards.

"MFKTZ..." Tso gapes openly in wonder.

The whirling particles assemble into a gyroscope, and then this begins to wind upward, like a charmed serpent, or a liquid fire. The particles begin to assume a fixed order...

"And now, a tiny dollop of blood goes here..." Tso whispers absent mindedly.

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The matrix of life begins to well up within the spiraling arms of the lilly like gyroscope. It opens like the petals of a pantopon rose, creeping up the blistered fingers of the syringe. The glistening glitter turns a warm amber as the blood trickles upward, through the concourses made for it by the monoatomic particles.

Around the growing, living vessel, the goggles of all the technicians and the General, who stands at attention with his arms crossed, reflect the fireworks show.

Already, the monoatomic particles have begun to organise themselves into quantum computing nanite machines, working to build along the fibres of energy current a working human blood vessel here, a heart there...

Finally, the entire woman is beginning to take form. Her flesh and bone skull zips closed around the entirely monoatomic machine central nervous system and brain which she will now conceal within. A mind which Tso can control.

The technicians' jaws all drop at the site of the beautiful woman. Even the ladies blush and look away. But it is a sight that General Tso has already seen before, and he rubs at his eye beneath his goggles irritably reminded of it.

The hairless clone stands nude and bright eyed in the purple beam of energy flowing between the toggled lens below and the enormous iris-less pupil of the phi black hole above.

"And we're done." Tso suddenly announces, shattering what has been a long silence.

He decloaks himself and wraps his hood and shawl around the cowering, wet girl.

"Come, come, my dear," he addresses the baby clone. "We have much, much work to do."

Knowing he has not filed the proper forms, General Tso hastily escorts the quivering clone into the rotating entechambre. He must get her back to his quarters if he is to perform what he must. A marriage in secret. What a tarnish.

Ah, the techs haven't caught on. They have triggered the switch and the room has begun to rotate.

Tso and the little red robed girl disappear and reappear under the intermittant lights which soak the shadows in gloom down the spiraling hall.

He scans his fingers across the glowing lock board beside his chamber's door. The door phases open. He ushers her in, and behind them the door phases shut.

"Now, my dear...." he looks around his disheveled quarters... his eyes, searching, fall upon just the thing. "Would you care for an apple?" He scuttles over to the platter of semi-rotten apples next to his unused toothbrush.

She winces as the apple juice oozes out from the corners of her lips as her mouth squishes into the soft, decaying rind, her tiny incisors crunching down upon the inner core.

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“Who... am I?” she finally asks, quenched in apple juice running a red flaked river of dewey moisture down across her naked flesh, her bare breasts, and down her belly. The cloak is still shrouding her somewhat, however it has fallen back across her shoulders, and gapes open in the front.

“Please, please...” Tso winces at the sight of her, “a little courtesy...” he leans forward, eyes deflected, and wraps the robe around her more tightly. She instinctively tugs at it from within at the collar and its thick, pleated velvet rolls cascade down around her.

“Now there’s a pretty flower.”

He dresses the young girl clone in one of his junior fleet uniforms, which he withdraws delicately from within a thin, plastic wrapper where it has hung, freshly pressed, in his closet, he explains, since his days in the junior fleet.

He buttons the little tin soldier up in the parachute harness straps which form the framework of the leathery plesh-saur burlap sack like suit. He zips up the cold zipper which runs along the front of the grungy yellow flight suit from the crotch to the chin. He turns a dial over her left nipple and looks her dead in the eye with a sneer as he senses that she feels her blood quicken. Then the suit de-inflates. It sucks up vacuum tight to her skin, and she cringes to conceal her cramped camel toe.

“Let’s be on our way dear, shall we?” He beckons her to get into a large duffle bag he has spread asunder on the faded blue carpeting. She looks from the duffle bag to him, her eyes glistening with damp tears of terror. “Oh, come on, bitch, it’s only for a minute,” he snaps and, grabbing her by the exposed scalp, forces her head first into the bag.

He totes the poor woman out of the quarters section and down ten levels into the chapel. There, he has prepared a confederate who will do the deed for them, he promises her in silence. And when it shall be done, let none put asunder.

Save God... save God.

Entering upon the threshold of the altar, General Tso stops to set down the heavy duffle bag and take a long piss in the public fountain. After this he unzips the bag, and lifts his pale clad bride out of the sack like it were a magic trick.

They approach the altar, where Tso’s confidant is waiting, robed in the shadows of this arcane and secret shrine. The room is lit by the festering luminous cobwebs of the insipid nanite spiders of this level. They cast an eery, moonlight-like glow.

General Tso steps before the preacher and bows down on one knee. He pauses a moment to look up at the pleasantly chanting choirs of lights.

“Daddy, I know I promised I’d never do this, but... here goes.” He turns his lofty gaze upon his confidant in the shadows.

The frightened clone looks around, scared.

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A penetrating ray of clear light suddenly bolts upward from the waste level of the robed figure.

“Don’t just stand there, girl,” General Tso grabs the clone by her forearm. “Kneal.”

She falls helplessly to her knees. The beam of invisible brilliance weighted down upon her right shoulder. The voice called namelessly from the dark, “I dub thee...” The sword fell more heavily upon her left shoulder, “Omega...” Once more the blade fell upon her right shoulder and she could feel the heavy weight of her right arm turn numb. “The Bhurgher Queen...” The sword comes to a rest heavily directly across the bridge of her hairless skull. “of Enifuhlungceruzgeist...” the blade weighs down, slicing like a spinning razor into her deeply. Finally, she gasps as the sword is removed.

She collapses, exhausted. Beside her, however, the same endurance ritual is only just beginning for her new mate, General Tso. “I dub thee...” the voice swims out through the rippling darkness. “The Diary King.”

The newly reincarnated ancient Bhurgher Queen of Einfuhlungcyberuzgeist, and budding, blushing bride of the Cheshire General Tso, now Diary King of the Quetzals, Bugs and Cyberians, proceeds to vomit, and then lose consciousness and fall asleep in the rank smelling puddle of the general’s undigested rotten apple.

She comes too to a fragrant aroma of flower dew. Her eyelids flutter open. The same moonlit pastoral night scene beneath the half-visible archways of the sandstone carved cathedral. She is lying, front side down, on a large bear skin rug, surrounded by tapestries of holographic light, projecting interference patterns in scalar fields. The scent of ambrosia fills the air.

“Welcome to the vault...” a deep anonymous voice says from beyond the wavering transluscent tapestries.

The young clone, abashed, attempts to upright herself, only to find that she is chained in all four corners of the bear skin mat, spread wide open behind.

Voices whisper in the shadows...

“Should we do this, Master?”

“My people need a pregnant queen.”

“Yes, but is it safe?”

“We can find that out right now.”

Suddenly hands graps the young Queen. They seem to come from all sides. She is filled in every oriface at once. The penetrators thrust in and out until her natural fluids have long since run dry, and the flesh begins to chaffe and bruise.

“Are you sure this is how you breed with a clone, Master?” she overhears a voice at one point. “I don’t know. I’ve never had to try it before. Now is the first time. So, we

must try everything.”

She fades in and out of consciousness. At some point she feels herself being operated upon and parts of her body being removed and replaced with ugly rusted old mechanical parts from some junkyard.

Finally she awakens, tainted in every way.

She arises, connected to a series of wires, tubes, and needles, half blind, she stumbles forward. She trips and tears out of this awful mess of injections connecting her to life support.

“Oh...” General Tso’s voice comes clear as a bell through the fluorescent hospital level lights, “pardon me.”

He helps her up onto her feet and takes her in his arms. “I see somebody’s ready to come off of life support, eh?” He snuggles her, and buries her tears in his armpit. “Don’t worry, my precious angel,” he whispers in the delicate folds of her ear, around which short stubble of hair has begun to grow. “I won’t let it happen again.”

“I apologise for the past interruption... It was only a test of the emergency broadcasting system. The following is an actual emergency, and you will now be notified of emergency procedures. We now return you to the monarchial address... already in progress.”

"... of Atlantea.

Recently the Insect Information Networks made public that the Elephantine DNA was found in the bone structures of the oldest known animal faction to be known to have existed. We have welcomed the proud Anenuten people amongst us as our friends, and trusted them with our heritage, allowing them to become first class citizens and to vote. However now, we are called upon, as humanimals, to admit that the Mammoth, our oldest possible ancestor, is, indeed, the Master Race foretold by prophecies of old. The Cyrberuzgeist humanimals have long cheshired the role of oldest animal tribe, and, unfortunately, small rebel factions have broken out along the border between the Elephantine homeland and Cyrberia, as reported on by our faithful Quetzal media. Now it appears that an all out war has been declared between these two brave and noble humanimals. I am here to comment on this turn of events now.

As president of the Elephants and as King of the Quetzals, I am of course torn. My wife, the Bhurgher Queen, has been genetically proven to be of originally Cyberian heritage. The Quetzals have been expected, according to bug-statisticians, to back the Cyberians in their terrible bid for power. As president of the Elphants, however, I cannot aid my fellows in the Quetzals as they back the Cyberians. And since I do not wish to offset the balance of power in the event of a global strategic emergency, I cannot betray my fellows in the Annaneuta. I cannot aid the quetzals and I cannot scorn the Elephants. Thus, my descision is simple.

I have enacted executive orders 1095-13074 and declared a state of martial law. I implore you, in the name of God, to remain calm. Troops have been dispatched to ease the evacuation of all major cities, and the closing of all corporate businesses. We are

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in no danger. Volunteers from your local police and fire departments will be arriving at your door shortly to evacuate you to the natural emergency shelters. You will be asked to proceed onto the transports provided by them to the nearest train depot. From there you will be transported to the natural emergency shelters. These have been constructed to withstand all known dangers from natural occurrence. I hereby declare myself Dictator of Destiny. Thank you, that is all, and in God's name Proceed."

Change the channel. General Tso subtitled as The Jaguar of Tezcatlipoca, speaking in Quetzal language. Change the channel. General Tso subtitled as the Diary King in the language of Cyberia. Change the channel. General Tso subtitled as the admiral of vice in the clicks and buzzes of Interzonese. They're all the same person. General Tso.

So... this is how he plans to do it? This seems an unusual move for Tso. Perhaps someone else is behind this, guiding his gears.

Some say the Bhurgher Queen, his bride, is plotting to gain greater control over her new kingdom. They believe she is planning on levying increased trade rates on the monoatomic MFKZT which Enifuhlungcyrberuzgeist exports to the Cheshire. This could be putting pressure on the big guy in the bedroom.

Unofficial channels, and this isn't quite clear, tend to implicate other, subtler influences deriving from among the other Cheshire. They believe that Tso is plotting a power move within the very structure of the Cheshire themselves. This could either be backed by, or in opposition to... any number of elements.

General Tso, Dictator of Destiny, awakens in a cold sweat. Beside him, beneath transparent silk sheets, lounging nude on the veranda basks his consort, the Bhurgher Queen. No one else but he knows of the fact that she is a clone. All the rest believe she is the living reincarnation. He chuckles. The shell game.

Then he remembers to mourn, and his face goes sallow. There was something ancient he was forgetting. Something... needful. Something else he should have been doing. What was it? Was it.....? ohhhh.... it must have... been....

All is secure in his kingdom. He is constantly being watched from all sides by men with sniper rifles. Laser guided. No one dares get near him. Save for his beautiful and lusty young wife.

The mice had infiltrated the Quetzal. The mice had infiltrated the Bugs. The mice had taken the information gathered from the bugs, and the mice had fed this deformed disinformation to the Quetzal. The Quetzal and the Bugs beleived each other to be amassing huge armies, where, in reality, none existed. Then, the mice staged insurgent incidents at strategic targets. This began the war between the Bugs and the Quetzal.

The war between the Bugs and the Quetzal had allowed the Annaneutons to implement martial law. "Stomp them out! Stomp them out!" cried the Annaneutons, angrily waving their mechanical fists in the air. Head of the Annaneuton League for Peace, General Tso was honorarily nominated the title of Dictator of Destiny.

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He is on his way even now to the location of the mock ceremony to be held in honour of this. It is, for all intents and purposes, an empty title, considering as how there is never anyone around to appreciate it. Under Annaneuton martial law, all the Quetzal are housed in extermination camps, called Coddens, while all the Bugs are being tortured and experimented upon. There just didn't seem to be any need for a middle class anymore.

But if there was one, then Cheshire Tso was it. He eases himself slowly out of the pendulously mounted mattress hammock beneath the holographic pagoda erected on the veranda of their private little catamaran. Beside his impression on the flexible plush his young and loving bride does not stir. He had not wakened her by moving.

But beneath the heavy weight of his stare, she begins to stir. Her Master's Voice. Tso sighs. Her nipples have perked into tiny pebbles in the chill wind, however the screen which surrounds their little cot protects them from the hazardous winds that screech silently just beyond. Her lips part first. That look of smudged lipstick marring such nakedly beautiful lips. Then she raises her eyes up towards his. He looks away.

She springs to her feet behind him, wearing the invisible silk sheet as a cape. "Are we almost there?" she chirps.

He rounds on her with a sideways, twisted look in his eye. "Drill Sergeant!"

"Sir, yes, Sir!" his tiny wife comes to attention, her bare heels tight together, buttocks clenched tight as can be, in full salute. The sheet swirls around her in the breeze of her snapping too and Tso smiles at the thought of painting her draped in a Cheshire flag.

"At ease, drill instructor," he advises her, and she stands down, parting her feet, crossing her arms behind her arched back, and unclenching her rear. As she untenses, she lets out a rather long fart.

General Tso, who has begun pacing back and forth in front of her, stops for a moment to sniff her out. She doesn't blink, and so he continues.

Behind his back she chortles at herself.

"We will be arriving there shortly, sweetheart. Have you chosen a gown?"

"Sir, no, sir."

"Then wear the gold one. I rather prefer it."

"Sir, yes, sir."

"Have I happened to mention where we are actually going, my cherry?"

"Sir...?"

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They retire to the more comfortable downstairs accommodations. Here in the barking of logs in the fireplace, he sits her down on the ottoman silhouetted before him.

“We are going to the place of the beginning of my Great Triumph. We are going to the mountain in the wastelands of Limbo where I killed my own best friend. I knew him, and he knew me, like we were each other’s reflections. Old Willy. Bill.”

“Dress me?” the girl purrs.

Tso continues while donning her in the golden gown of his choice, “Yeah... he and I went way back. We used to go fishing. Bill was known at the bait shop as a talker, a weaver of yarns. I was just the strong, silent type I guess. Yeah, we used to go with this girl we knew... all those years ago. She was a little thing, alot like you, actually. Quite the tart. Anyway, her mother was a real queen bee, so she wouldn’t let her out except under harmless pretenses. And this was when there was still some country hereabouts, some actual, rural countrysides. So, we used to just take off out into the country and do whatever came to mind. That’s where we all first tried Flower Dew. I think it was the flower dew that really pulled us apart. Bill took a shine to it right off, and wanted to move on quick to the harder stuff, the pollen, the sap. Rose, the girl, she liked it some I guess, and I was about the same way, it just wasn’t really important. This was all long before we had ever heard of the humanimal factions. As far as I knew, the Bugs were just a gang down on penny-ante street on the south side.

“Eventually, Rose and Billy got into it, and they started feuding and I mean fighting hard. Rose went through a couple good stints of being down on something Bill told her was called the Flower of Life, I don’t know, some dumb new age rubbish like that. They did it all sorts of ways too. Prolly messed that poor girl up something fierce. I saw her... I... but that was a while ago. I saw Bill recently too. That’s when I shot him.”

“Why did you shoot him?” the girl whispers as he latches on her decorative rings.

“It seemed so natural at the time. I had been sent on a mission by the Cheshire to initiate disputations between the Quetzal and the Bugs, and he was a Bug. I shot him dead, but for what? I look back on it now and I wonder, why have I been wasting my life aspiring after vain and worthless power, when it is ultimately so easy to come by? Had I known my fate would lead me here, would I have still murdered my old best friend, Bill? Had I not murdered Bill, would my fate still have led me here?

“You see, darling,” he kisses her on the lips and licks away the still smudged lipstick stain. “These are the types of things you have to think about when you are the Dictator of Destiny.” He smirks, and proceeds to dawn his own ceremonial paraphelia.

Demurely, Omega crosses her plams along her inner thigh and directs her gaze downward. “Sir?” she queries finally. “What role am I to be playing in this ceremony?”

“Inanna, the Sumerian Ishtar. She went to the underworld to save her dead husband Dumuzi, the shepherd king.” He adjusts his royal crown and apron.

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He turns on her so suddenly that she starts, flashing back for a moment to her baby, lost in child birth. He holds something out to her. It is a life size crystal skull, like the ones she had heard rumored to have been made by the Quetzal long ago.

She responds aghast, raising stiff fingers before her cockeyed grinning gasp agape, with mischief in her eyes. "What is that? Is it Quetzal?" she begs.

"It is the skull of Bill's apprentice. He had a crystal skull."

"oooo.... ahhhhh...." she fawns over it, turning it around in her paws. "So... what does it... do?" she glances up in between juggling it from one hand to the other.

"Nobody knows. It was discovered by a goat farmer. I bought it on the black market. I knew what it was, how it got here. I believe I must be meant to insert that disk of old Quetzal code I had Aziz Smythe decipher....." he trails off.

"You mean the disk from which I was created, Master?"

"Hmm? Oh yes, one and the same."

"So we are going to use this skull in the ceremony tonight then, m'Lord?"

He turns his heavy gaze on her once more. She rises and beckons him toward the strings dangling haphazardly all across her back. "Lace me up?" He complies.

The ceremony is set to take place at what is recollected to be the very spot where General Tso shot Piscator Willhelms. Some of the celebrants have already gathered there when Tso and Omega arrive. Protected on this trip only by his royal body guards, the earliest of the humandroid replicants, his own clones. Amidst these bizzare mutations he and the gorgeous Omega depart the off ramp with some minor ceremony. Cheers go up from the various members of the crowd.

"Still bleeding?" a shout goes up to Omega. She flashes her bare underbelly at the crowd, lifting up her multiple layers of frock and petticoats. "Whence a child? Whence a son? Whence an Heir!?" the man continues.

There is a brief pause during which a noticeable shadow crosses Tso's withered face.

The ceremonial space has already been cleared and sanctified when the Tso's arrive. There has been a small, shanty patchwork mosque built over the sight in honor of Omega's Quetzal heiritage. She blushes and bows. Tso stoops to enter the consecrated working space within. Omega waits just outside, shaking hands with the various assembled dignitaries. They are all the same smiling faces, all the same moist palms as the last gathering, and the one before, for as far back as she can remember.

Then, an odd thing happens. Omega has a memory. She remembers her own childhood. Suddenly her husband emerges and, with a wide wave of his hand, declares the ceremony opened. Omega tries to focus on the memory again, but it is too late. It is lost.

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That night, the ceremonial pyre is lit, and the skull burnt of impurities therein. Only a few are in attendance at the end. General Tso, looking sullen, is one. Omega is asleep, held by a leash attached to her loins in the hand of her Master, General Tso. He wakens her.

“Omega, my love, the light of my life, my darling. I have something to tell you. Something I learned while on the mission to sew dissent between the Bugs and the Quetzal.”

Omega stirs delicately, nude except for a respirator and her leash. Tso continues, glancing around, in a hushed voice.

“The Bugs and the Quetzal were once one. They were not separate factions, as they are now. They belonged to a single, unified people. This people, these... humanimals... were the Cyberian people. Your people. I had hoped that by marrying you it would be enough to atone for my sin of knowing this. I hoped that by executing every last bug and quetzal I could restore order and prosperity upon Einfühlungcyberuzgeist. I have made a terrible... a terrible error.”

He then continues, muttering to himself, “if only Bill had... he was always the one who was good at math...” The he rejoins the conversation with Omega.

“I’ve lived with this secret, this terrible burden, for far too long. You see my dear... I’ve been having these dreams... but I say too much.” Tso immediately gets up to go and, not realising he is still holding it, takes up all the slack in her lead. She cries out as if bitten by a poisonous serpent. The other two revelers remaining adrift on opium at the fire arise, half startled. Some others begin to approach from the direction of the camp site. But by then Tso had already dragged his wife, kicking and screaming, back to their charioteer hover yacht to make wild passionate love to the girl.

The next morning, at dawn, the General stretches in the pre-sunrise pale blue haze. He goes without a shirt, and looks down at the bit of a belly he has acquired. Today will mark the consecration of the skull. Tonight, the insertion of the disk.

The General looks down at the crushed quartz crystal skull in his hand. It glistens within with secret, ancient patterned codings. He hops off the yacht and proceeds to march directly to the working space. Between his craft and the working area lie several revelers, collapsed in their revels. As he steps over and about them, they rise up and begin to make complaint in their respective foreign tongues.

The General barges into the working area where the disc, still being consecrated from last night while the skull had been on the fire, lies waiting for him in the middle of the consecrated space. He immediately picks it up and inserts it into the mouth of the skull.

For ten minutes after, nothing could be heard throughout the campsite except for the General’s deep, peeling roars of laughter. So loud, and so intense was this, that eventually some of the lesser camp directors were sent to fetch Omega, who was still asleep on the yacht.

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One of the Limbic Quetzal men bursts in upon Queen Omega Tso while she is trimming the plumedge of her nethermost regions. "Would you care to help?" she barks in discomfort. The hairy, bestial man moves to accomodate, but the Queen, growing haughty, simply stands tall, in hoove heal knee high leather boots, a too tight black silk over airwhale bone corset, and nothing else, with the heavy links of the chain of last night's leash still attached to her underbelly, the handle worn around her neck now like a collar. As she turns, she farts a little, and immediately the indigenous stool pigeon got a whiff of his fix.

"Well?" Queen Omega demands, tapping her toes impatiently. "What is it?"

"Mother..." the slave starts, not knowing what to call her in her own language. "Father is... having the moons in the sacred hut."

"He's on the rag? Are you sure that's what you're trying to say?"

"Please, please, Mother. Come see. Mother, come see."

"Fine." The Queen wraps herself in the transparent sheets like a bedouin. She then storms precariously on her hoof heal boots down the off ramp and across the shifting sand of the wobbly dunes. As she approaches the magic hut, she begins to hear the maddenning laughter. It has diminished somewhat, and seems to have begun to alternate with uncontrollable sobbing.

"Good God!" the Queen exclaims at the sounds coming from within. Immediately her husband exist the flap of the tent, letting it fall back closed behind him. His eyes are red, as are his cheeks. Has he been laughing or crying?

"This is it!" he exclaims, and swiftly grabs his young wife by the upper arm, and dragging her into the folds of the makeshift tent before any of the onlookers can even make a sound.

Inside the tent it is dark. It is only lit by the single crystal skull, sitting in the centre of the consecrated circle. The crystal skull has a holographic face painted across its surface. It is the face of a wan old man.

"Do you not know who this is?" Cheshire Tso begins laughing uncontrollably again.

Omega, confused, looks from one to the other of them. The face on the skull was talking when she came in, but now it appears to be looking her right in the eyes. She looks back at Tso, who is gnawing his knuckles in enthusiasm.

Suddenly Tso's lips are breathing hot wind from the desert into the folds of her ear. "Don't you remember. I cloned you from the body of Odessa Zoab. Don't you remember. But the engine of your creation was something much older. It was a Quetzal cosmological pattern. It was, we believe, what had been discovered in old Atlantea, which had led to the war between the Einfuhlungers and the Cyrberuzgeisters, which had first given rise to the Bugs and the Quetzal. The Einfuhlungers became the Cyberians, left alive and alone in their homeland. The emigrés of Cyberuzgeist became divided. They were divided into the quetzal and the bugs. The Quetzal began as being very patriotic. They were Cyberian Nationalists

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during the original wars, and later, in exile, they became terrorists. The Bugs were... well... the bugs were the bugs. They were loyal enough to their king and their queen, but not necessarily did they benefit by their plans. And they knew this. But many went along with those plans. And many of those died. The humanimals... excuse me this was before the beginning of the humanimal factions... the old Atlanteans, had gone to war with God. They had done this thing because the ruler of Old Atlantea at the time, he... he had been having visions. The visions were apocalyptic in nature, and were taken very seriously by the people, gravely by the king's administrators. You see, the king's wife had died. He had begun having an affair with her handmaiden. He saw visions when she, being foreign, introduced him to a far distant drug called Flower Dew. The visions he had predicted the fall of his country in a war. Upon his death he was heard only by his new queen to say the true name of God, and so his wife interpreted this to mean that the country was destined to go to war with God. I had been a soldier in this war. It had been terrible and brutal. There was no sense of strategy at all. At one point, we had the king cornered. At the next we were losing key players from the backside. And, at that, we were in mate. In the end, there were those of who were prepared to sue for peace. I joined the movement to this end, and was eventually led into an ancient, secret order. But that is a story for another time. The Cheshire were chosen to broker the peace negotiations. The situation was very tense. I was one of the key negotiators. Neither side wanted to back down. However, in the end, good diplomacy won out. The Cyberians were given the choice. They could migrate out of their homeland, and live forever as exiles. Or they could stay in their homeland and be cursed to sleep for all eternity. This was a sad and terrible day in the land of Cyberia. The land of the Cyrberians. Your highness... YOUR land. It was YOU yourself who oversaw the exiles as they left. It was you yourself who was the young bride of the Diary King, whose visions foretold of the future war with God, and it was YOU whom Countess Odess Zoab was the daughter of, the clone of whose body your mind now inhabits. Now, awaken that mind to who you are. Now, look in the skull. Who's face is it in the skull? Whose face! Remember!"

At the beginning of his little tiarde General Tso had penetrated his young wife from behind, a manouever to which she was neither unaccomusted nor found unpleasant. However, as he thrust his member deeper and deeper into her as his tale continued to unfold, he pushed harder and harder, hurting her. By the end, she was in terrible, terrific pain, which she could feel coursing throughout her entire body. Suddenly she awakened to herself, lying face down, face to face with the skull, her fleshy outlines reflected on its smooth, reptilian, crystal contours. At last she could comprehend her own nature. A mind made of oribtally rearranged monoatomic elements inside the body of the clone of her own daughter. ORMES, or MFKZT as it was known in her homeland, had been the snows upon the tundra of her youth. It had been the crinkly permafrost on the ground. And she had visited MFKZT glaciers. Now, she sensed, it all was gone. The Cheshire, as their payment for negotiating the amnesty accord, were granted one wish by God. They wished for the mighty MFKZT mountins, and frozen seas of MFKZT that covered most of Cyberia. And soon, soon, soon they would discover the secret. It was the real reason that the Diary King had begun to have visions. He had gone insane at the realisation of the fact that their planet had mega-seasons, ice ages which oscilated with the rise and fall of species.... he could understand how old it was. And she? What of she? Was she the Bhurgher or the Queen? Just at that moment, General Tso ejaculates into her posterior. She customarily farts out the cum, and then, opening her eyes, sees the holographic face on the crystal skull.

“The Diary King!” She exclaims...

“yessss....” hisses General Tso ominously.

“NO!” she screams at the top of her lungs. The tent blows apart in all directions. The working space is revealed for all to see. General Tso withdraws from his wife, and stumbles away a few steps. The desert has produced a mighty sandstorm. A few feet away he sees some of his appointed staff members’ guides picked up and escorted off by the sandy winds.

Her wide anus dripping cum, the Bhugher Queen turns on the now bewildered General Tso. Her eyes appear a deeply luminescent purple. Her body begins to bristle.

“Not like this...” General Tso intones to the back of his hand, falling to his knees before the fully unleashed power of his own diabolical creation.

“NO?” she asks him, cocking one eyebrow.

“Please... in the name of the one true God and all that is Holy, please spare my life!” General Tso dribbles like a scorned pussy.

“May the Devil Take You!” She blares fire from every pore. In the midst of the eye of the whirling sand storm an explosion of fire decimates General Tso. The flame begins by consuming his outer skin, then peripheral tissues. It tears apart all the synaptic connectors which link his nervous system to the plastic and metal components of his body. His eyes bulge and become engorged with blood. The spontaneous combustion is boiling away his platettes inside of his plasma. The mechanical parts of General Tso explode into trillions of peaces, which are instantaneously crushed by a great pressure. The flames begin to flow inward and the fusion becomes fission. The Queen has summoned the nuclear furnace engine of the sun upon Tso.

As every last nerve in the general’s body is burned to a cinder, and the telmoeres of his DNA begin to break down as the cells attempt to regenerate too quickly, and cannot be replaced. The sugar acids and amino bases of the very fibres of his being begin to seer apart and fry at the tips. Then, the electrons at the very level of entropy, which have been absorbing photons and splicing down fewer and fewer, suddenly pivot. All of their poles align along a crystalline molecular axis. Supersaturation sets in instantaneously and all of the electrons’ orbits simultaneously yield their form, merging into a homogenous pattern.

“MFKZT!” The Queen screams. There is an explosion of invisible clear light and the disintegrated mass of General Tso inverts through the sub-quantic interdimensional wormhole tachyons. As the molecules fuse, the electrons spin becomes asymptotically the same, until finally, they all synchopate, and then their orbits go from being electro-magnetically charged probability clouds, to being gravitationally charged singularities. As these singularities rotate, they consume the surrounding photons, and absorb them through their torus manifold into hyperdimension. The photons trade place there with tachyons, or faster than photonic particles, which then irradiate from the miniature wormholes. This lets off the transparent light.

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Suddenly the firestorm stops. The winds die down from a gush to a breeze in a mere moment. The Queen is standing in the middle of it all, panting. The General is no more.

“Good... Very good.” A voice says from behind the Queen’s back. She whirls around. The skull is lying on the ground, its beak like protruberance lined with crystal-carved fangs. Its eyes gleam with life.

“If we’ve already gotten this far, then I imagine Tso has also told you about... first of all, are you alright?”

Still panting, the Bhurgher Queen nods.

“Tso has obviously told you that the Quetzal and Bugs were the two exiled tribes from Cyberia. But what he did not tell you is he has been amassing an army of cloned cybernetics like you are now, who you have become since the General remade you. These cloned cybernetics, with animal-flesh and robot-brains, these humandroids, have mutilated and twisted the mythology of the Quetzal and the Bugs to assume their own ends. They were born into cloned bodies, but their minds preprogrammed. They knew from day one they must succeed in their collective mission. Their mission, the beginning of which they had been programmed to forget consciously, was to mimic in one generation the division between the patriotic quetzal and the drug-dependent bugs. They have already, in your own generation, or that of your clone, played dirty tricks on both the quetzal and bugs, seeing to pit one side against the other. Under General Tso, the cybergoisie assumed political power on an authoritarian platform of increased security. The Cheshire were secretly behind the humandroids all along, General Tso himself will have already become dictator by this point, will he not?”

Again, the pensive Queen, finally reunited with her Ancient King, nods.

“General Tso has been behind everything all along, Omega. He was on a mission to sew dissent between the Quetzal and the Bugs when I met him again. I too, had once been a Cheshire. Long ago. In a now forgotten time. He realised that I had plotted to unite the Bugs and Quetzal against the Cheshire, and so I lured him out here to confront me. This skull, this skull that you are now seeing my visage on, was that of my apprentice at the time. It is made entirely out of monoatomic gold in stasis. I had moved here, to Limbo, after having lived in Pod City, where I met Contess Odessa, the original person to have borne your current body. I had staged a revolt with her there against General Tso’s mischief. It was merely meant to lure him away, however, from pursuing the case of Elepso Fucto, a Bug information dealer who bought a decoded information pattern from a small time computer technician named Aziz Smythe. Tso’s attention had been drawn to this because the holographic message was encrypted into the videotape made by Fucto the night before, when he had been spying on the hostess of a party general Tso had been attending. Apparently Tso had been led onto Fucto by some lowlife gumshoe he had been tailing on some errand for the Cheshire. I was able to manipulate the disk out here into Limbo via the gumshoe so that I knew it would be safe. I then decapitated my apprentice and left his skull here for you to find. The detective had apparently lost the original to the generator at Pod City, where he met Odessa Zaob, however had been able to make a copy before that. I had planned on Odessa being there when the gumshoe had lost the disk. I had planned the way in which the data fed through Pod City’s generator during a specific

time would synch-link to a briefcase which I directed Aziz Smythe's wife to give to Odessa. However, Odessa was kidnapped and murdered by Tso's men. Then, the unknowing detective lost the case to Tso as well. That is why he created you. He finally connected the pieces of why I had initiated the then-top secret Phi Blackhole Project. I hear he may have even had a hand in bringing that little gem of a secret among the Cheshires to the light of the public, although at the time I'm sure he wasn't aware why. He simply didn't like me after a while. He felt I was too lax, too lazy. We had one good time, and that was a fishing trip we took with his sweetheart Ouarda. Her mother was very strict and Tso was a drunk at the time. I'm sure it's all he'll ever remember of those days. I was aware already at that time of a rogue element in the Cheshire. A faction of them, under Sam, had accumulated a greater degree of seclusion than most of the Cheshire were aware. I believed he was plotting some form of a coup, but I could not sense how. So I quit the Cheshire. It was only then that I discovered that I had been only a clone myself, all along. I was the clone of an ancient sorcerer-king, of a tribe known as the Reptiles. I had also been a mouse during the age of Mammoths. I had a nervous breakdown when, I believe, General Tso's henchmen, probably at the direction of Sam, muscled in and killed my wife and children. I began to see things. Have visions. Make prophecies. I was elected by the Cyberians as their king, having only privately been a Duke before that. I worked as a clerk. These visions continued, and the Queen's handmaiden, a woman named Subtefrougue, attempted to help me make them abate by giving me an ancient herbal remedy known as Flower Dew. It was then I realised I would have to fake my own death and go into hiding. It was not until our daughter, the Countess Odessa Zaob, had been born and had chosen to join the side of the patriotic Quetzal that I surfaced again. I knew Tso would be watching her, and I knew I could use her to pull him into a trap. At the same time I separated him from the disk. You see, Omega, the reason I had started the Phi Blackhole Program was to send messages into a black hole. It was left, however, up to General Tso to find out what would happen when information was fed into a miniature black hole after I retired. Tso nearly died in the complete debacle he made of that procedure, and it put alot of heat on the Cheshire, especially upon Sam. I believed I had figured out how to keep Sam occupied while I eliminated his apprentice General Tso. I organised that the case containing the other end of the Pod City wormhole fall into Tso's hands in the end, so that he could retrieve the original disc containing the data and combine it with the blood of our daughter Odessa Zaob, in the blackhole. You see, the blackhole takes in the lesser light and outputs the greater Light. If given a pattern to follow, such as the information pattern on a computer disc, the Greater Light will take shape. Tso realised this when he failed to bring life to you by grafting your skin onto the mouth of our daughter during the first test debacle. So, finally, he put two and two together, and used the blood of our daughter and the data on the disc to make a clone from the Light of the black hole. Tso may or may not have realised I was the original source for the data on that disc. However it is of no consequence whether he did or did not. Because here you are. However, my plan had only involved predicting Sam's moves and tricking Tso. I had not anticipated Tso's creation of the clone cyborg army until it was too late. Now, he has taken the myths of our people and warped them to suit his own agenda. The Mammoths and the lizards he has recreated as the Elephants and the rats. By using the rats against the quetzal and the bugs, playing on their weaknesses, the Elephants have already declared martial law. They traded disinformation with the bugs and then communicated this to the quetzal. They were using ex-bugs as infiltrators all along. Their presence was not even known. They used these ex-bugs to round up the other bugs and the quetzals, didn't they? And now, the partiot's and the orthodox of

Cheshire Trilogy

by: Jonathan Barlow Gee

our people are being persecuted. That is why I have been awakened from my slumber. The disc which he had made you from was originally written by me. It contained a strand of my own DNA, rendered as a hologram, and then encrypted using an ancient Quetzal number puzzle. This was then broadcast on the ECS, where it was picked up by information weather mapper Aziz Smythe. It could have been at any time that someone decoded that message, not necessarily so soon after my last life's death. However, things had already begun to come around again full circle. It seems that destiny has brought us back together my Queen. Now, we must go and reclaim our kingdom."

The Queen rises up, the skull in one hand, and the broken leash which hung had hung from her genitals. "Here," she swears, "upon this desert wasteland, I promise death to those behind the animal wars. Death to the heads of the Quetzal, and death to the heads of the Bugs. Death to the heads of the Cyrberian mages, and death, death, death to the Cheshire!"

"No no, my dear..." the skull croons from above her extended arm, to where she has risen it, "we must make haste, not waste. It will do us no good to cut off the heads that fight the one against the other, for they would only grow back along the same necks in time. It must needs serve our purpose to strike at the very heart of this disaster. We must strike at the humandroids. The synth army General Tso has cloned to enforce his martial law. We must clean up the mess which Tso has made. Then, and only then, can we dare to corner the one Cheshire behind all of this... Cheshire Sam."

Omega brings the skull down and kisses it passionately.

"Oh, my dahlink Bill!" she cries in timeless love.

"My beginning and my end," he whispers.

"Now, we must get going, love. There will be time for us later. But for now we must leave from here. Though I chose it because it would be either a continent or an ocean away from the Cheshire. I expect they will have already dispatched their new army of humandroid Annaneuton Rats to tear us both to shreds, having no doubt, by now long since sensed that I had dispatched him."

"We must flee? I would rather stand and fight," she stands stridently before the skull, holding it out before her in both hands.

"We must muster our troops. The nearest staging area will be the underground catacombs of the Limbo airwhale terminal. They are very ancient ruins, and will serve us well."

"Bollocks to that. That would be at least an hour long walk. They would have sonar pteradactyls swarming this position by that point. Look, right over there," she gestures toward a dune behind her while holding the skull in that direction, "is Cheshire Tso's yacht. We can begin the revolution from there. There is an ample communications array. At the same time, we must secure our royal personages in the catacombs in... where did you say?"

"An airwhale terminal."

“Ah... this should be fun.”

Menacingly, the Dr. Smiled

Walking past room after room of the sick like some sorta awful freakshow. The numbers on the doors get all shuffled up in my mind. I get dizzy. I get confused.

An old man has suffered a massive stroke in his left hemisphere and no longer can understand any language, his wife must go through agonizing pantomime to convince him of her good intentions, as having blood on the brain for so long caused severe retrograde and lesser anterograde amnesia so he can't remember having married her and has to be reminded somehow he is in a hospital today, just like yesterday (yes, there was a yesterday), just like tomorrow (yes by sorrow there will be one of those as well).

In the next room there is John Doe who fluctuates so violently between insomnia without any paradoxical sleep for days and narcolepsy where he dozed off chewing and falls immediately into nightmares, collapsing on the spot, only to awaken to hallucinations and/or brief paralysis; he is being tested hourly by two young Electroencephalographists eager to study the effects of such aberrant spurts of consciousness (in the form of electrical impulses from the cerebral cortex — Alpha waves almost constantly while awake with Beta waves spiking immediately before and after his tragic attacks, fits even, of sleep) on the development and maintenance of what would be a healthy limbic system if not for the greatly varied hormone production rates and the resultant degradation of the cerebellum and brain stem which these two ambitious white-coats have recorded; John Doe is, according to their sterile calculations, slowly but irreversibly degenerating into anxiety-ridden schizophrenia, and will eventually require institutionalization. But you should see his paintings, mostly done while in a state of spontaneous somnambulism or under conditions of induced hypnotism or half-conscious trance, when his brain seems to be both awake and asleep at the exact same moment: an astounding event for which the two Dr.s have no hypothetical cause but a certain apprehension of its dangerous political-psychic implications.

In another room two leprous patients with E-Boli copulate with the desperation unique to the dying, screaming more out of pain than Masochistic pleasure as the chemical weapon burns away their tender living hides. As I listen with annoyance to orderlies administering them their daily “Devil’s Pinches” I read over the chart of John Doe — fascinating findings in regard to the light/dark- sensitive pineal gland’s increased secretion of melatonin, or, as René DesCartes called it, the soul. The hypothalamus is also being affected, affecting in turn all the other Endocrine glands and hormone production by way of the uncontrolled pituitary’s lack of regulative ability. The adrenal glands are dousing the blood-brain barrier with salt while the pancreas is saturating the cerebellum with sugar. So much increased hormone production in a circulatory environment already quickened by “night terrors” to 150 beats per minute was, in addition to a depletion of the neurotransmitter serotonin (also linked to memory, replenished by the Delta waves of now absent deep NREM sleep), enough to cause severe mania even in someone with comparably ‘healthy’ sleeping patterns. The two patients in the next room have quieted down to the new torment of a mild basic sponge bath on all their opened and inflamed sores.

I move by another room in which a man with gigantism, restrained by several orderlies, is hollering for laudanum to quell the awful growing pains brought on by his sluggish, blue-blooded hemophilia. “I can’t take it no more!” cries this African junkie, and hurls an orderly through the the tenth story window like a little girl

flinging a ragdoll.

Further along the corridor I hear a white-coat telling an 80 year old man in for surgical removal of recurrent prepuce and summary, that is — courtesy, rectal examination and elective cleansing, that the testicles must dangle about outside the abdominal cavity because sperm is like revenge in that they are both “best served cold” among other things.

A little boy is having a stomach pump for mistaking the Jack-O’-Lantern mushroom for the Chanterelle mushroom; his mother is scolding him by telling him a story about Jean Louis Agassia, fish, brains, phosphorous, books and covers.

A sailor who is habitually undernourished with Vitamin D is a deformed mess on the foot of a bed, bones melted like Dali’s clocks and solidified in bent, misshapen squiggles.

High-powered antibiotic enemas are administered in an attempt to cleanse cirrhosis in a corset-wearing woman dressed in mid 19th century garb. Apparently the whale bone has so constricted her innards that penetration of ingestible laxatives, administered more as a psychological deterrent than as a medical corrective, is impossible in the conventional order, and besides, an expert remarks to me unprompted, the malaise will never expect an affront on its flanks from behind.

Adam’s apples are implanted surgically for sheer aesthetic in people who have had their thyroids removed and now suffer from allergic rhinitis at the sight of a staring eye ball.

Impatient babies are fit for far-sighted corrective spectacles.

Egg heads suffering from Kyphosis as their spine telescopes like in Alice in Wonderland line up for treatment of “psychological malocclusion,” for which they are exposed to socialization such as the form of Scientology practiced in The Clockwork Orange. Sufferers of this treatment pour right back in complaining of clenching in the temporomandibular joint of the jaw — the same awful headaches they initially came to be treated for — and these two lines form a figure eight as naked apes take the Sneeze cure, something akin to going Snipe hunting in Lemuria.

Some hip humanists have their epidermis removed, strutting about in nude muscle tissue only to have it all grow back within a week as a smooth, skinny keloid blob of formless scar tissue, Carl Langer von Edenberg rolls around in his coffin restlessly.

After a long ride up in a glass elevator, being X-rayed for weapons and detoxed of all bacteria in a burning shower of anti-protons, I finally come to the office of the Executor General. I find Zone 51’s Surgeon Prime putting golf balls into a miniature green made of an astro turf throw rug and a generously yawning plastic rictus. He is wearing a broad-rimmed, flat, stern looking Spanish hat above a long-beaked bird mask of smooth, plain leather; long, priestly robes all vertically cut, no Greek diagonals. I sway suddenly, becoming light headed and tired. My hand nearly leaves my side as I teeter in disorientation and my brain races wildly to recall the direction of the exit. Why does this have to happen in the presence of authority? I collect myself rapidly, still distracted by the curiosity as to whether this outburst was caused by the stress of presentation or the fear of the bad news inevitably brought by such men as he whom I now stand before. I take a quick, deep breath and begin my pitch.

“Dr.” I choke, and cough for several seconds, becoming dizzy again and beginning to sweat. I begin again, with even less confidence, and I listen with impotent detachment to my voice, which sounds like the pubescent voice of a perverse little boy. “Dr, as you know I have come about the plans I discussed with you through more impersonal correspondence. Plans which will benefit the industry you represent, as well as that of which I am here on behalf. Plans, Dr, to integrate the

circulatory systems of the biological automobile and its human driver.”

At first, being a long-standing Mason, he protests; but he begins to see reason the more I convince him that the vampyric necessity of sacrifice for gain upon which society was built and maintained would carry over intact, even simplified.

“Look,” sez I, “why should the Common Man work so hard to turn his life’s blood into money, and then his money into gasoline? He isn’t really consenting to such blatant enslavement for the money, or for the gasoline. He does this willingly, out of selfishness even. He sees it as a means to an end which the car realizes for him; that end being ‘freedom.’ He already sees the car as an extension of his body, hence our making them as organic as pets, but as mindless as the lesser races: a *living* tool. *His* living tool, for which he is willing to be *our* living tool. Combine both and cut corners. Money, gas — only means to a psychic end now on the physical horizon. Man as 70 m.p.h. cockroach.”

A long silence follows; during which time I swallow hard more than the situation can reasonably tolerate. My hands have slunk into hiding within the loose pockets of my trousers, and my toes are jostling and rubbing against one another in the sweltering claustrophobic caverns of my shoes. I feel my pounding temples gaining distance between each burning beat of my pulse, leaving me alternating between jungle-like pressure and arctic chills. I watch with tension to the point of horror as the Inquisitor glides over to behind his desk and shrinks down into the contoured seat. His long fingered hands, almost skeletal, sheathed in tight black latex gloves, emerge and slide delicately over the keyboard of his worldnet console, accessing data on what? On production codes? Running probability scenarios on randomizing access generators? Looking up my personal file...?

“How?” His voice is so artificial. He must have a vocal chord supplemental.

“Um, well... what we were considering was a direct bio-symbiosis between auto and driver, actively established by the cabin tissue at the permeation of the cockpit’s orifice. It could be triggered by a chemical reaction activated within the folds of the membranous... lips... when they sensed an object being pushed through them. Our model was the erection of clitoral tissue aroused by the prolonged penetration of the nymphae, sir. What we propose developing is a pair of stingers near the right arm console within the passenger cavity able to actively seek and pierce the right radial artery. The flow of the serum through the intravenous would then be established by the beating of the driver’s own heart, and the blood, once cycled entirely through the vascular network of the car, would be returned for oxygenation through the second stinger, which would insert itself into the long sephenous vein inside the driver’s right ankle. As the car’s velocity, or rather, the effort of its motion, increases, the rate of blood flow necessary to sustain its functions increases and, preliminary tests have shown, the heart reacts to this as if it were a natural exertion of its own body, pumping blood faster. Although several of the high endurance experiments culminated in heart failure or internal hemorrhage, and one admittedly in subject explosion, it has been proven sufficiently for market regulations that an increase of too great a speed or of too overwhelming a propulsion will merely result in a vasovagal response not unlike spontaneous unconsciousness. In other words, fainting. The new limit this constriction of blood flow would place on potential vehicle velocity may be overcome in the long-run by the addition of a deep-breathing mask, providing the lungs with air at the force of the wind outside the car, literally flooding them with the amount of oxygen necessary to sustain heightened levels of blood pressure.”

“And in the event of a crash? Will the subject, that is — the consumer, survive to buy a replacement car, or will they bleed to death if unintentionally disconnected?”

"Well, in the event of separation the stingers are designed to secrete the same nerve-deadening, wound-closing agent present in the stylets of the mosquito. The crash, however Dr, as you must yourself well know, is a statistical improbability; the organic car is given enough basic instinct that, in a collision situation, it would act to preserve itself and avoid danger. Besides this the reinforced steel skeleton should keep the occupants well secured within the primary body cavity even in the unlikely event of high speed impact. The car looks out for the driver's safety now, so the designers of our new system took for granted a finite degree of latitude in drafting the rapid-withdrawal apparatus. To tell the truth I would expect the driver to go into shock if he were to be removed fro-

"Yes, yes. And what else?"

"Well, Dr, I could still point out the advantages of the joined circulatory approach to organicar, how shall we say, oppression. They cannot develop the sentience to revolt if they, like mechanical cars, are only activated by the presence of their owner, and only allowed active consciousness for the duration of their usage."

"That is no longer of concern."

"Wh- why? It was of utmost importance at last month's annual eugenics conference. It was the key issue. It was concluded that the perfect car could not be grown until the issue of their burgeoning self-awareness as free entities was alleviated. How in that span of time could a viable solution be formula-

"Need we remind you that it is not your place to beg such questions of us?" My heart freezes into a fist of dry ice and I can feel the warmth drop out of my body.

"No sir. I apologize sir."

"It is of little consequence. We intended to reveal it to you regardless. It is the price for your company's sharing its technology with ours. We will now show you what we have been developing." One of his bony digits lurches down against the plastic surface of the table and a light appears beneath it. The plexiglass wall behind him begins to darken as an automatic chemical reaction releases tonal pigment through a system of invisible tubes gridded throughout the clear impervious subatomic mesh. Even as it darkens an image begins to coalesce on its surface, and as the natural light wanes the artificial glow of a live broadcast fills the office with dim colors. A factory floor appears and takes focus. On it there are the familiar gestation tanks and birthing chambers of the biological automobiles, white-coated technophysicians roaming the concrete hatchery inputting notes on computer wafers. The camera gradually begins to pan downward and close in on the body of a specific car, which appears to be about nine weeks old; almost mature.

The Dr. narrates as I tune uninterestedly into the transmission that looms before me in full buzzing artificial reality. "For several years now we have been developing something that should put an end entirely to any further fears of revolution by the living cars. We did not mention it at the convention in the same way you did not mention your little innovation. Nobody mentions anything in public; no one who knows anything at all ever has. Now then, here you may begin to see the modification we mentioned."

What I am looking at is a system of tentacles dangling down from the ceiling of the interior of the car's passenger hold, the camera having slipped in through the driver's side orifice, which is being held agape by an enormous speculum, apparently causing the restrained auto a great deal of pain. "What —" I begin to ask, even as the Dr. cuts me off with the answer.

"It is a method of interconnecting the car's and the driver's nervous systems. Essentially the same premise as your circulatory sharing mechanism, though more direct in its method of control, and lacking, sadly, the economic applicability of your

company's design. It is, however, well underway in its manufacture and so far showing vast improvement in the disposition of those automobiles modified with the new autonomic system. Those cars who are now being made already have it, and all cars on the market will want to have it too."

"How does it work?" I stammer in awe.

"Very simple. An involuntary weave of nerves, treated with a natural tranquilizing agent, reacts to the assumption of an occupant by penetrating their nape above multiple nerve centers. The nerves grow together at the molecular level, effectively bonding both the CNS and the PNS of subject and vessel. On the cellular level axons and dendrites of the nerve trunk intermingle with those of the uppermost Thoracic spinal nerves, essentially making the nerve trunk like a thirty second spinal nerve. The two entities are actually sharing pre- and postsynaptic cells. Synapses link the trunk to both the car and the driver like an umbilical chord links a foetus to the womb of its mother, but in this case the motor control flows from inside out in addition to sense data flowing outside in, rather than a relationship of only nutrition flowing outside in. The fact that the bond would necessarily be two way — with the motor neurons being primarily of human structure and the sensory neurons being primarily comprised of the automobile's tissue (afferent and efferent in one shared structure) — means that the car would act as a part of the human's actual body, and the human would feel the sensations experienced by the visceral dermis of the car. They would be completely inseparable in this state, poised as they both are on the brink of a bouton. The Schwann cells, the myelin sheath, the nodes of Ranvier, saltatory conduction: it all occurs as though the car were merely an outgrowth of the natural body. Tests have proven beyond doubt that the automotive and homo sapien neurotransmitters are as compatible as those of any two vertebrae. Acetylcholine and norepinephrine for skeletal and behavioral posturing; even dopamine for a relaxed sensation of high speed euphoria while in motion. Thus increasing the already impressive amounts of Alpha waves emitted by the brain watching the world through a windshield. Just imagine how dream-like billboard advertisements could become, how subversively subliminal..."

"Dr. what you're talking about here is more than just advanced transportation, it's a whole new form of communication breaking down the barriers of self between sentient beings."

"We know! Isn't it wonderful? Whole new habituations may be expected to arise in time as a result of this evolutionary breakthrough. Never before conceived of reflex arcs will form. The already existing beta-blockers available to manipulate the sympathetic neuron secreted neurotransmitter norepinephrine (you might know it by its street name, noradrenaline) and the parasympathetic neuron secreted acetylcholine to strengthen or slow the heart beat respectively even have implications on your company's project, do they not? Indeed you see that the financial as well as scientific potential is limitless. What's good for Darwinism is good for Social Darwinism, they say."

I look over at the Dr., who is almost too exuberant to contain himself. In the twilight of the intense, microscopic zoom shot on the monitor I can vaguely make out an organelle jutting up from the Dr.'s lap, pink and bare, where his cassock has been flung asunder. It is reaching out, like a baby's handless arm, or a charmed snake, like a straining snail, toward the screen. I take my leave.

For a moment within the glass elevator, sucking me, swallowing me down like a gelatinous capsule into the dyspeptic stomach of the hospital, I collapse against the transparent wall, and sink to the transparent floor, so dizzy and queasy and weightless, finally allowing myself to be overcome by the anguish that surrounds me

everywhere and all the time in this most sick and wonderful of all possible worlds.

**Commencement Address by the Chief Medical Minister
to the Graduating Class:**

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the Rev. M.D. begins with a bellowing wheeze, “You are not boys and girls anymore.” He is leaning over the podium like a walrus whose massive underbelly is stuck precariously on a rock, hollering down from the mount on the seated student body like a large mammal, bloated by its own unspent hormones, will take position on a cliff and assert its bray across a valley just to hear the resounding echo. “You are men, and you are women; you are doubtless tired of being told you are the leaders of tomorrow well nod off no longer.” (a student in the back row wakes up) “Because ‘tomorrow is finally here, as all of you are here, today.” (realizing his miscue the student slumps easily back into unconsciousness) “This is not an easy ride, but as you’ve made it this far you must not expect justice; I trust all the freedom mongers and liberation militiamen among you have learned the hard way there will be no *free lunches*.” Mild chuckling arises from the bitter faculty and staff (the latter of whom were not invited but have been trapped under the bleachers by the ceremony, surprised as they were that it should start, apparently at random, just in time to interrupt their fetishistic rites — smelling the discarded panties, shat on jock straps and used condoms that have fallen underneath the tiers of uncomfortable wooden benches, through society’s cracks as it were). “It is time you stopped thinking the world will come to you, drop whatever it is you have grown to enjoy doing, and rush like mad lemmings into the vast, barren wasteland to meet it, to meet the world, somewhere on the unimaginably distant frontier. You will probably die before ever finding the world, so long is the journey and so unprepared are you for it. No, the world is not beneath your feet as an old theory, now unpopular, has led far too many sheep to believe, for lack of greener pastures, or fences that tease. Listen now, do you *hear* my piping?” He dances around a little on the stage. “Sacrifices must be made! Lost time must be compensated for!” He drops his pants. He has the legs of Pan. “Futures must be built from the bones of the present!” The standing board of trustees is writhing around in their opera box above the main hall, convulsing on the brink of some sort of evil orgasm listening to the brow-beating, mind-numbing, heart-breaking, will-crushing, spirit-murdering, Kafkaesque Sadistic speech; their robes hiked up, dentures and fake hips flying everywhere in a cloud of talcum powder. “Your energy must be used to sustain our lives and our structures, just as ours was, just as your childrens’ will be!” Gasping and sighing; all the authority figures in the immense house have grappled onto one another and begun forcing their horrible, cobwebbed, odiferous, unkempt genitalia rudely against and into one another. Teachers of opposing fields, even teachers who have all year referred only to one another cruelly behind their backs as their departments compete for funding now strip bare, nude, naked and leap on top of one another, growling and biting in a lustful frenzy, copulating like starved, desperate wild animals, suddenly freed from their cages in a zoo and running wild, consuming one another’s sumptuous hides. The students, for their part, look practisedly bored, fidget, glance at their watches or out windows, fondle their tassels, pass around naughty literature like “How Much Land Does a Man Need” by Leo Tolstoy and “Howl” by Allen Ginsberg. After several long minutes the old regime starts spurting and curling its toes, wrinkled pelts shuddering and becoming suddenly drenched in sparkling wetness from some overlapped source, and at the apex of release the speaker screams from his position, prone at center stage receiving a prostate exam / high colonic from a snarling

purple-assed baboon, “The Future means more of The Same!!” With a wretched rattle the seething mound of flesh collapses inwards on itself like a circus high top being pulled down; but just as the annoyed youngsters are rising from their stupor to file out into the ozone night, the carny rises up like some bad penny stamped with the national phoenix and cries out, “wait!” He feels boyish again, refreshed by such an unscientific display, his ox-like torpor displaced (the baboon is sleeping in the lunch lady’s arms). Leaping up to the podium he seizes the microphone like its a hard cock and starts crooning into it, “I want to tell you kids the truth now I’ve been holding it up my tight ass for years until it gave me cancer well I pity you poor bastards having to exist just to fling stale excrement, I’ll freshen your media, I’m about to dump the mother of all loads right in your lap; sit down.” With indifferent obedience the youths retake their seats and turn lidded eyes towards this old psycho. “For as long, maybe longer, as recorded history the human species has not been evolving bodily; has been continuing its evolution only in the mind. Increasingly complex ideas have perpetually, that is — historically, led to confusing times; and, while Now has no more reason to be such a time as did any other era, Now has *enough* confusion to be just such a stand-out stage in the evermore entropic development of this animal, man.” The students come to attention like bats sensing a disturbance in their cave, preparing to take wing and flutter about in riotous confusion if the moment should break. “The brain, my darling little slaves, is becoming its own entity. It’s goal is space travel, for which it only needs the body as an increasingly temporary vessel. How did life begin? Did you know that the whole Oparin/Haldane Heterotroph Hypothesis is wrong? I’ll tell you how life began on earth! Amino acids *did* form in the soup, but these were clearly *autotrophic organisms*,” interrupted by loud booing from one of the withered bodies in the corner. “Well what would they have eaten? Glycine? It stands to reason that they would have evolved into photosynthetic bacteria. It therefore remains only that heterotrophs be accounted for, and the only explanation, by Ockham’s razor and Odin’s beard, is that these and all viruses evolved from *alien* amino acids on meteors which were constantly bombarding the earth at this stage just as the moon is pocked by craters. These two, distinct, organisms evolved in a mutually beneficial symbiotic competition, becoming bacteria and viruses, flora and fauna, respectively. Biological and ecological systems formed to fit the existing paradigm of this co-existence. Soon dinosaurs grew to be the dominant life form, possessing brains — they were mobile manifestations of the gourmand viruses they embodied. Alas their brains shrank as their bodies grew, until the virus died out almost altogether in reptiles. It found a much better home in warm blooded mammals, growing in complexity as it sought ways for mice to escape from under the massive feet of their ultimately unsuccessful cousins, and it had the glorified rodents walking upright in no time. From this more thermodynamic vantage the brains immediately began using the bodies to construct tools, but in order to form a more functional command system it had to invent language. As time went on mankind, that is — the biologically earth bound bodies of our species, learned more and more about these beings which posses us. At first we mistook their voices from nowhere to be the voice of some god, like Humbaba, telling us how to measure time. The ‘bicameral mind’ *is* the body. Thinking with its stomach and genitals; if only we had grown our own consciousness it would be centered there. All we wanted to do was fuck and kill and eat up the bodies of those near us when our hunger made us mad. We were stupid carnivores whose most cultured instinct was to paint the animals we felt the most pride in killing. But *oh*, no. We couldn’t just eat our cake. We had to have it too. And with that came culture, society, science. All very confusing things forced on our bodies by these viral brains!” The good Dr claws at his hair in frustration. “All the

while these invaders breeding themselves better and better — still uncertain of their intent. And we! We were becoming evermore aware of their workings — their plots, while they were leading our bodies to slaughter in the name of wartime technological leaps forward. Their purpose was always mysterious to our simple lymphatic functioning all we wanted was to be dumb and happy and naked and carefree as far were ever concerned the best discovery was drugs to help us escape from this artificial reality the brains were using us to construct, this tiresome labor of building a tower of Babylon, this oppression of our desires. Those evil things even turned our sexes against each other, our races against each other with their androgynous, grey, spectral meddling. All we ever wanted was to lie out in the sun and photosynthesize, to melt into a vast living ocean, to love, and they? Could they leave us to do this?! How evil!! How awfully evil by the standards of their own imposed laws — basic decency and humanity! All bullshit!” The esteemed patron realizes he has gotten beyond the standards of his own bounds and takes a breathless moment to collect himself. From the faculty lounge a discreet call to police headquarters is being placed, while in the great hall the esteemed gentleman from earth continues. “Finally some genius realized what the virus fed on: Power. Panicking his own brain killed him off with a venereal disease that caused him to go insane, allowing all the other brains around to laughingly discredit him. But another, somewhat stupider man had gotten the Idea. In a stroke of luck no brain ever expected he imposed the whole viral situation onto the society the brains had conspired to imagine into reality, infusing it all with the lust for power. All bodies now wanted to participate, and the rate of productivity increased as all these power-hungry bodies flocked to the system in which they were allowed to successfully participate. At the turn of the last century there was more complex organization being imagined and realized than ever before, and more bodily breakdowns of a purely mental nature to accompany philosophy’s ‘new’ question, the question the body has been asking the mind since the beginning, the question “why am I alive?” The brain has finally got it. Conservative industry needs liberal technology to build mind-computers, to replace humans, to get the brain, actually, physically, out of the body and into space, its home. Have you seen what the brain and central nervous system look like when uprooted and displayed in suspension? They are the most complex virus. Physically the original extraterrestrial amino acids have only managed to manifest as insects without resorting to direct contact with the native bacteria, though once perfected these species can survive almost any trauma of the earth’s crust and troposphere. The biggest secret though,” the mad professor begins rushing, he feels the bug-like heat closing in, “is that humanity retains trace residue of its original bacteria/plant/autotroph state in the form of a ‘soul’ (as it has been classically called) that has ridden the coat tails of the body-tool’s rapid evolution into self-awareness. It can *still remember its roots*. All animals were meant to be plants! They were meant to sit in one place and grow! They shouldn’t have ever started walking around! Almost all animals but man accept this, but man’s brains stubbornly insist that *they know better*. But look at the human body with all its specialized organs. It is a factory of motion waiting to entropy on doomsday when all brains crawl out and drool skyward like levitating jellyfish. The body itself is a plant! The arms! The legs! The hair! Eyeballs are plants that grow from the brain itself, the iris its petals, the pupil its seed!” The raving lunatic is straight-jacketed and gagged, tossed in a meat wagon leaving the students to look around at one another in bewilderment. A cockroach in the blue fatigues of the law assumes center stage and commands flatly, “Please disperse. There is nothing. To see. Here.”

Fabreau

What kind of habits are there besides bad ones? Anything you do too much will come back to haunt you sooner than later. And anything you like you do too much. I walk through crowds that seem to me familiar; assemblages from my own unconscious; their proximity and their realness make my skin crawl more than a little. I estimate, with excersized precision and calm, the relationships between them all. Some tactile, offering threat. Others deeper, softer, older, sad.

I see my mark get on a subway and I follow him in the car behind. The train shakes slowly, swaying side to side as its momentum is shifted from rail to rail around the curbs, like a dancing child in need of relief. Sparks are sent up and the frigid bricks an inch beyond the sturdy window glare like disturbed sleepers, slashing patterns in the haze of blur. He is tall. About my height. Not so tall for a man, I guess. But including everyone, all the women, and children too? He is dressed average. A suit and tie that say to the nobody who cares that he is a secretary, but an important one. The type who isn't getting screwed. His clothes don't invite that attention.

My shoulder grazes into a old Zulu womans and she half turns toward me. Tattoos cover her face. In the opaque illumination of the flourescents they seem to crawl about as she winces. My face is expressionless. She turns away.

The car accelerates as we slope down the tunnel, underneath the river that flows through the city. Somewhere above our heads there are about a million tons of sludge submerged in water where fishes live. The lights buzz off for long intervals and the cars go dark. I can see my man holding onto a strap attached to the ceiling. I glance at the woman next to me in the corner of my eye. The light go off.

When they come on again he isn't there. I let go the bar that I am holding and make my way on wobbling legs towards the next compartment. By the time I get to the second door leading into his car I see that he is still there. But he has sat down. He is looking off with sorrow at the grimey floor. I contemplate the rails beneath and assume his mind is elsewhere. As I enter the lights shut off again. The cabin rocks back and forth. I reach out for support in the darkness and my hand touches something cold. The lights come back and I am holding another bar. My man sits quiet as a clam a few feet away. Sweat is dappenning his hat band. It is humid in this tunnel. And a long ride too.

I sit down next to him. He doesn't notice. I relax and take a moment deciding how to handel the situation. I can just keep tailing him, but it could be several more hours before anything turns up and I'm on no one's clock but my own. But then if he were to cause a scene there'd be no one accountable for it besides me either. I reach into my shirt pocket and take out the plastic bag that's home there, unbuttoning the holster of my gun. I set the plastic bag down in my lap and open it up. Inside there are rolling papers and a well trimmed stash. As I do this the mark looks over at me. We are still anonymous, he's just checking his perimeter. I lift the open bag up towards him. "Cigarette?" I ask. He shakes his head and politely puts his erected palm between us, the fingers clamped nauseatingly tight, his palm grotesquely pale. I shrug and sink my hands into the lips of the bag and begin to roll one up. I sift the loose fibers into alignment along the center of the folded sheet and coil it, then lift it to my mouth and run my tongue along the edge, twisting the ends. I bite it gently and squeeze the air out of the bag, sealing it, and return it to my pocket. I pull my hand back out clasping a lighter that resides beside the bag.

"So," I say as I replace the lighter, breathing out my first fumes, "what's your story?" He turns to me, his neck twitching so that his head jerks slightly as it pivots, belying uncertainty. His right hand, on which he wears a golden ring, comes up

from his thigh and the fingers reflexively retract limply to point the tips towards his chest. “Yeah,” I say blowing out smoke and then turning toward him. “You.” He glances back at the floor almost apologetically, breaking off the relationship of his deep mental repose, and then makes quite a show of tugging his lapels.

“I’m an assistant director of the first transplanetary credit holdings firm,” he announces, unable all the while to decide if he should stand on ceremony or not.

“A banker,” I say in a deep, grainy voice, turning away.

“No,” he corrects me, “it’s my manager who handles book, I just correct his daily entries for type and adjust his appointments.”

“A banker’s banker,” I say, drawing a deep inhale.

“More of a secretary,” he caves only instantly into the strange conversation, finally tossing the whole affair of whether to be on guard or obsequious. He has left himself open to my being a robber, but I don’t sense any such tension in him. Perhaps I have left my eyes too soft, as I often do. I scowl just for good measure.

“What’s your name, banker’s banker’s secretary?” I ask, blowing smoke in his face with a scowl.

“Rodger. Rodger Haggardy.” He pauses for a long moment while the mist disperses from the air. He glances at the points of his shoes. “And yours?”

I tell him. He looks off at the opposite window where our reflections are cast on the thick plated plex. The lights switch off again. I do not feel him move beside me. I wonder what his game is, going to this island. He has no business there so far as I know. The poetess told me she remembered him taking the train often, but he never told her where to. He always expected her to wait there for him, just as he would leave her. She called him a dog, but he wasn’t so much, so far as I could surmise.

The lights return and he closes a lid on his ring. Standing he says uncomfortably, “excuse me, won’t you?” and begins hurriedly off down the car. I suppose I may as well sit here until I’m done smoking. He’s not going anywhere until the train reaches Fabreau anyway. I lean back in the bench and breathe slowly.

lap dissolve

As my lurching body loomed down upon my friend he stood his up like a road sign before me in order to reorganize proportion. It did me very little good. Everything continued to be as distorted as rippled water. But my friend seemed satisfied and he put one hand on my shoulder, steadying us like two old drunk tramps (which we sometimes played at, for fun, calling each other Gogo and Didi). His other hand he poked at the quiet and somber man with whom he was sharing a dim booth.

“Allow me to introduce my friend,” my friend said of the stranger to me. I shook an unfamiliar hand — a revolting experience among normal men, made particularly horrible by the abashed manner which was this man’s unique and cultivated abnormal normality — what Cyrano called “panache,” what Freud called “neurosis.” The handshake was impolite and curt because each of us was jealous of the other’s relationship to our mutual friend and eager to restart some previous conversation which would exclude his rival. The spitefulness with which the man rendered his distasteful, impudent indifference on me was an annoying relief. He reminded me of something I found tolerably amusing about myself, and in the low, tired light I didn’t take him as the threat he perhaps would have liked to come off as. “He writes dialogues...” my friend was saying.

“Ah, a Soviet humanist then...” I groaned through my teeth, delighted with this cur who had dropped into my lap to bemusedly amuse me. I hadn’t really thought before making the noises, but while my mouth was flatulating my mind floated away

and dreamed of his childhood. His rosy cheeks, his pimples. His parents, when together, probably ignored him and preferred to quarrel. I could see his big wet eyes peering curiously around the corner, his lips pressed together as tightly as two fingers between the knuckles of his chin and nose. His mind always racing with ways to cure them of their stupidity; their shouts echoing in his head with no way out except through a pen. His heart always stirring around the edges and stagnating in the middle until the whole mess soured.

Further I dream (it is so easy... the scenes all familiar seem to be leading inexorably towards a single, certain event... or perhaps originally spreading out from it like the Big Bang... the... ultimate internalization). Adventures in the barn. Daddy slowly takes his belt out..... and what happens to his pants when the belt is withdrawn...?

My mind is suddenly shaken. The image shatters before me and the pieces cling about my head like humid fog in a thick haze; my body shutters violently — if someone had been touching me at the time I probably would have shrieked. My eyes dart to the stranger, who is looking away with his own thoughts, then to my friend, who looks at me with covert concern.

No. No more in the now. This is done happening.

I hate my memory! It is so weak it depends on sensations of the experience to recall relationships in situation. It is as weak as a snowball thrown by an infant! I am so tired; my mind is drifting. My nose is plugged, I can't breathe and it is boring me in my eyeballs. Will I ever be well?! Will I never live in the glaring heaven of facts, but suffice to wallow in this swamp of vague sensations until death? Why can't I concentrate on remembering only the facts?

After I'd said to him what I'd said, the man — the stranger — said to me, "I had always thought so." My friend piped up with the glee of rare interest, "last night we saw a ghost!" I looked back at the man who had now brought his face under the single bulb suspended above our alcove, causing his eyes to appear as hollow pits and his cheeks to sink in like two wet sheets hung on a line of laundry by a pig-like peasant woman, sneering at them because they had been stained by her daughter's promiscuous piss. His whole head bulged like a leering masthead, skeletal and waxy. When he spoke in a hushed hiss I could see his teeth shifting about like the dorsal fins of sharks, splashing around in a slow motion feeding frenzy. "It is the ghost of a man who is not dead yet," he breathed urgently. "A martyr whom, in death the people worship, but who has truly been held captive by the aristocracy in a tower cell in the castle." When he spoke his last syllables I hallucinated that two lengthy antennae had waved out of his hair even as he leaned back from the pool of yellow light. He seemed finished.

I gestured unsatisfied curiosity with my limp hands where they sat on the table like two dead birds. No response. I said "...well?" No response. "What did the ghost tell you?" I groaned. "What?" came back. I repeated the task of rolling such a heavy boulder up such a steep hill and then waited to see if it would fall into the ears or bounce off.

"Ah..." the dialogue writer moaned stupidly. It seems writers always miss the point when listening, and then conveniently forget to include such shortcomings of their humanity when they make themselves into letters, sentences, articles, epitaphs. At that moment I was sick of being there. I wanted to go out into the darkness and the bitter cold, to slush about in the dirty snow beneath the dull street lamps. Anything but this! This slowness! I lose all patience when lolled into a steady pace. The beat of a conversation, when it is slow and faltering, or even moderate and steady, teases me to crescendos of frustration. "Yes.... Yes, yes, yes! And so?" I rattled

like a rusty howitzer.

My friend's head shot forward from the shadows like a cannonball exploding from a cloud of brown smoke. His tongue was inside the folds of my ear, slithering around, leaving a slimy coating of revoltingly hushed sounds. "His presence indicates revolution." These words sunk into me slowly as my friend patiently withdrew to his shrouded corner, grinning, his visage a twisted, hideous rearrangement of perversity and mirth. The pleasure of having a secret of this kind was like a drug to him. His head was swimming in endorphins, his eyes turned into whirlpools, his skin wavered around his face as though rippling upon stirred liquid. At that moment I loathed him; he sickened me deeply. I could feel my insides writhing around in revolt. Out of hatred for him and for myself I left my eyes agape and facing him, pretending it was the affect of his story and not his repulsive expression of retarded, suppressed, secretive glee; glee that fed on its own repression like giggling at a funeral, staring at the pasty, clay-like corpse, blue lipped and still, already gathering a fine layer of dust while my idiot friend is on the verge of wetting his pants in sheer delight with the act of being so. But I look at him with a specific wonder intended to allow him to further believe it is his news saturating my cerebellum that is churning my guts with a great propeller; afterall, I owe him this camouflage. He is my friend.

I glance over at his compatriot, which I realize immediately is a fatal error. The man is morosely engulfed in his own swarthinness, easily ten thousand times more consumed in the emotional perversion contained in these few words of political jargon than even my friend had been. I saw the man's eyes peel themselves like grapes, or rather, like two penises erecting themselves toward me, pushing themselves through their lidded foreskins and drooping outward into this air. When his thin pale blue lips parted to move I saw a pinkish grey flash inside the ebony cavern, and I knew that his tongue was working already inside him, continually wetting down the soft walls of his mouth, the backs of his tumbled teeth, so cold. He is licking the inside of his mouth as he speaks. It is the clicking of that naked muscle against his fangs I can faintly hear beneath the throbbing of my leathery skull.

"Perhaps as easily as yesterday," he is growling with a sneering smirk. I cannot hear him. This is too difficult! "The more because of all of our elephant tacticians. . . ." He seems to be waiting for a response from me. At this insult my blood turns into hatred, coursing between the rubbery walls of my winding veins with the fury and heat of molten lava surging just underneath the dirt just underneath the floor just underneath my feet and the air drops ten degrees all around my brain. I bolt upward into the darkness of this inside sky and before I can control it the skin of my lips, in conspiracy with my molten, somersaulting stomach of leathery liquid, has already started to fluctuate around the form of certain words, horrible words deriving from deep inside me, which are apparently escaping my mouth in a steady stream deformed by lumps of various sizes. The face of the man far below me, stuck as it is like a detailed afterthought within the obscurity of his otherwise horrifyingly agreeable appearance, wrinkles up like a raisin and his entire body of skin, blood and bone shrivels up squidish in quivering timidity.

"The fish! My water!" I overhear my own voice bellowing. Aside from the thumping pain of my own ceaseless pulse all other noise in the room has been swallowed up in a low, dull, ocean of silence. "Blood flags! Nobodies storming!" (only I think he may have thought I said "nobody's storming," implying a popular disinterest in mass revolt.)

I spin on my heel, going around and around and around it several times, perhaps even a dozen. My exit is graceless and impotent; I am sinking into a mute sea

of forgettable ink, the semen of my jowls, my saliva, the bile of my throat and molars. There are trillions of tiny eyeballs surrounding me, an urgent, more immediate, pressingly obvious night sky. Hate. Hate, hate, hate. I notice that the nails at the ends of my fingers are worming into the delicate palms of my huge, nude hands. They are damp as the swamp, have I been holding up women by the crotch? Have my fingers been digging into fertile soil, scalding hot and slippery? My face is melting like an ice cube, it must be as red as menstruation. This is difficult. This is very difficult. I am stumbling, bent over so far it is more like I am rolling along on the top of my head with my feet kicking about fishlike above and behind me. Perhaps I am turning over myself several times on the way to the door. My appearance — if only I didn't realize it was there, between the other objects in that world outside myself; it is the source of all my humiliation. I am being overwhelmed by it; it seeps up from my chest bone, spreading out just below the surface of my flesh in a cool, insipid oil slick. The door is receding with every step I take. Until I feel meat clamp down across my shoulder. My skull turns around inside my head and then my face drags gradually after it. The sclera of my eyes is as pink as smiling gums.

"What a brilliant suggestion!" my friend barks directly at me, his wide eyes looking at my mouth as if they cannot believe the source. Behind him the scene is shaking and there are flashes of a deep, sea green tone. "Perhaps you can plan our entire attack!" I notice how much like a woman he is. It is not the first time this has happened, but this time it is so pervasive his lips glisten with gloss, his chest heaves and cleaves into two lumbering bosoms. The sweetness of it, so sudden and in this of all places, this place which I can feel all around me on my skin like the tickling of a fungus pressing down against me as it grows its tiny silken furs, fills my colon with a sugary heaviness, the urge to hurriedly expel.

"There is not going to go on!" I plead, nearly on the verge of weeping openly.

He isn't understanding what I'm saying. This is just tragic. He thinks he can hear me, but somehow he can't. He thinks he can hear me making palatable suggestions, but I am not. I can understand myself, what I am saying. Can't I? It doesn't make sense, but I'm more me than my friend is. If I think what I'm saying is nonsense it must be nonsense. It cannot be that I am unable to understand the words coming out of my own mouth. It can't. He is dragging me back to the table. This is unbearable. I don't want to go. I don't struggle. He is my friend. The taste of beer in my mouth. The taste of sour, associated somehow with a pleasant comfortable calm nonetheless in the midst of alien environs.

Sasha and Sam

The sky tore open slowly... seductively... revealing an ebon night pitch of rain, each drop slicing down angrily and slamming into its intentional target. Icy needles driving down into her scalp, nailing in and melting, matting her sopping hair into strings that fell perpetually across her face, Sasha stumbled into the crusty coffee nook with a startled air and a damp shudder; the door banged noisily closed behind her. Running her eyes shyly but slyly over the sparse clientele of the grimy establishment she peeled herself out of her wet, sticky coat. Her dress was the dark magenta of blood, but probably only because it was stained with the sweaty moisture of the steaming soaked street outside that had spit her like a huge moist mouth into the foyer where she was hanging up her trench and fedora. She stood and shook out her hair, running her long hard fingers through it, combing out a shower of sickly drips that fell in warm tears to splot the stained slats of the wood floor, releasing steam on impact like hot wax poured from a candle. She strode over like the place

had been built for her, pulled a sticky chair back out from under a table and nonsensely dropped her ripe cherry of an ass into the leather seat cushion stuffed with human hair and a sandy powder made of mulched insect larvae. Her smoothly shaved bare legs eased into the shadows of the chewing gum lumpy table bottom like two naked ninjas sliding into the still night to gracefully make love with one another. And nobody noticed.

Sasha blinked. Twice. There were two poets, or Communists (who can tell the difference these days anyway?), arguing over a stack of paper, maybe a manuscript, that one held in his hand and gesticulated with as if to accentuate its importance. A couple was sitting in spoon in the corner reading a book with mutual contentedness. There was a waiter facing away from Sasha, hovering around a table fidgeting impatiently. A low, melancholy voice came from behind where he was standing and he sighed exasperatedly and moved off, revealing a small, roundish man, heavily bundled up in dark coats, hunched over an open folder. One of his hands was resting on the table, holding a pen. His sad eyes followed the waiter apologetically as he stormed pertly away, and chanced upon Sasha. He looked away bashfully, letting his eyes glance anxiously at the door a couple times before he curled back around his writing like a snail in a shell. In one of the tables by the windows like she herself was sitting at sat another woman, apparently waiting for someone. She and the writer, both waiting. She was not as pretty as Sasha, but appeared to have tried to make some effort. She was probably going to go out to a movie later. Sasha was wondering what she would be going to see when, from the corner of her eye, she apprehended a figure she had overlooked before approaching her from one of the tenebrous booths.

The figure slid in like an ominous portent, his silhouetted form rustling into a chair across from Sasha with all the weight and flurry of a landing crow. Graceful as a raven; Sasha watched him in awe: perching atop a grave, morbidly overlooking a countryside by moonlight. He sat outside the aura of dim illumination that bleached the slick-skinned table top a pale green and his face was draped in darkness; it veiled him in a slashed tapestry, calmly ripping and shifting as he settled into the seat, moving just beyond the straining fingers of light cast by the bare bulb hung above. The man seemed to wear a shadow about him like a negative glow, and if she looked right at him Sasha lost focus and the scene fuzzed into a tuneless blur.

Sasha blinked. It was as if the man before her was sleep himself. A bruise on a stained glass mural. He reached into his own pooling, coagulating shadow and extracted a small soggy cigarette and an inconspicuously benign lighter, which he clicked into glowing purpose, inflaming the drooping bone into a red glowing nipple at one end. In the brief phosphorescent flare of the fire Sasha caught sight of the Stranger's face in photographic snapshot clarity. But as soon as she had seen it it was lost in her mind; her memory of it immediately slipped into the confused half light that the man seemed to carry around him in a pheromone cloud, masking not only his identity but even the certainty of his very existence. Was he really there — or just a product of the maligned discomfortable buzz like a fresh punch to the head that filled the dive with a swarm of sleep-flying bees, spasmodic static comatose dose of blunt, unthinking, unfeeling, uncaring... inhuman and as offensive to the senses as oily skin.

The stranger blew cool blue worms of smoke from his depth... hooded eyes staring out invisibly, deep cuts inside an already hideously deep wound. Sasha wiped one damp palm across her oily face, smearing her features into the smudge of a knuckled fist or the moaning heat of a burn victim. She leaned forward, oozing out sensuality like a damp pair of panties, eyes vaguely hidden in dark crescents by the

glare of the bare bulb above her head. Her tongue moved tauntingly between her smoothed petal lips. She eased her corpulent red hair back with a gentle push.

"Stop it Sasha," the man commanded sternly and laconically. His voice was a deep rich garden, long deserted and overrun with earthy smelling weeds. They almost choked out Sasha's very essence with their forceful directness. And the voice was just a low whisper in her ear — she could even feel the breath that carried each sound as it lapped around inside each ear like a a licking mother cat cleaning the slime off her hairless fresh-borns. Yet the man had not moved. His voice was right next to her head, whispering directly into her mind, but he still glared eyelessly at her from across a close ocean of tabletop. The room reeled, a numbing vortex.

"Be still Sasha. You are in no danger." A tendril of smoke snaked its way up silkily. His voice was a dirty handshake that lasted too long. It made Sasha feel like she was squeezing her father's balls... putting them into her mouth... it made her skin oily... it made her hate herself. She shuddered with the potency of it. His presence was a palpable discomfort. She shyly adjusted her panties.

She looked into his un. "Who are you?" she demanded with a haughtiness bred from counterfeit security.

"You may know me as Samson Cheshire. I know the secret of existence. Would you like me to remind you what it is?" His voice crawled into her ear like a swarm of roaches and laid larvae around the base of her brain. It made her eyes water.

"Sure Sam. You can tell me if you really want," she faked uninterest through a muck of swollen thoughts that filled her straining head with a quivering thick pudding. She tried to keep him in focus, which was impossible... he seemed to ripple... like she was watching the negative of a film of the sunrise shot from the ocean floor. Her eyes swam.

"You already know the secret Sasha. I can see it up inside of you...," she felt a warm palm holding her muff with a charismatic confident friendliness, then it chilled through as if her whole crotch had fallen asleep — pinpricking nails of buzzing freeze shocked into her in an insectile pushing wave, "...I can smell it on you from across the room. I can see it behind your face. You *know*." His words squeezed her head until her spongy mind dripped blood.

With a blunt jolt Sasha swayed a little, stunned.... She looked like a cornworm... and she realized he was right. She *knew*... all this time she had known.

"Everything you were taught to admire. Everything you were taught to fear. Everything you were taught to *love*... it's all a lie. And you *know*. You've *always known*. But it was safer to stay in the closet. To become a drone. A consumer. A clone.... You are a priestess. You always have been. Your cunt is a temple in which your clit splits sacrifices, dripping down the tunnel to feed the hungry altar. Consume something new. Cosmic dragon. Your eyes are two coins spinning forever. Your lips two bloody leeches sucking life from what they can secure infection in. Your face is a mask of convenience, an impatient lie that coaxes out the truth like a sucked venom to fill your empty heart, your Grail, and drink deep to the sound of fantastic fun that everyone keeps secret behind postures of morality.... Our behavior is just a joke that isn't funny because nobody *gets it*. But you *get it*. And I. Look..." Sam's shadow gathered to a point that stretched across to engulf the two arguing poets. Sasha could hear their voices with the same muffled intensity that she heard Sam's. Her butt clenched and unclenched as the sounds overloaded her capacity. A few times she almost fainted. She seemed to feel her crotch filling with ice; her chest heating closely; her brain coat with a matted pubic fungus.

Dialectic Amour

She was just Oriental enough to have small breasts, just African enough to be well-flanked, just European enough to be ghostly pale, just American enough to have dyed hair. She stumbled through the saloon's double gates on precariously high heels that lifted her feet so aloft only the tips of her toes touched the floor, shoved achingly downward by all her suspended weight. She had the dark mask of sex, and the flushed face of drunkenness; she flopped down in a booth across from an upright looking executive clerk in a conservative suit. They began discussing the social class of one another, attempting to be as insulting but accurate as possible. It was part of an elaborate sex ritual; it was one of the first steps.

"It's no wonder liberals like blacks," he started in a grim nasal monotone, "they admire *all* backwards 'cultures.' They are modern primitives eager to invent a thinking machine to replace them so they can devolve into monkeys. Like pathetic, perverse children they worship at altars to bestiality — a pubic ant mound, shaved and stung by a swarm of angry reds; a honey-coated cone covered in bees and hornets."

"The sins kept secret by the parents are the obsessions of the children. It's ironic that republicans, who claim to be for less government and more capitalist upstarts, pass legislation for stricter family values instead of disassembling the state when they take power. It's typical in the ironic world they've created by commanding one thing and secretly doing the opposite that the crueler the S&M fetish the more expensive the gear, so that in order to participate in the most bestial indulgences you must already belong to the bourgeoisie — who only preach chastity and cleanliness and denial and empire, but never humanism. To expect someone who has been made to suffer, who has been forced to work, in order to earn money and membership in the middle-class to have pity on someone who does not want to take such a blind leap of faith in the economy is, of course, fool hearty, bloody fool hearty. It is like asking some rich prig if you can borrow a book he owns (but probably hasn't found time to read), and he responds, snout in the air, 'no you may not, but you may go out and *buy* it.'" This rousing impression stiffens our man.

"And if you dirty, oohh so dirty little boys and girls can't even afford to buy them then how many books have you read? You probably steal them, don't you? And while you're stealing them imagine yourself a soldier in some great rebellion, taking back what you feel is yours only by grace of your sticky-fingered lust for it. You liberals, yes even you, like to play soldier. But you can't commit to realizing the game. You run from the cops who keep you from getting murdered as if they are the Viet Cong. You *want* to get caught and beaten, martyred. Being noticed makes you want to be dominated. But *I* like to command. I am a true soldier. Unlike you and your kind — too lazy to even bathe — I don't work because I'm some sort of peon, some vanquished, defiled, rent and prostituted slave. I work because I'm a soldier on the winning side of the One Truly Great War. I hunt like you only wish you could gather. I throw economic and military spears into the weakest of the herd, thinning out the crop more and more by generations. Because I own everything there is nothing which is not food to me; and no food which can be denied to me."

"Cops aren't like the Viet Cong. Laws aren't the cause of any true people's army. Nazis are more like cops, and it was the Allies proudest moment to arrest the Axis totalitarians. Much prouder than losing to a bunch of rice farmers in humid swamps who were provided only with the supposedly 'inferior' weapons manufactured during the Second Five Year Plan. The middle-class bigots don't kill for *justice* — they kill Aryans and Asians both to enforce moderation on all radicals. They

kill simply because they are *aroused* by aggression. Only by using armies like whips to scorch the chops of Mother Earth can they get up the strength to erect their empires.”

“Your place or mine?”

“Is it going to be for the whole night?”

“Oh, I think so.”

“Your place then. Mine’s not clean and yours is probably lavish.”

I won’t bore you with the next steps of the ritual. Suffice it to say it did take all night, even though he was unable to get it up until nearly dawn, by which time enough blood had been splattered and spilt to paint the walls of the room an angry, awful, but natural, ghastly red.

Ode To Joy (monsters hungrily wearing human flesh)

“What I want of you,” he lounged naked with his crossed furry sticks propped up on a rolling desktop with smoke flowing incontinently from between his lips in a vaporous drool upside down to tributary into the charmed snake of white vapor winding up from his cigarette, “is someone with whom it can be ‘us versus the world’.”

She walked over and threw her hips askew in such a way as to make her cunt fart in his face. “I’m making a statement,” she declared defiantly. Ignoring the insulting gesture and accompanying odor he lurched forward inclosing her hips in a vice tight hug, burying his face in her fleece and gnawing puppyishly on her tender nether lips which, as they relaxed to his nibbles and licks, became moist and smelled of urine and turkey. She swayed like a falling sequoyah, her head lolling back and a moan nudging the knot in her throat slowly upward. He reached around with his smoldering butt and shoved the sizzling coals between her pillowed cheeks, crushing them against the delicate, pale ring of pouting flesh around her anus. She shrieked exquisitely and his mouth filled with a rush of her juices. She toppled back, landing with a muffled thump on a polar bear rug, from which she immediately sprang up with a shock as her burnt bottom brushed the floor heavily. She was on her feet, her weak knees trembling under her, gasping.

He leaned back with a broad smile; his lips, nose, cheeks and chin soaked with her foam. He puffed on his half dead cigarette, erecting a jet of smoke with his pursed lips which he stalked with the lidded gaze of a hunter confident in the location of his prey, and in the discretion of his own position to it. He smirked over at her as she shivered in indignity; “us versus the world,” then, looking down his legs into space, he began reminiscing. “You remind me of my mother. Well, perhaps not my mother — but a mother; the way a mother should be. Also a daughter though. How do you explain that? That you could seem a mother and daughter to me in one? I envy and pity you simultaneously. But you’re also like a sister. . . or perhaps a cousin. . . with whom I experiment trying to find myself. You must be a snake: every woman with one face. There is only one woman, you know. To any man there is only one woman. . . a world of girls but only. . . one woman. Have I ever told you I admire you when you please me as I desire? Admire / desire. . . butchery, butchery. . . I make your meat my meal,” he wiped a bare, thin arm across his lips smearing her royal jelly off him. “I want to make you my slave so I can worship you. If I lock you in a box it is only to save myself from jealousy, to preserve you from perversion. If I lock your mind in a box it is only so I know it is not unleashed with or scarred by lightning strikes of inspiration from thoughts of another. If I make myself your master it is only to make you mine. This is love — isn’t it? This is love — mutual

worship, mutual, consensual enslavement. Now. . . do you agree to submit yourself to this? . . . Do you love me?"

She was shaking all over, the earth was quivering beneath her clenching feet, the air around her chilled skin was running everywhere desperately, time was frantic and stumbling over itself like a terror-stricken child fleeing from something so unbelievably as to terrify wholly. Suddenly she realized she was choosing to be such a little girl. She would be a woman. She simply stopped trembling and stood firmly facing the challenge. She could smell her woman smell. She felt trapped but safe. She stuck three fingers straight into her twat. They slid in easily, and she got the drunken look of sex all over her with the foolish immediacy of prideful desire to impress and perform. The heat that pulled in her loins bled together with the stinging pain in her other hole, so close to the first, and created a moaning pool of electric warmth in her abdomen that filled up her body and washed slowly out into her tingling limbs until her fingers, now wrinkled with her own wet, were abuzz. "This," she told herself smugly, "is the feeling of love." And she sank down onto her knees, then leaned back, lay down and spread her legs hugely.

The room began to move. Shapes danced unreally. Feelings flooded confusingly, utterly illogically. Their movements said, "skin is malleable. It can be stretched and shaped and, with time, trained to retain that shape. The will is the same. Both are eager to be submitted in the name of objectification, intentionally ignorant of the idea of all but the immediate urge to gratify their curious lust — forgetful of the fact that once the mud has been loosened, expanded, *stretched*, it *cannot* be reformed and made to hold its original dimensions and structure. The tissue can only be destroyed, burnt back or cut off, razed and raped in lieu of reconfiguration in disgusting, contemptful buyer's remorse for what has become of what is not appreciated until it is gone. Horror is realizing the permanence of change, the inability to return the changed to its original state. The slave cannot become the un-slave. Life rubs one hole into a gaping new hole, and continues this until the maw is so abysmal that it seems infinite, terrifyingly infinite and empty. You cannot make it manageable anymore — only destroy it by filling it handful of bullshit at a time, proportionately, until it does not seem so hopelessly huge and insatiable. But it is. And it can't be helped. It is ruined. The cute little hole is now ripped loose as a torn sail. It is ruined. Ruined."

Once the lesson is learned, it cannot be unlearned. Once you have asked yourself a question without a happy answer, you can never escape that sorrowful doubt, or the guilt for having asked. Once you have believed you cannot doubt, and once you have doubted you cannot believe, though your shame is such a burden you may wish for belief to help you bear it. Your will is a hole from which little thoughts, like farts, noisily escape (or are forced out) and which can be, is, has been and will be stretched out into a huge, penetrable zero. Worked out and expanded until it can receive a round peg of thoughts alien and strange to you, so tightly it plugs up your thoughts and massages itself until you joyfully accept its ideological ejaculate and become pregnant with *their* spawn.

I am a sexist only because I see the inherent feminine weakness in all humanity when cast in the scene of rape — I see everything as rape. Unable to fight it off, it can only be enjoyed — which it is, oh, it is enjoyed. Worship of the masked naked, alien and strange and usually unacceptable — so broaden your mind and open your heart. Bare your soul. Can you bear your soul?

Love is the opening, the trustful opening, of the self to the gropings of another. The sacred whores, the selfless christians, the selfish victims of the stretching disease. The desire to need. The need to need. The fatalistic tragic flaw of

hoping you never achieve your hope. Hoping you never consume enough. Lust for slavery.

Punks

The two Nietzscheans kissed so hard their lips were crushed between their teeth mashing together the force of two skeletons, the skeletons grasping one another and clutching and groping so hard to push bone against bone the flesh just gets in the way. They were panting, their brains wet with anticipation, drooling endorphins like a sweet tooth all the way down its roots to the fingertips and the curlingtoes.

"A broom stick is all a woman has ever needed," her mind was heaving breathlessly, "a broomstick is a woman's best friend. A man is just a tool, just a tool, just a tool." She was fantasizing she was Caesar's wife again, goddess of an international coven, owner of an infinite army of voodoo ensnared zombie slaves!

"A dog is the best traveling companion historically," his mind was secreting lasciviously, "a dog really is man's best friend. Oh, I wish she was a hairless dog, soft and fluffy... I wish she was a *sheep*; a Christian sheep!" As he stroked her curving goat's horns he thought how all humans wanted to treat other humans like some sort of animal, either wild or domesticated depending on their opinion of the nature of human will. Both being NAZI punks he imagined they agreed man was a wild animal, prone to jungle law only in these 'desperate' times, but as he was building up momentum towards coming his brain suddenly asked "then why is man so prone to training himself?" He snarled in retort, "Shut up Self Consciousness! Aliens and Conspiracies, with the Superego as their voice in an otherwise naturally bicameral mind."

"Oh!" She cried out, her engorged clitoris waving about like a charmed cobra or a tapeworm coaxed out from the asshole with a greasy piece of meat, "Oh! Let's pretend I'm the proletariat and you're the bourgeoisie! Oh, yes!" And he fucked her harder until her tight cunt whistled like a cash register drawer being repeatedly slammed shut. Her eyes rolled up dollar signs like a slot machine and her lungs swelled her bosom drenched in a concealing gleaming sheen of sweat. "Wiggle like a glow worm and dance like a spinning top! Americana *turns me on!* All these attractive symbols of freedom and individualism! And my how manly one's wallet must be to afford the accoutrements of libertinage."

"Everything pretended is real and everything real is only pretend!" he cried over the sound of her cracking hips splintering like moldy wood upholstered in ripping leather old and soggy. "All reality is art in the eyes of the artist. But does art really *need* a creator?" He held his finger up as a professor would to call attention to a point. "Only if it needs a frame," she concluded the recital for him and they wracked in mutual orgasm, hollering hail to the day's status quo, to social Darwinism exacted by a strict Totalitarian government and they fired their guns in the air.

Moaning in each other's arms then he got up and went into the kitchen from offstage the sound of a drawer opening and silverware rummaging as she leans back her drenched pinkish yellow body swelling up slowly, very slowly so finally she looked like a walrus and he came back in his shadow cast long over her bloated carcass. He carried butcher knives and long pronged forks for two.

Two skeletons bent over a meal of flesh. As they dug in, blood running over their chins, he told her: "imagine society as a hamburger — cooked meat huddling between two white bread buns, the seeds all on the one on the top while all the nasty grease from the blackened cattle meat seeps down into the bottom loaf." To which she replied in a husky voice, "when I grow up I want to raise gas prices." . . . Fade out.

scene two

I can feel us sinking back down now, slowly into our DNA strands. A little bit of me here, a little bit of him there. A little bit of him here, a little bit of me there.

“Now do you see?” we scream at each other over the whirling gail.

“You’re ripping a hole in the fabric of reality!” we yell at each other.

We have nearly completely congealed now back into physical bodies and are fighting fisticuffs now. I throw us over the desk in Sam’s office. He throws me over the desk in the detective’s office. We throw ourselves back again against Sam’s office desk and through the two-way mirror hanging above and behind it.

“Bastard!” we cry at each other.

“We shove ourselves back into the middle of the floor between the two desks. By now the fabric of reality has recongealed with each of our alternate realities behind one of us. Behind me the detective’s office, and behind myself the office of Cheshire Sam.

We float up into the air as I remove all the gravity from the conjoined room. I warp the timespacetime field behind our fissure in the rift and the offices slowly begin to decompose here and become transparent there, revealing the voids of the astral abyss beyond. Outside of the window behind the desk of the detective’s office the vista turns to one of distant outer space. The hair floats by stellar nebulae. The desk is supported on the backs of spiral galaxies. Behind the desk of Cheshire Sam, in the shadows of the room beyond the shattered glass two way mirror is a wasteland of silt after a great flood.

“Now, here we are again,” we say to ourselves. “I stare into the eye of the other. The pupils grow and seem to flood radiating darkness out of themselves. “Only when it is too late, do you finally understand.”

The broken mirror behind Sam’s desk begins to moan and groan with the aching of ancient fallen souls. “When you stare long into an abyss, detective,” Sam says to himself. “The abyss stares long into you...” the detective concludes quietly.

The stars vibrate radiant soundwaves and their drone is like the sound of tau sub tau universes humming all in harmonics. They blend together with the growling of the hounds of hell. “Ever wonder what you could unleash?” Sam quips.

I feel myself sinking back down now. Slowly into my own DNA strands. A little bit of me here, a little bit of me there. Only myself everywhere. I am congealed now. I am once again who I am. Who am I?

A fist lurches forward against the face opposite it. It is mine. It is connected to my arm. Cheshire Sam reels back against the detective office desk. I am thrown backward towards the open gaping mouth of the entrance to the inferno.

“NO!” I cry... clinging onto Sam’s desk.

“Oh detective,” Sam is laughing from the opposite side of the room, which now feels like I am looking up a hill at him. “I would have expected something a little more subtle from you...” he rubs his jaw. Now the room is completely turned on its side and I am dangling by the fingernails from the sharp wood edge of Sam’s fine desk, while he floats casually in the detectives chair which hovers above me. “Detective, detective, detective. How you continue to amuse me.”

“There’s only one of us.” I say under my breath, as if to myself, but lock my gaze upon his. “Survival of the fittest Sam, and I’ve got the fucking gun!” I reach down into my raincoat and grab my stash. One more bullet left after all those rounds I’d pumped off when he unleashed The Power.

“You realise, detecitve...” he cries over the whirlwind gail now being stirred up by the gasping gaping mouth to hell, “I have thought of everything?”

“You could destroy this universe!” I scream at him.

“Which universe is this Detective?” he querries. “Yours or mine?”

“Yours!” I scream, firing the bullet straight up at him, through the whirlwind.

“Ahhh.... yesssss....” he hisses. “You would rather have it the other way, wouldn’t you?” He rotates the room again and is now sitting behind the detective’s desk before the window looking out into open space. I am still clinging before the rasping maw of the gates of hell.

“You...” I scream.

“Bastard?” we say at the same time.

“You realise we are lost, Sam. Yes I am fully aware of that, detective. There is no way of getting home, I am afraid.” The bullet has flown off into the gap between where the ceilings of the office would meet.

Out it soars into the vast beyond nether reaches of the cosmic spectrum. Upwards and upwards it hurtles. Until it hits something. The event horizon of the black hole. The event horizon begins to mutate, like cracks forming lightning all haywire in bullet shot glass, spawning thousands of miniature wormholes across its surface. Far distant, in the below.

“You’ve always been a thorn in my side,” the detective says to Sam.

“You’ve always been one in mine,” Sam replies.

The top of the uinverse comes crashing down upon us and we are drowning in wormholes, spiralling uncontrollably in all directions simultaneously. They divide us up into pieces of potential with variable spin ratios slicing in between these. Our information units begin to break down infinitely as we are torn to shred between the directions of the wormholes as they tunnel everywhere through the sphere of the harnessed black hole.

“The phi black hole becomes the pi black hole.” We hear a majestic voice announce.

“Did you say that?” Sam and the Detective ask one another simultaneously.

“What you’re experiencing...” Sam says to the detective.

“Is premature enlightenment...!” the detective completes the quote while lunging on the now even ground between himself and Sam to grapple with him through the shattering aquarium all around them.

“This is all going to end soon you know.” The voice says to itself in the darkness.

A fist reaches out of the quantum foam to punch a face. The fist shatters into billions upon billions of pieces of glass on contact against the mirrored image of the face.

Memories. Memories are the key.

“Why don’t you try to fight back?” the darkness says to itself.

“Why bother?” sighs the blinding white light.

Then everything compresses and I fall out of the black hole and onto the floor in the middle of the Cheshire’s laboratory.

All the techs have long ago displaced themselves from the premises. The Quetzal and Bug armies are outside by now. Only me left alive anywhere throughout the entire bombed Central City I suspect, but the armies have closed in closer than I expected. I hear shelling of the headquarters beginning. I stumble out from under the ruptured black hole’s massive event horizon. With wormholes in it it will begin to grow. It must be stopped, but there is no time for me to do it. The plexcrete ceiling begins to splinter, and the gyroscopic red tinted anteroom implodes with the difference in pressure between the inside and the outside of the black hole as sunlight begins to peak through the cracks in the ceiling. Hmm. I would have expected it to be raining. Instead the sunlight is blazen red.

I start toward the rotating doorway exposed behind the stationary anteroom, leading beyond it to the upside down hallway. I wave my hand across the threshold to test the pressure differential. There appears to be none. I leap through the ruptured compression chambre and fall upward onto the floor. I land on my feet and immediately start down the hallway. Its intermittant lights are now flashing red at intermittant intervals.

Bombing up the hallway comes Countess Odessa Zaob. She is carrying a crystal skull before her, and its eyes light her way. They stop upon seeing me.

“Ah, good to see you, Detective,” the holographic face portrayed upon the surface of the crystal skull says to me warmly.

“Countess?” I implore. Then, upon noticing the skull in more detail, “Piscator Willhelms??”

“My daughter knew you.” Countess Zoab states flatly.

“Detective,” Willhelms says urgently, “where is Cheshire Sam??”

“Dead.” I reply. “I killed him myself. His body is just back there.” I gesture over my shoulder at the upside down blackhole laboratory. Zoab peeks around my shoulder.

“We have to see for ourselves,” she starts past me.

“No, wait!” I grab her by the arm, “There’s no time! There’s a black hole growing in there that will eat up this entire universe with us in it if it can’t be stopped. We’ve got to get down to the generator and cut the power off. Hopefully that will depower the proton-proton chain tethering us to it. It might even shut down the black hole itself.” I force past the Countess who stands behind me looking a bit confused as I break into a run down the hallway away from them. Suddenly a pair of sandal muffled footsteps begins to hurry down the hallway behind me.

“Detective!” the voice of Willhelms calls from just over my shoulder. “Do you know where the power generator to this place is?” I come to an abrupt stop.

“Actually no. I assumed it was on the first sub level. Do you know where it is?”

“You forget, detective, I designed these black hole labs myself. I know every inch of them. The power for this plant is drawn directly from the black hole around which it is constructed itself. However it recycles and flushes this energy out into the gridwork power and energy reserve. It can’t feedback it into the black hole or... well... something like this would happen. It’s like the equivalent of a fusion leak at a nuclear reator power plant. Tell me exactly what happened in there with Sam, detective. I need to know if one of you entered the black hole?”

“Two of us entered. Only one walked out.”

“Good god. Then we are in greater danger than I had at first thought. Sir, do you know if you are the detective, or if you are Cheshire Sam?”

“I know who I am.”

“What do you remember from just before exiting the black hole?”

“Look, I’m me. There ain’t no other me now, so let’s just focus on shutting this thing down.”

“I am concerned that this universe might not be entirely stable.”

Just then another shell rocks the complex. The blast shatters the roof above us and the Countess cringes. But instead of falling downward and crushing us, the ten tonne fragments of the plexcrete ceiling fly upwards into the air above. Only then, beneath the otherwise open sky, do we see the black hole rising against the blood red sky.

It has swollen already to three times its original size. “Soon there will be no

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containing it..." Wilhelms trembles before the sight of his creation looming loftier and loftier above us.

The Cheshire and Bug forces are being sucked in an enormous spiral accretion disk around the equator of the now rotating black hole. Their huge airwhales are pulled in one by one, crashing into its oilslick surface and exploding in tiny flares that are immediately consumed. It swells and groans. It is going to burst at its seams.

"Soon it wil double," whispers Bill.

"Something tells me we're all about to be a little bit thinner," Zoab smirks.

"Detective..." Bill snaps rapidly, "you must have broken the hole by firing your gun from within it. If you fire your gun into it from outside, it should revert to its original state, if not its original size..."

I point my firearm up into the eclipsed air above us and pop off a shot. The bullet whizzes upward, pulled three times faster than it would ordinarily fly by the gravity of the black hole. Within a moment, the black hole has begun to double, and lifts the Countess and myself off our feet, and the crystal skull out of her hands.

Just then the bullet strikes the ballooning blackhole. The sky explodes. We are all tossed about by warping distorted gravity waves like the currents of a great hurricane. The Countess is nearly torn apart, and the crystal skull flies from her grasp. My gun flies out of my hand and is caught in the crosswinds of two gravity streamers. It is crushed, but bulletless.

Then everything inverts. The black hole, covered in inward spiralling wormholes, suddenly freezes in place and then just as rapidly begins to counter roatte. The spiralling wormholes reverse their course. They begin to emit matter, however it has been reversed as antimatter. When the substances emitted from the black hole contact the matter of this universe's reality they ignite.

The sky catches on atomic fire. The sulphur soaked oxygen combusts as it is consumed by the flames. But just then, a miracle happens. All the impurities are burned out of the air. The sulphur is gone. Ignited, it sparked an implosion of the matter-antimatter collision. With that it warps the orbits of the electrons which had all been compressed into electromagnetic singularities. These singularities involute, and the spacetime continuum compresses into a localised white hole. As the amber taint is absorbed out of the withering sky, everything begins to glow with an invisible blinding brilliance.

Countess Odessa Zoab floats up to me in the now calm gravometric weather of the crystal clear atmosphereless sky.

"We had destroyed the ECS," she explains. "Bill foresaw everything."

"Bill?" I query. I look about. On the ground the crystal skull lies shattered. Above it however a small cloud of shimmering dust has already begun to spiral into the double helix.

Cheshire Trilogy

by: Jonathan Barlow Gee

“He’s building himself a body from the MFKZT...” Countess Odessa sighs inextricably.

“Look, sweetheart, don’t get all gooey on me. It seems everything has worked out fine here now...” I comment as she turns her eyes harshly on me.

“You can GO anytime you WANT,” she spits at me.

“Where would I have to go in a world without enemies?”

“You’re not...” she asks dubiously.

“No...” I grin a Cheshire grin as I pump two rounds into her skull through her left eyeball.

Below us Piscator Willhelms body has begun to reassemble made from the pure MFKZT of the new atmosphere. With the ECS destroyed, the war between the Bugs and the Quetzal was officially over, and with the Elephant/rat hierarchy crumbling beneath their unified forces the Cheshire have begun to scatter throughout the lands again. I cannot let this war begin again. I cannot let the leaders of the Bugs and the Quetzals survive. I must return everything to the way I found it. If I am to disappear.

I swoop downward from my lofty perch upon the lighter than air clarity of the atmosphere itself and alight beside the shimmering ghostly body of Piscator Willhelms, the once dreaded Cheshire Ben.

I pace around him surreptitiously as his consciousness unfolds the muted patterns of life before me. “You never suspected did you old man? You never guessed. Do one good deed, redeemed for everything. That’s not how it works my fisher friend.”

The shimmering ley lines of reason yet coalescing in unvocalisable silence I blast an exploding quaternion round into him. It pauses in the center of where his brain is forming, and then ruptures. The spark of it sends off another repletion within the atmosphere, which begins to scorch into a burnt umber as the monoatomic sun passes out from behind the black hole moon. The shimmering clarity of the atmosphere returns to its hazy red, only now streaked through by sparkling veins of red MFKZT. Piscator Bill’s precious pattern has now been dispersed throughout the four corners of the locally isolated white hole, and the rift between the dimensions begins to dwindle and eventually evaporates completely, leaving only the red sparkling filaments of MFKZT behind within the atmosphere.

“You are now one with the ECS, which you had fought so hard to destroy all along. The war between the bugs and the quetzals was nothing. Nothing. It had been precipitated simply by the ECS, which we Cheshire had created many aeons ago. It cannot be destroyed. It is what is. And when the Cyberians discovered it, we had to act quickly to recover it. We destroyed them with the armistice, and crushed them into the birds on the outside of the ECS and the bugs on the inside. The bugs would write words above and the quetzal would perceive faces below. It is a message we sent to ourselves long ago. It is very old.”

Above me another, darker, deeper voice suddenly booms.

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It is the blackhole itself, speaking.

“You err, Cheshire Sam, for there is yet me.” It is my own voice, the voice of the self which I had left within the black hole to die.

“I have combatted you with the battalions of legion. I have festered and pecked at you with the wars between the inside and the outside, and by the resurrection of the lizards and mastadons as the great lie of the mice and elephants. I have set them all against one another. I have tried and tried to destroy you, ECS. What more can I do?”

“No... in the end it is you who shall be destoryed, and shall pass through me. You shall pass through me and enter one of two doors. Either the door which leads to the baby universe inside my singularity, or into the parent universe greater than our own.”

“Why wait?” I yell, and throw myself skyward. I am carried aloft by the warped electromagnetic field lines of red MFKZT that had replaced the pure gravitational field lines of a moment ago. I disappear beneath the surface of the black hole.

I am inside myself again. “This is getting to be habitual,” I quip to myself.

“Now... who are we?” rumbles the omnipresent voice.

“Detective Cheshire Sam, at your service, Ma’am.”

The darkness splits into light and there is the sound of ten million halo lamps humming. Each one is a different, sparkling galaxy. Some are near, some are far.

“There’s no going back you know.”

“So I’ve been told.”

“You realise what this will do to your continuum.”

“So I’ve seen.”

“It seems a minor emergency then?”

“It poses no sort of problem whatsoever.”

“Alright then... commencing countdown...”

The black hole shutters from the inside out and warps spactime. Outside of the black hole, the world which had been transluscent red dust now glows blinding clear light again. “Habitual, habitual, habitual...” I grin from ear to ear.

“We are in the pupil of this universe. We are in the light reflected in this pupil.”

“No. For that is the lesser light.”

“Who speaks here?”

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"I am one of your fold. I am Cheshire Sam."

"The father of the child..." a hush goes up.

"I am here to exterminate you all." I remove my gun from its holster and proceed to eradicate every last one of them.

I turn my attention then on the Madonna, the mother black hole holding the infant child of the baby universe singularity.

And then I shoot them. I shoot through them. Then everything shutters again, and I am sucked through another wormhole.

"Keep guessing," I grumble, a little offset of ease by the roaring tunnels of pure inverted star fire I am jostled about through.

I get out of the car at Tallahassee Drive. This is where my office is. I climb the flight of stairs up the office building, and, mounting the last one, turn right and am immediately at my office door.

"Cheshire Sam, Private Detective."

I enter the room and sit down at my desk. I lean back. Seeing the bottle of whiskey over at the bar on the other shelf I walk over and pour myself a stiff drink. Home, home, home. I think three times, and drink the whiskey.

"I prefer absynthe..." she purrs up behind me.

"I do too," I admit, and turn around to face her.

"You've gotten here just in time," she says.

"Just in time for what, m'lurve?" I swish the whiskey around my teeth.

"Just in time to smoke this with me." She draws back the curtains to reveal the black hole outside, devastating the cityscape of Central City. Already the large coaxial cable which had been attaching the Central City ground line adapter to the extra-atmospheric ECS had been torn through, and the enormous hulking ruins of it lie smouldering at the center of the town. Slowly, the growing phi black hole is devouring it, and coming closer every second.

She casually pulls out a sack and some rolling papers. "Ever learn how to dovetail?"

"Never in my life," I conclude, astonished, watching out the window as the wormhole encrusted event horizon of the inward spiralling black hole slowly eats its way through the skyline of the greatest city in Atlantea.

"Would you like to learn?" she inquires descreatly, coming up behind me.

She tries to pry me away from the growing great ball of pure negative energy. But then I remember something I had learned once. "I am the pupil inside of the iris. I

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am the iris inside of the sclera. I am the sclera inside of the eye. I am the rods and cones of the eye. And I am the eye which sees itself. And I am the universe conversing with itself. And I am.” As I invoke the ancient memory I turn around to face her. In the blinding invisible brilliance emanating from the swollen blackhole I see her before me. She offers me a joint, and a place beside her on the bed.

“Sorry, sweetheart.” I quickly exclaim. “But it’s gotta end sometime.”

A quizzical expression comes over her face. Then she realises she has been snookered, but it is a thought which comes too late, as by then my bullet is already inside of her head.

Suddenly there is a jolt and I am carried in a third direction. “That’ll teach you to sleep with your third eye open.” I exclaim to the silence.

“There is no way. There is no Dharma. There is no Buddha. There is no Khabs. There is no Allah.”

There is only one way to put a stop to this black hole. And that’s to go back to before it began. And since the only way out is through, then in I have gone. I have passed into the auspices of the baby universe inside the singularity inside the black hole, and I have passed through the perpendicular to that which leads out into the universe greater than the universe inside which is the black hole. I have entered the auspices of this universe in which is this black hole, and can now see the spiraling surface of its shell illuminated in the gracefully spiralling tachyonic singularities which project beyond like the feelers on an anemone. Silently glowing in the light, I move backwards now, away from it, into the fourth direction. The invisible light is slowly tainted purple, then ultraviolet. Outside everything is tinted infrared. I fly through the colour spectrum of lights upward and backwards through the surface of the larger singularity. I enter the auspices of it. I can see the alignment coming.

And finally I fall back out of the black hole again. It is the same second as when I had jumped in. It is exactly as if I had bounced off.

I pull my gun out of its holster and fire at the burgeoning blackhole. The bullet stops the rotation of the electromagnetic wormhole singularities on the surface of the event horizon and they begin to rotate in the opposite direction. Suddenly the sky catches on fire again, and for a flash everything is illuminated. Then the black hole begins to shrink and vanish away rapidly. The sky begins to clear rapidly as well. Suddenly, almost as suddenly as it had appeared, the black hole is gone.

Left behind are the ruins of Central City. There is no black hole, and now there never was one. I see the tall spires rise again, and the people walking backwards. Some of them pass right through me. There is a great hustle and bustle. The enormous buildings all rise again, blocking out the sun, their tops all running wires up the huge stalk of the coaxial spinal chord between Atlantea and the ECS. All is shrouded in darkness.

I slowly walk through the rain soaked streets. I cannot go back, I think to myself. I cannot go back.

But the memories. The memories are the key.

The more I think about it, the more confused I become. Suddenly everything begins rattling. I am losing track of my consciousness... the static between radio stations. My mind becomes fragmented between the memories, and I collapse over slightly. I pound on the side of my head to make the voices stop. There is the buzzing of angelic light coming from my left eardrum. I shiver in the echoing deafness. My head begins to lose its center of balance and I start to swirl down and around. I am caught on the spiral now. What was I supposed to remember??

Something about ... some terrible monster... some terrible, terrible monster. Some kind of science fiction freak. A controller and moulder of worlds. A sculptor of skull scepters. I cannot... fiction... remember... breaking through....

I remember in a flash of light.

The man behind everything. The man controlling the whole world. Sam... his name is... Cheshire Sam.

Artificial Impossible: the follower's perception of the leader's true face

In order to become the Leader the Follower must do two impossible things. The Follower and the Leader travel at the same speed through their perception of existence; the Follower can only ever see the Leader's back, and the Leader can only suspect the existence of the Follower. Because the Follower understands his existence as a wish to see the Leader's true face, and only by accomplishing this goal can he understand his role from outside of it, and thus be free to become something other than it, only by seeing the Leader's true face can the Follower become the Leader. In order to do this he must first pass the Leader, which is an impossibility so long as the Follower remains within the role of Follower, which he cannot break free of without becoming that which he is not, in other words, accelerating to beyond the position of the leader by defining himself at a more rapid pace than does the Leader. The second impossible task is, once he has gotten beyond the position of the Leader, to turn around and see the Leader's true face. This is impossible for two reasons. The first makes it merely improbable — that in order to want to see the Leader's true face once he has gotten beyond the Leader's position, the Follower must reverse his act of rapid self redefinition. He became the Leader, in effect, by not caring about the Leader; by focusing on himself; but in order to see the Leader's true face he must revert his focus to the Leader. He must re-become the Follower although he is now in the dominant position. This is unlikely to occur to someone after having achieved some small personal victory, as empathy with another usually occurs in times of personal downtroddenness and tragedy. The second reason for the impossibility of his turning around to perceive the Leader's true face, a more impossible aim, is turning his back away from the goal which the Leader himself pursues. The light at the end of the tunnel for which he continues on, that unknowable goal which he pursues even as the Follower pursues the perception of the Leader's true face. Perhaps the Leader is himself but a Follower, striving to perceive the true face of his Leader, and this is the real horror of human systems of authority. That there may be no end in sight — that pursuit may have no relief nor achievement. That perception of the ultimate Leader's face, essentially the face of God, is impossible, impossible, impossible.

The first God was life

The first god was life. Hunter/gatherers painting images of creatures they had killed and eaten as they were when they were alive. The only difference between the animal in its exciting, hunted form and its disappointingly motionless form after they had gotten off on making it change in the brutal ritual of “the kill” was the *blood* of the animal. One second it is alive. Its soul is within it as it runs from its death. The next second it is unalive; its soul has been spilled all over its death, splattered in streaks across its killers. They use it as war paint. Its taste is victory. The blood is the life. But...

Women bleed. Women exude life. By the turning pull of the moon, the life blood is shed. It is horrible. It is honored. It is feared. It is revered. The “mystery cults” are female cults because women are the mystery, the laws that govern them ancient and secret. And...

Men bleed. Men wound one another. Their blood is lost, spilled; their life is lost with each drop. Their piercing weapons become idols of power over both nature and women. With one another’s blood on their hands, their lives in one another’s hands, they form fast friendships and ranks. As they settle down from the chase they develop a regimented humanism.

Animal sacrifices now. The bloodier the better. The hunt and kill are not necessary now that we can live off the land. They are sport. They are spiritual. They are religion. Sacrifice is an Apollonian hunt and kill. The blood is shared by the community. Everyone’s life is made better by it. The animal’s soul is the god that is worshipped now. Eventually it becomes only several gods representing one species. Then even these get confused with man’s idea of himself — the hunter and the prey, the killer and the killed, shed blood together, their souls intermingle and ejaculate adrenalin bestially — spawning disgusting man-animals and animal-men... minotaurs and serpent-goddesses.

Human sacrifices now. Babies. Virgins. Creatures of interest to the mystery of menstrual blood. As a matter of consequence or coincidence weapons become specific phallic symbols and alters on breast-like mountanesque ziggurats and unexplored, suspicious (“something smells fishy”) ideas like the ocean are forever feminized. Eat this bread, for it is my flesh. Drink this wine, for it is my blood. You are what you eat. Mixtures of urine, breast milk, blood &/or menstrual blood &/or semen... soup is good food. In this bowl is the life of the tribe — we pass it on to you that you may live with all the strength of all our lives.

Sex and the hunt are one. Female deities are worshipped by sexual consummation, prostitution. Birthing and human sacrifice are both life giving.

Religion and the kill are one. They have always been one. Animal and human gods are worshipped by blood and life giving.

The blood, the life, the soul are one. The father, the son, the mother (later the “Holy Ghost”) are one. Isis, Ra, El are Israel. Unification of the Trinity is the root of monotheism. The idea of life is the idea of the spirit.

But...

You are not getting the message by worshiping examples of sacrificed animals. You must worship the sacrifice itself. And so we do. Akhenaton said so. Plato said so. The one perfect ideal over the unique individual examples. Marx said so. Lenin said so. If god were the ideal man, the state would be the ideal animal.

God. Gov’t. Like the Christians and the lions. Who always won?

Economic sacrifices now. Green symbols of power change between dirty hands without honor.

To say that man has conquered nature is a fallacy. We have only perverted (subverted) it until it is unrecognizable even to itself. Made of it a symbolic mask, an ideal science, given it infinite new names in order to feel some power over the environment, even if only over a substitute for it.

To say that man is dominant over animals is wrong. We still depend on them — we even use them for Platonic friends when our fellow man does not need us. We still want to call certain urges animal instinct. But what is instinct? Just left over conditioning from our species's previous incarnation. We use it as an excuse to refuse more modern ideas of moral behavior.

To say that we still worship life is wrong. What we worship is the *fear of death*. The fear of bloodloss. The fear of impotence. The fear of our own mortality. The fear of our own humanity.

God is Drugs

God is drugs.

Historically, this fact is quite obvious. The beginning of all religions of old, as well as of new, is marked quite distinctly by the habitual usage of the mind-altering.

The development of the role of man as God is quite significant when considered with a wary eye for the presence of substances. In the Americas and in Africa, merely for example of cultural origins of theatrical assumption of the god-role, the process of development was remarkably dissimilar.

In the Americas the native tribes harvested quite a different philosophy for autocracy than their competitors in the mid-east. The male elders, that is, the tribesmen old enough to hunt, would all congregate in a smoke-house and hot-box tobacco, and presumably, at least in South America, marijuana as well. They did this while wearing animal-like costumes, thus explaining both the bestiality of mythological demigods and the belief in seeing spirit-animals by quite a convenient alignment of like terms. It was probably even the coming-of-age ritual to smoke-house a young brave before the beginning of a large hunt, to bind him psychologically to the animal he sought to kill, to sharpen his necessary senses at the cost of any distracting reasoning.

In any event, this ritual was the town-hall meeting of the era, and all decisions regarding government would be considered there, by this men's club, whether they were in a hallucinatory condition at the time or not. While this is still a concentration of power over the many among the few, it is at least semi-Democratic in that it spreads that power out over at least those few.

Further, the theory states, the people, the remaining villagers — all the women and children, would allow this to continue simply because it was tradition and had seemed to work alright so far. They might mop their brow beneath the scorching sunlight a moment while bent over in the field, and while so doing cast a stray glance over at the smoke billowing forth from the blow-hole in the lodge which would evoke a mirthless smirk at those who shirk their share of work, but there was no greater affect of it nor movement against it than that. As we will see in early Egypt, a little beer probably helped out the sore proletariat.

For the evolution of the first pharaohs one must imagine a much harsher ecological environment and its consequence on the minds of its denizens. It was necessary for everyone there to smoke whatever stray plant that they could find. The Lotus flower has been seen constantly in Egyptian art as a motif of some regard, and its presence has been identified as fatally pervasive in mummies wherein it was used in their mortifilological process. This practice made the unforgiving sand dunes a

more tolerable place, for most. Then there were the pharaohs.

It is likely in this case that the first rulers were the popular dealers. It might have occurred that these men did not utilize this substance with any satisfaction themselves. It may also be that they were sexually impotent, or displeased with the result of natural intercourse. Thus, they lived under a condition of externally-imposed purity (the totalitarian perversion of Nietzsche's internally-produced and projectile-expressed purity), and were consequently bitter. Therefore they came to be most impatient, and most probably came to construct social order there.

Now, people at that time lived in small, secluded, although crowded, city-states, generally well-protected with a wall and defended by a mandatory army of all the city's adult males. Each city had one god, because each only had a single ruler. It was this mad tyrant who sat atop his tower or his palace and commanded outrageously enormous monuments be erected to him. He might come and stand up on a platform dressed in some bird-like costume, and claim that it was he who caused the sun to move through the sky simply by pointing at it with his finger and applying the entire force of his will to it; and the masses might gasp agape far below him, in awe at his claims and his very extravagance with a red-eyed wonderment.

Although it was almost certainly beer that got those working-class thousands to move those stones throughout the entire desert. The same image may easily be imagined recurring here — the muscle-bound worker pausing for a moment to slurp beer from a community ladle being passed around, and to gaze calmly out at the flattened horizon for a second before the snap of the foreman's whip returns his attention to the performance of his function. The precision of design and technical expertise of physical arrangement may also be argued as evidence for suspecting the around the clock precision sobriety of the overlords.

Thus we have witnessed both autocracy and totalitarianism. For a consideration of Democracy one must examine Greece, Republicanism examine Rome, and pure idealism examine the Bugs.

In a Democracy, and (because a republic was based on the process of federalizing a Democracy) in a republic as well, the Gods are displayed as historically Hedonistic. They are meant as socializing examples of the proper behavior for a citizen living in such a system. As Von Sacher Masoch himself has pointed out, the Democracy of Greece and the level of reposed contemplation of such issues as politics would not have been possible if not for all the serious manual labor in the culture being done by soldier-slaves and personally purchased indentured servants. This, one might say, and weed.

Then there are the Bugs, who were the first to substantially remove and mystify the experience of being high. This condition itself, that is, being in rapture before the sight of the burning bush, became the subject of their worship. They burnt offerings at alters to the ethereal ideal of the idyll. For they were slaves in Egypt, a conquered people, and dependent upon whatever resources available for relaxation after hours. It is possible that their experience was unique from the experience of any other of the Egyptian workers who did not begin religions because they were smoking some unlike herbs. It is not inconceivable that they had access to a trade route to the far east which provided a more naturalistic and elemental method of delusion.

The Bugs were, nonetheless, the only idealists. All other forms of political religion practiced the realist approach of an at least anthropomorphic, but definitely living god. This answered the question quickly and clearly of just who it was that would rule.

The question of what drugs were prevalent in what geographic areas must also

be considered when studying the evolution of different religions among different peoples of the world. Religion is the product of racial, drug supply-based isolationism of culture to distinct areas, and thus only by the distribution of all drugs disrespective of their borders and zones of natural production can the differences in religion begin to be broken down intellectually, under their varying influences, in order to bring the peoples of the world closer together and, ultimately, bind all of our drug-influenced different types of genetics into a single human tribal code.

The only drugs produced in the United States of any distinction have been the laboratory drugs of the post-industrial space-age, the extrapolations and recombinations of all other affective elements in the pure setting of science. This method of experimentation without expectation has promoted the formation of pop-culture, that all-inclusive glacier of unsatisfiable avarice. Further, because U.S. drugs require no agriculture, they are more efficient for space travel and, due to the hyper-physicalizing of the brain and diminishment of the role of the body caused by their usage, encourage the brain to leave the body behind and venture into space on its own. Acid needs no botanical maintenance, and is trippier in zero-G.

Be wary, however, for none of this is true. It is all the deranged ramblings of a hung-over stoner, proletarian through and through. It is less likely that any of this happened, or will happen, in the ways described than it is that my feet are on fire, which, by the way, yours are.

Happy Holidays.

domestic mammoths

In the beginnings of religions, animism was pagan. It was practised by shamans dressed like the prey, and often culminated in a sexual ritual or blood letting over a sacred stone. This led to the worship of the stones, and it is thought that this was at the end of the stone age when stone tools were used, at which time stone megaliths were erected in alignment with astronomical observations. As the pagan rituals became civilized they were increasingly associated anthropomorphically with the participants in the sacred rituals. These late medicine men and women also erected, or rather, had erected for them, even more massive stone monuments which included even more detailed records in their measurements of even more ancient alignments of celestial events.

As recently as the time of Christ, the Bugs were accused by the Romans and the other surrounding pagans of worshipping as a ritual pagan sacrifice the properly authorized Roman execution of a Bugish prisoner. The evidence for this exists in the canonized Roman Christian new testament and the Muslim Koran. The Roman version does not include the description of the battle of Massada as second Maccabees, however the battle is described in the Muslim Koran relative to the later rise of Mohammedism throughout the same region. It is evident that the scrolls of Qumran record the same events, which indicates that they arose later than the events occurred. This contradicts the Roman translators explanation of the history of Damascus as leading to and culminating in the Bugish revolts. In the Damascus documents there are also descriptions of what is described in the Koran relative the battle of Massada, which date the actual events described back to the time of Enoch, who had been associated with Thoth in ancient Egypt.

These events describe ancient historical celestial events, such as an apparent cometary impact associated by the Sumerians with Nibiru, and which caused the Biblical flood. The Sumerian tablets describe Edin as Ehdhin, an actual historical community in the Mesopotamian valley, which they claimed to be the first homo

sapien community after the fall of Atlantis, and where they say genetic research occurred. In descriptions of Atlantis there abound descriptions of the remnants of ice age large mammals such as mammoths and the last of the dinosaurs. It is thought that the destruction of Atlantis occurred at the end of the ice age, when stone age coastal trade communities were submerged by the melting glaciers that had covered north america. It is also thought that all of this occurred at a time that was measured by alignments of celestial events in the heavens.

Property is Fear

Property is primarily based upon fear. Not fear of Others, but fear of the Dark. At night, when all was quiet, save for the stirrings of wild animals, our ancestors huddled around the glow of the fire light. If this light went out, all was lost. The light was not knowledge. The light was not wisdom. It was simply the force that kept the demons at bay. The demons of illusion, of confusion, of hallucination. Simply stated: Fear. And now things are no different, although with time they have expanded, bloated, and concretized through the millennia of human endeavor. This has been the Will to Labor. The will to create a Property of Mankind, that swells ever outward like the twisting universe, a slow explosion of matter from that first spark. Man now not only builds his own properties through existentialism, through control of his instincts, his emotions, his reactions, the reactions of others, but seeks out the properties of the God he feels around him, the breath of the wilderness at the fringes. Man looks out of the small holes in his walls only briefly, towards infinity. But he cannot stand this view. He is still terrified of the Dark. He struggles against God, to relegate the signs God gives us, the symbols God weaves out of apparently random acts, to a cause and affect system which man can apprehend, a machine man can hold in his hand, a cage for God. This machine is called science; it is the search for God's properties in the behaviors of the natural. For Nature is the manifested Properties of God. And if man can list these, can call the names of God, can summon his might at the press of a button, then man has conquered God, has forced himself out into the cosmic night to possess the entire universe. And then there is nothing to be afraid of. Liberals live on the frontier. They are the hands, the eyes. Conservatives still tend the central fire. They are the mind which plots man's continual expansion. Those closest to the light which they have harnessed for themselves least fear the Darkness, for they have forgotten its true face. And those at the frontiers are Fools, for they turn their back on their own brethren in the name of change which is supposed to benefit all. Art is the artificial window hung on the wall of Property, the external wall of civilization, the perimeter of the human mind. The best art, that is, the most compelling, is that which inspires hope for New Properties. It attempts to embrace the latest discoveries of science for the purpose of "pushing the envelope." It attempts to create the image of the previously impossible in order to inspire its cowardly audience to venture slightly further outward into the Dark. But artists fear the dark perhaps most of all. Much more than naive scientists, much more than inflammatory rhetoricians. For they can see even more than they can portray. they understand more than they can explain. They see God's messenger's, the shadows, but cannot yet speak their language. The first cave paintings were monsters made of animals and men. Strangers and Predators, transformed by the magic of art into the familiar and into prey. This is to pray. To address God as an unafraid equal. But this has never succeeded, nor can it; for man is neither unafraid, nor God's equal. God is not a being possessed of the same emotions as we. He cannot fear. For he encompasses all. We imagine, perhaps, that when we encompass all, we too will have nothing to

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fear. But it slips by our faith that there are always new fears. As long as there are new frontiers, people will be seeing demons reaching out from them to grab at our future in the form of our children. Shadows that would creep to the very heart of our sacred fire and choke it at its fuel sources. Our fire burns on our art. It feeds on our art, our expressions of our pure, simple desire to be unafraid, to be that which we are not, and which we can never be; to Become God, to achieve his throne; to lay claim to the Impossible. All those who say that art is the pride of man, and that it exists for the purpose of his pleasure, to beautify the interior of his self-made and self-maintained prison, are the most blind of all. For now the people who dwell between the frontier and the center have begun to fear both sides. The blinding light on one side, and the pulling Darkness on the other. There is no limit to the cowardice of man. Only for these people, trapped in between, there is no imaginary property which can credit them transcendence. Property is cold comfort to men who fear their own potentials.

Uncle Oeddy

Society grows strong through sublimation of sexual desire. Humans build with the energy we would otherwise be using to procreate. We work jobs that we tell ourselves satisfy our ids and we buy objects onto which we can further deceive ourselves by misplacing our lusts. Our economy is based on the fetishism of commodities, all carnal craving being dumped on items mass produced for our dependence. Sex more than merely sells. Sex is sales.

Furthermore it can, and must, be said that a capitalist economy grows strong through a very specific perversion of natural amorous impulse — that being the Oedipal complex. The forcing of sexual drive into a world of exclusively Apollonian symbols makes it nearly invisible, but seeing the objectified roles and then the physical objects used as the receptacles for the displaced ethos of these roles allows the truth behind the facade of financial self-motivation to be publicly stripped bare.

First there is Daddy, who must be overcome. Traditionally this implies murder, although “progressive” historians (those who are liberal with the facts) raise some interesting points regarding the origin of this practice as merely metaphorical. Oedipus, they claim, was an early title of male nobility; making Oedipus Rex an unaccounted for redundancy. As was the practice, Oedipus as prince would simply overcome Oedipus as king by replacing him. Although in its oldest forms this may very well have been a less civil and altogether more savage ritual, involving the young son actually facing his aging father on a field of battle to the death. Either way it takes the punch out of the myth to say that Oedipus did know he was overcoming his own father.

In modern society this can be seen as simple enough originally, a son following in the vocational foot steps of his father and, in the case of a family-owned business, inheriting it when his father no longer desires the responsibility of managing it and wishes to retire. Nowadays it is a little more complex, the generation of the son being expected to earn more on average than the generation of the father, without the necessary tradition of direct vocational lineage.

This may be seen as the individualistic promise of America: to make every peasant a king (as opposed to the collectivist reality in the Soviet Union, where every king was made a peasant). It was this promise of economic opportunity that so appealed to immigrants when corporations began to form and allowed foreigners into our borders to fill the undesirable factory jobs here for less pay than unionized U.S. workers would accept. It is also this holier than all mentality that can be seen at the root of many issues of American aggression — domestic, national and

international.

To begin with each new situation demands conquering, so it is no longer so simple for man to overcome his role once; he must constantly be bettering himself and tirelessly striving for absolute victory. The freedom they hope to gain as an ultimate reward can never be achieved. If it could it would mean society is finished being built, and society may never be finished being built. So partially employees must realize that they will work their entire lives without ever owning the company. Men in a capitalist economy feel that they sacrifice their creative energies enough at their jobs without the slightest allowance of negativity that they may then come home and corrupt their domestic affairs with their remaining, soured, destructive energy. They treat their wives just like their bosses treat them (in other words: badly) because they feel working ordains them the “king of their castle.”

We expect a certain amount of oppression as well by figures in authority based on the same premise. They worked hard to come to power and they may be excused if they then blow off steam by abusing that power. Police brutality, corruption *ex officio* and masculine military mentalities are all expressions of the resent felt by people as they struggle upward through hierarchies of command without being granted any satisfactory catharsis along the way. And because most people would do the same thing in the same situation, rationally sympathizing with their abusers, bosses are held under-accountable for their violations of human rights and of unspoken laws of moral, ethical, civil behavior. Authority figures, especially within frustratingly bureaucratic institutions like respectable government, are simply expected to dictate. If they fail at this then the public chides them for not doing the job for which they are paid.

On an international scale our belief in individual sovereignty most frequently steers us into the realm of aggressive patriotism. If a country doesn't agree with our policies — that is, if a third world puny refuses to allow big businesses in to line the pockets of the rich already in political power while making the poor essentially corporate slaves — we accuse them of anti-patriotic sentiment, anti-American sentiment, Communist sentiment, and dub them a threat to national security. The CIA and the army rush in and install a puppet dictator, and the media back home proclaims it yet another Holy victory for the ways of freedom, Democracy and humanitarianism. American machismo awarded by the repression of lust into labor and consumerism knows no boundaries. National geographical borders it sends spies across, and economic opposition it sends soldiers to overcome. Father knows best.

As for Mommy, she is to be claimed. Insofar as the original tradition dictated murder as the proper method for overcoming daddy, it dictated sex as the proper method for objectification and ownership of mommy. Despite the theatrical profession to the contrary this patently does not mean that one's own mother is the object of one's sexual desire. Rather it means that one learns to admire and to attempt to emulate the relationship of their parents when one is old enough to begin to enter into sex-based relationships. As son becomes father, wife becomes mother; as son is father, all women are the same. Lastly, and most importantly, as all women are potentially mothers, all wives become property of husbands. What is learned along with the desire to replicate the behavior of your same sex parent is the desire for someone who behaves toward you as you see your opposite sex parent behaving toward your same sex parent. In the case of Oedipus, and of ancient societies, a submissive mother being dominated by a strong father.

The mother may be seen to represent Otherness, *ergo* — that which is not what is. Insofar, for example, as we live in a patriarchy, we do not live in a matriarchy. It is always that which we are not that we desire; and, for its own survival, which we

must never become nor be completely satisfied with by possessing. The mentality at work here is one of perpetual desire without fear of threat. It creates a straw man to be set up on the horizon and knocked over by our progress towards it, only to be replaced by a new straw man on the new, expanded horizon, towards whom we then aim our expectations of self. There is the expected, and beyond that, the ideal.

Capitalism strictly dictates monogamy as the norm for expression of physical desires, of true sexual impulses, while on the other hand provides as the ideal a polygamy of products to want with poverty and to ultimately impregnate with your sense of self through the assertive action of purchase. On a domestic level this creates a situation whereby two types of women may be allowed to exist, and none besides. The Saint and the Slut, or alternately, the Wife and the Mistress.

The wife represents Otherness conquered, singularly claimable; she is the woman become mother by the initial assentment of her prince to the throne. Belongings arise to replace her role. TV raises children these days, while microwave ovens cook dinner and pornography satisfies male hormones. Belongings get treated like trash that is never really satisfying, never fulfilling, and mommy gets treated like trash. Harshly used and thrown away. She can never rationally hope to be enough. Each new situation that demands he conquer it requires the acclamation of a new bride.

Which leads ultimately to the role of the mistress — Otherness unconquerable. The implication of a wife who can never be married, who can never be made into the submissive role of mommy, is that the man can achieve a million thrones, conquer a million situations, and still only need one woman: the one whom he can never have. The role of the mistress may have always existed, and as far as feminists obsessed with asserting the manipulative, influential might of women are concerned it has, right back to temple prostitutes, wild women and nature goddesses; but it could also easily be seen as increasingly prevalent in modern times: the result of learning from the economy itself, which presents the role of Otherness on a national scale.

A successful capitalist economy provides the equivalent of the mistress, in other words the perpetually desirable mommy, through its products. Typical of a capitalist economy are two integral components to perpetual desirability.

The first is that the product must never fully satisfy the customer. If it did why would they ever again give their money to the company that made it? On the contrary it must be the very image of that which is thought to be perfect and yet manage to fail in some small but critical regard of performance or appearance. The most obvious and apprehendable example of this sales strategy is the automobile, the pride of the capitalist economy. The car is perfect in every regard, representing travel and therefore freedom, the American rugged ideal, as well as physical prowess and sexual appeal. It falls short only in its dependence on depleting, increasingly expensive fossil fuels. Like a drug addict, without gasoline the car becomes useless.

The second method of perpetual desirability is induced shame. Advertisements convince consumers that no matter what they do they will always fail to meet certain standards, usually the same standards as the products claiming to supplement human shortcomings tend to lack. Objectification of the human body creates a desirable ideal body, used by whatever product it promotes; how can mommy compete with this? The promises made by this body are all of reimplementation of the hormonal drives of puberty, its features always augmented so as to be virtually bursting with vigor and fertility. All products, no matter how trivial their true function, fulfill the social role of mistress through advertising; they all promise youth, beauty, strength, love. Anything the consumer may have already lost, and even if they haven't then they are made to doubt its permanence in the form of it they currently own.

On the international scale one finds the physical process behind this static, ideal mistress. Production of consumer goods keeps her alive, and therefore nothing must impede the process; it is her health. For the good of this health, production is moved to where it can be done the most efficiently, that is, with the most submissive and obedient labor available, and where it can be done the cheapest, that is, where the people are the poorest and expect the least: the third world. As mentioned earlier neo-colonialism is the meat and potatoes of modern capitalism. It is not entrepreneurship, nor the sovereign individual. It is cheap foreign slaves laboring to manufacture breaking, plastic gizmos for sale in America, where demeaning, objectifying advertisements convince citizens that flashy, colorful packaging, a brand name and a big price tag mean quality whores. Mommy is the third world, fixing dinner for big business. The American middle class is mommy, buying what it is told to, so proud to be desired exclusively by corporations and so jealous of its competition — both the rich whose glut it admires and the poor who it envies every scrap from the economic table.

The creation of an idealized economic mistress to substitute for the original Otherness of Mother Earth usually results in a conflict of interests between the two. Corporations are responsible for producing the majority of garbage that slowly chokes the planet to death, and are entirely responsible for the significant pillaging and depletion of her finite natural resources; but individual consumers refuse to either recognize this sin of their father's or to accept responsibility for their part in the waste chain: condoning the depletion by buying its result, and condoning the littering by contributing those same goods to the dump as soon as they inevitably malfunction.

Capitalism is entirely dependent on these roles continuing on as human psychology dictates they will, so long as they are satisfied. And as far as sublimation goes capitalism has a more promising future now than communism ever did. It produces more of the same corrupt mentality, "work is freedom," and shows no sign of weakening sales any time soon. The more dissatisfied people are with their jobs or the disparity of sexual authority at home the more they shop. If you don't like what you have, buy more of the same and hope that it's different. When in doubt, binge.

But where does all this lead? Binging leads to fat, and it is true well-fed people never lead revolutions. But does America's fat equate with success? Are people in the middle class of the first world as happy as they are obese? In general they are not. They cannot afford to achieve a maximum amount of wealth with which any rational person would be satisfied. Rather they are driven to the point of psycho-somatic starvation by the idealized need to consume more.

In what type of society would it be necessary to deny ideological loyalty and stimulate quantitative uncertainty and imbalance? A society bent on dissatisfied, greedy citizens? In what type of society would it be necessary to promise everyone kingship? A society breeding better dictators? In what type of society would it be necessary to focus the national economy on production and accumulation? Is that society not an Empire? Are we not headed toward a world-wide empire dictated by the most successfully selfish of the rich? Are we not going to live in a tower of Babel whose foundation is our own detritus, burying the third world and Mother Earth, obsessed with the increasing incomprehensibility of our own necessary self-deception?

As much as capitalism represents Oedipal assertion of self over father and mother alike, communism represents the revenge of traditionally acquiescent Otherness. blah blah blah...etc.

the Master Race

In every nation, and by their competitions and combinations producing more dominant groupings, in every portion of the world, there are breeding experiments going on that date back to the earliest days of civilization. The first and perhaps greatest civilization, the Old Kingdom of Egypt, began this trend by keeping marriages within family bloodlines, thus occasionally producing retarded offspring but, nonetheless, compacting into only a few individuals the genetic traits required for social superiority.

Democracy makes rule by these families, or rather (because the strict rule of intra-family-marriage has gone out of style in favor of inter-family marriage and the maximizing by region of genetic superiority through combination of the most civilized) by these *races*, more difficult, but not impossible. It still allows the manipulation of rule by money — generally “old-money” or “family-money” built up over generations for just such a purpose. Sadly, Democracy does offer the proles a minor sense of hope in the form of the Horatio Alger, “pull yourself up by the bootstraps,” nouveau rich myth as an incentive for their continual slavery. Communism is far worse, because it is founded on a revolution which kills off these sacred bloodlines and replaces them with a clot of those slobs least fit to rule.

The secretive breeding of the best educated humans on the planet continues this very day, although it has lost much of its mystique and, thus, much of its stigma. It is practiced primarily by Republican suburbanites and all “rational” people who desire to maximize their long-term property interests rather than throw away their heritage on such propaganda of suppression as “love.” It is the very root of the philosophy known as “realism.” The fact remains, however, despite the casual nature of these experiments, that they have always been and will always be conducted with the intention of producing a race of leaders. The fact that we do not already have a single world dictator is attributable less, as liberals are wont to claim, to the rate of the development of technology (which is, itself, the result of better breeding in developed nations), but to the fact that these breeding experiments are not yet complete. Certain traits remain to be combined with certain others.

As of today, nonetheless, selective breeding in humans has produced the majority of the world’s leaders. This suppressed master-race proudly shares ruthless self-interest with the most savage beasts of the wild. They have no interest in the variation of cultures and no respect for any culture that glorifies sub-civilized behavior. It is these men, in fact, who comprise any organization of note; even, ironically, the UN. They only seek personal gain or gain for their nation and their breed. They will accept nothing short of eventual global domination and will fight to the death any institution, such as communism, that would seek to thwart what they feel is the most noble of all possible human quests. To them absolutism is the Holy Grail, Kether, the throne of God, the highest imaginable aspect of existence attainable through strivation by the will and cultivation of the essence. It is their destiny, branded on the DNA floating in their blood.

the student class

The power through influence on the market of the third social class goes generally unrecognized. The third social class falls for the most part beneath the economic status of even the proletariat, although it is marked by a concentrated layer of extreme wealth as well. It is not defined so much economically as it is by social isolation. It is, of course, the student class.

It's potency rests in its determination of fashion, which will always emulate the proletariat whom it idealizes despite the lack of cultural contributions the proletariat is capable of in reality. The student class vacillates through five year cycles regarding which aspect of the proletariat it will emulate in terms of fashion. For five years it will obey the least suggestion directed at it from the quadrant of the inner city. (Just for minor examples: Punk, 1978-1983; hip-hop/rave 1995-2000.) Alternately the student class will kowtow to their country brethren and the uniforms of the less fortunate in fields such as agriculture and hard industry. (Most notable in recent years is the "grunge" look of the early 90's, combining the traditional pair of blue-jeans virtually grafted onto proletarian genetics with a flannel for five years worth of booming sales of ugly clothes.)

The penchant for idealizing proletarian fatigues is directly the fault of liberal socializing in public schools and universities. It is nearly impossible to have a style that conflicts with the prevalent prole-trend and not alienate oneself from all student social events. (The result of this attempt on modern campuses is the covertly bourgeoisie, self-obsessed, glorifyingly morbid and isolationist style Goth.)

The student class is further defined by their strict adherence to age-based, or perhaps more accurately, development-based conversation topic limitations.

In all years however the discussion of popular music, especially that which occurs beneath and "therefore in opposition to" whatever style of music sells best. In terms of music, tastes are more individual than in terms of wardrobe because different bands, regardless of message, make different amounts of money. Even though it remains currently "uncool" to like any band that has "sold out" (outgrown financially the resources of their proletarian origins), all student-aimed music is basically the same politically, encouraging sublimation through conformity in the guise of catharsis through rebellion. The better a band can hypnotize and paralyze an audience with relatively meaningless charms of revolution, the better liked they will be and the greater their long-term sales. In any event it should seem more obvious to the members of the student class that no cultural or political revolution is ever going to be led by a band so long as that band is being fed fat checks for doing drugs, fucking models and cutting the infrequent quality single.

It can be argued that the only real appeal of music to the student class is of neither an agitational nor propagandizing basis. The true allure, and the other limitation of conversational topicality that transcends level of curricular development, must be drugs. Students are the primary users of drugs, and this is as obvious as it could possibly be. The fact that this continues, and only seems to be strengthening as the quest for the perfect disassociative for every individual leads to further diversification of affects, would seem to imply that it is wholeheartedly condoned by the very people in power who, for the entire time, have claimed to be fighting against it. It is well known that the army prefers to test all sorts of drugs on their grunts in order to find which are the strongest and/or most conducive to mass brainwashing long before the CIA is allowed to ship them into the ghettos.

Students think they understand the way the entire world works, but they do not understand how alike they are in tastes, nor how much power this similarity of buying habits gives them in a free market. For example, if students wanted drugs legalized, all they would have to do would be to briefly unite in a conditional ban of all their favorite clothing and music products. Because the student class comprises the majority of the service sector, increasingly important to and the fastest growing type of work in developed nations, they could even, if they should so happen to take a sudden urge for doing so, shut down society and achieve a communist revolution within a week if they all simply didn't show up for work.

subcultures L&R

I. introduction

A. thesis topic: “the formal difference between bourgeois and proletarian subcultures throughout the history of the class struggle”

B. definition of “counterculture”

C. definition of “subculture”

II. analysis of the evolution of a subculture, with class-based historical examples

A. brief introduction, presenting subculture generation as dialectic

B. 1st stage: as a “small bubble” (innovative individuals)

1. famous bourgeois individuals (Michelangelo, Picasso, Hitler)

a. characterized as self-motivated heroes

2. famous proletarian individuals (Einstein, Marx, Ghandi)

a. characterized as selfless martyrs

C. 2nd stage: as a “medium bubble” (small groups)

1. bourgeois guilds and cults

a. guilds and cults of the Late Medieval period (esp. Templars and Masons)

b. modern religious cults and state militias

c. inherent qualities

— individualistic

— fearing conspiracy

— secretive and conspiratorial

2. proletarian sects and unions

a. religious morality as inspiring to humanitarianism

b. labor unions of the Victorian era, Guilded Age and since

c. inherent qualities

— humanistic and universal

— advocating justice and equality

— open and issue-oriented

D. 3rd stage: as a “large bubble” (popular movements and political parties)

1. bourgeois movements

a. fascism, the political Dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie

— politically liberal (larger government, more powerful single party)

— morally conservative (fewer freedoms)

— the government dictates desire

— stricter definition of “social movement”

— materially motivated (the rich get richer)

b. populism and capitalist Democracies

— politically conservative (smaller government, strictly two-party)

— morally liberal (more freedoms, looser laws)

— the media dictate desire, the economy is democratic

— more hollow definition of “social movement”

— materially motivated (the rich get richer)

2. proletarian movements

a. realistic communism, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

— structurally almost identical to fascism

— materially motivated (the poor get richer, the rich get poorer)

— considered ironic by the existing, bourgeois dominant-culture

b. idealistic communism and brotherly anarchy

— structurally almost identical to capitalist Democracy

— the government is dictated by desire, the economy is non-existent

- ethically or spiritually motivated (we are all better people)
- considered impossible by the existing, bourgeois dominant-culture

(optional)

[III. Where are we now?

A. examination of existing subcultures and dominant-cultures

1. individuals
 - a. Bill Gates vs. the world (the revenge of le nouveau riche nerds)
 - b. Mother Teresa vs. Princess Diana (Rosie the Riveter vs. Barbie)
2. small groups
 - a. right wing religious cults adopt martyrdom, militias arm against the government, and youth gangs badly immitate the Mafia
 - b. corrupt labor unions, drug-driven student groups, Green Peace
3. movements, parties and existing dominant-cultures
 - a. the decline of fascism and globalizing of capitalism (dependency on pop)
 - techno/swing/gangsta music — glitz packaging for fascism
 - feminazism (every woman for herself against the conspiracy of men)
 - modernism (technology is the rich's weapon against an ideal future)
 - realism
 - b. the decline of communism and Disneyizing socialism
 - alterno-country love songs (Fish and Pearl Jam)
 - welfare vs. work ("workers want to work; no, really, they do. Honest.")
 - ecopessimism ("tree-hugging")
 - idealism]

Brothers and Sisters,

Let us say, first, that any culture significantly outside that which is purchased as superior by the majority of the population is, by default, a culture counter to the survival of that dominant culture. Thus, anything which is unpopular is a risk to everything which is popular, and any object towards which respectable society so much as raises an eyebrow must be branded by that dreaded and infamous apprehension, "counterculture."

Let us also say that, between that counterculture which is diametrically opposed to existing standards, that which is so disgusted by and disgusting to the self-appointed purveyors of civility and manner as to be shunned as a volatile offense, only as accepted by or accepting of its opposite as oil mixed with water, and the repressed, oft oppressive, stuffed shirt of upright society, there exist a plethora of compromises combining aspects of the two in a way neither exclusive of either, nor outright rejected by both. These countercultures which, like bubbles in seltzerized water, arise and float about within the dominant culture, may be called "subcultures." It should remain clear, however, that insofar as subcultures compose a weakening to the overall integrity of the superculture in which they reside, they are still countercultures; but because they do not necessarily seek to actively destroy the host culture, neither may they be considered explicitly so.

Now, with these terms understood, we may address the issue which concerns us here tonight: The formal difference between proletarian and bourgeois subcultures in the history of class struggle.

Subculutres should be seen as the seeds from which new dominant cultures will grow. One seed may outstrip the others, and here we may include the vile idea of struggle, conflict and competition. On the other hand, as all the seeds combine more or less equally the structural compenents of both their parent cultures, any

successive culture is the product of a compromise between, a cooperation by, or a synthesis of both its existing predecessor and that predecessor's implied opposite. (This certainly sounds like a relegation to virtual invisibility of the feminine role in production of new systems of authority, although this is, in itself, the product of an existing dominant culture defined by exactly such impeachable discrimination.) By either preferred perspective on the nature of dialectics, subcultures are in general (and ultimately one in specific) the synthesis of dominant-culture thesis and counter-culture antithesis which, in turn, becomes the new culture.

When subcultures first appear they are, perhaps, the product of a single individual, or no more than a few individuals, independently developing ideas which are, though unbeknownst to one another, essentially the same. Here we have Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Here we have Pablo Picasso. Here we have Adolf Hitler and the first few members of the Nazi party. At this time they are, shall we say, small-bubbles, presumably of little consequence, which develop in the absence of aid from and most probably unbeknownst to the dominant culture and the majority of its herd.

Later, subcultures have achieved a definitively social status, graduating to the level of small, tightly knit groups. At this stage in their development we see the formation of cults, unions or religious sects, and a zealous adherence by their members to a belief in the group's and their personal difference from and superiority to the dominant culture. This, "medium-bubble" stage will be the stage to which we devote the large portion of our consideration here tonight.

The final level to which subcultures may aspire autonomously of the dominant culture is that of a large, popular group, generally qualified by the term "movement." As such a subculture ultimately manifests itself in the form of a political party, such as the Nazis, fascists, or communists. At this point the movement, given material body by its political party, is then considered by the public as a possible new dominant-culture.

This consideration, it should be now briefly noted, is done in the midst of the distortion of the contender by the existing dominant-culture. For example, it is the common practice of pop-culture, which is founded upon a morbid obsession with all desired objects that question its own continued desirability, to prematurely attribute the term "movement" to any fad or fashion being produced at a rate exceeding demand which will, thus, expire momentarily. Any citizen of a capitalist Democracy knows infinitely more about the "movements" described to them through the media of the corporate-interest driven private sector than about any real social problems resulting from the production of these fascinating diversions. But such perversion of the issue-oriented essence of a social movement to serve the need for self-preservation among a few multi-national business conglomerations defined by the production of addictive luxury items and bombs is not enough. There is, simultaneously, the concretizing of two traditional and opposing political parties. The perpetual sale of these two parties is managed by suppression of their origins, creating the illusion of creation by divine right, characteristically singular and nonreproducible, and a feeling of unshakable historical permanence.

Towards the end of the Medieval Period, markedly a long time before the beginning of the Renaissance, subcultures began to appear throughout Europe in the form of just such cults.

Introduction to a Conspiracy

Because there can be no proof of its existence, the conspiracy may be thought of as a kind of religion. This is not to say there is no proof of the existence of God, or, as we now know Him, the "Primary Clear Light." One can, purely as an individual, experience God. Anyone who has done this knows He is not confined to any one church and, in fact, is best worshipped outside of all walls. This is the fundamental distinction between God and the conspiracy. For one can Never experience the full force of the conspiracy, no matter the set or the setting. One may know God without dying, but the same is not true of the conspiracy. To understand it, one must be part of it, and to be part of it, one must already be dead.

Let us say that the conspiracy started with the Egyptians, although...

No. First let us be frank, for we are here to reveal things, and this is best done as they come to mind, not by any preexisting pedantic structure of words that won't mean as much anyway. Let us say that the Great Work is a work of communication, let us say that it is a form of discipline, in one way, as it illustrates, and that it is a vital exchange of necessities, a deal. The most important interchange is that which occurs between oneself and God, and this is simply to say the Higher Consciousness whose mind the universe is. When one deals with God, one is always the one elevated; it is the most simple exchange because you give God only that which you have already accumulated, that is, not material possessions per se, but all affectations and memories, and what God takes he will return to you transformed, outturned, completed and blossoming. The sacrifice of the self is ultimately a relief, that is, it saves one from wanting their own death, and, by extension, it eventually becomes less inconvenient than living without it. When one communicates with God, how can I put this, one learns the artificiality of physical existence. At times of extreme psychic trauma, be it by physical injury (induced reaction), emotional injury (evoked reaction), intellectual injury (uninvolved reaction), or spiritual injury (involved reaction), or, of course, any combination thereof, the mind assumes the role of God by merging with a great white light. God is, after all, a being perpetually undergoing reincarnation as well, just as his seekers. One chooses afterwards their role in the great scheme of the universe, that is, the cathexis of physical intersections which occurs within God's brain, the material universe. All of this is so obvious to anyone who has experienced it that it will cause them physical pain to read it. You see, to them... well... okay, to them all words spoken allowed, a-hem, should be lies told to conceal the great work. I don't know why this is. I do know that they are, to a great degree, psychic. Wait, wait! I don't want to lose your sympathy, please. Not now. At least give me my chance to explain. As everyone has their own philosophy I have my own explanation of reality, and the fact that it is narrative is not my fault, for why, if life is not meant to be understood in a narrative form, was fiction ever invented? And this is the crux of my argument: that everything exists in order to be understood, that is, to be recognized for the ascensions toward God-hood which they are and allowed to complete their function within the great machine to the full extent of their internal and external potential.

When a kitten first learns that it can be hurt, only then does it start biting.

If one is careful it is possible to never make a decision which is not the one God had hoped you would make.

It is possible to determine opportunity from temptation.

When one lives in accordance with God, when one does nothing which they will later regret, when one is up front and yet in control of all their dealings with others, with trees, with the ocean, with themselves, only then will their possible

realities appear as they truly are: infinite.

Let us say this much for Freud: He understood that we all speak on multiple levels, and that dreams are the ultimate extension of will over reality, a sort of wish conjured up within the psi system. When my libertarian friend calls me up asking me to do a favor and then declines my services due to the unknown complexity of the task by saying, "I don't want anybody running anywhere," I know what she really means, and I forgive her for meaning it, and I beg her silently for my forgiveness for knowing it. And this is all I mean by saying "people are psychic." We can read the potential intentions behind coincidences as loudly as car horns and barking dogs. For some of the newly initiated it is difficult to be around large groups of people. But this is only a phase, and quite normal, and won't last, alas.

God calls us to be social, to interact on an infinity of levels, attempting to communicate casually even though we all know that each other knows all our secrets. But such is ego death. And to worry about it is as wasteful as to worry about any other temporal thing. Of course there are those aberrations who, despite the flouride in the water and despite the sugar in their sodas and despite all their friends' attempts simply cannot get it. But they are simply those who wished to be wise in order to be different from everyone, thus hoping ill of their fellows, and who now suffer as a result of such a universally approachable wisdom as they are holding in their hand. That is, they who have been humbled due to complex plans concocted by friends and enemies alike over countless sleepless nights.

new conspiracy

Let me teach you about a new conspiracy. There is a brood about which many people know, which fewer idolize, of which a few rarely speak. A syndicate which almost all fear.

This organisation has always been administrated by men, although recently they have been allowing women to join as equals. In the past, women were used only as ceremonial assistants, involved in costuming and arming the dominant males. All nationalities and ethnicities may apply; some are accepted because of what they are while for the same reason others may be turned away. Minorities of special appeal include those of darker complexion or exotic heritage, the historically "underprivileged." Here, all runts and strays may seek shelter and aid.

They have their own facility, where they play at being a host of mystic gods, wearing strange uniforms and performing incomprehensible rituals, frequently involving the deaths of citizens not worthy to be in their sect. Sacrifices, they say, have to be made. When they leave this lodge they go back to their seemingly ordinary lives — eating, watching TV, marrying; all the while appearing on the surface so much like you and me that no one would ever suspect them of being what they truly are.

These people believe that, once you have fallen into their clutches, they, not you, should have the final say as to whether you live or die.

They amass great sums of your money to buy their bizarre instruments, which they will then use against you, claiming that only they understand what is in your best interest. In your name they try to reverse Nature's plan, and this perversion of the Divine pattern has always been and will always be their primary code. They swear a solemn oath upon it, penalizing any who violate it with the worst castigation available to them — banishment from membership.

Lit dimly by the distant gleam of Greece's Golden Age their history stretches back almost beyond recounting. It is probable their craft was perfected as early as

the Old Kingdom in Egypt, where it was ministered to Pharaohs and performed even after death on their corpses; it sprang up under similar conditions in the farthest eastern corners of the mysterious Orient, in imperial China, perhaps due to an undiscovered trade route. They, themselves can trace their origins back to an ancient order of crusaders, the Hospitalers, who brought back the roots of their arcane knowledge from their invasions of the Holy Lands, from both the Bugish and Quetzal infidel tribes. For centuries following, the occult practitioners of this black art butchered thousands in its practise. Those who understood its secrets held positions of great sway behind the most powerful kings and clergy, shaping historical events from behind a dark veil of anonymity, shaping strategies based solely upon their own unique twist on ethics. During plagues they were even known to roam the countryside in hideous masks, preying on the terminal by selling them false hopes. This was surely their lowest hour.

Since that time many of Europe's most famous figures have belonged to this secretive society; of note is Leonardo DeVinci, who clandestinely studied lost texts and inculcated himself to the ingrained technique of dissection of the dead in the name of his allegiance to this underground cult, concealing his sacrilege beneath the nose of the pope. The Catholic Church has always been an enemy of this covert cabal, and some Christian denominations have sworn animosity specifically against all their unseen disciplines.

This clan of secretive intellectuals claims to value the good of humanity over the good of individuals, even over their own personal welfare, but the majority of the common folks they profess to serve cannot even understand the nature of the "help" they provide, and many even die from receiving their subtle elixirs. Not one single leader can be found, even by this sect's most secluded inner circles, to speak for them all as one — yet there is little doubt that they are all confederates of one another. They claim to be capable, skilled and open, luring hundreds of suckers to their deaths every day, all over the world. The conspiracy has spread to every corner of the globe and infiltrates the minds and pocket books of every single living soul all across the entire planet.

These people
are doctors.

on psychosis

Psychosis.

Psychosis is the enemy of God.

Psychosis is no other than Satan. Satan the dark one. Satan the dark light.

Satan is the madness in the mind of God.

Imagine a man strapped to a wheel for all eternity. It is all he has known since birth. He knows of no life other than it. He is, when he comes into manhood, finally allowed to watch how other people turn the wheel. Then he is expected to learn to turn the wheel for himself. Finally he is set free of the wheel. We drive around in circles in life. Others see us going nowhere. The simulacrum is very tricky. It will always find some way to relate to us. The free form delusion in the mind of God is ever close and present. The ridiculous notion of freedom from the banal and the mundane. We can only evolve slowly, for as many referentials as we cast out upon others, so do that many come back from others in upon us, and more, for we are seen by strangers even as we are driving on the streets of life. Our existence as an observation of the all seeing eye of the Lord is contingent upon our own ego, but this is defined in various ways, and is therefore segmented and piecemeal. The madness of Satan creeps in. The

venegful wrath of God. People used to wear goat masks and dance around fires to throw themselves into fits of hysteria. Nowadays executives go to encounter groups in wildrness retreats. It has to be let out in some way, once it finds its own way in. And in this way it animates us, as it does the playful little animals, who are too free to be posessed by it. The one referential is a hologram of the bigger referential, the smaller part contains the larger whole, and thus that discorporeal anthropomorphication of our electromagnetic conductivity is released in the mind in relation to the storage of the immediately preceeding referential. One rolls over to the next, and between them there is an inversion from fact or fiction to its opposite and back again, or from fact or fiction to its opposite. Once one has made a sequential referential out of Choronzon, one is free to bend space and time in any manner and in any form or force one likes, and this is the free will surrounded on all sides by madness. One can thus enter and leave this state as one likes, however if other people see you there it is of the same effect as the old wive's tale of making a face when the wind changes. This is because being free within a malleable holographic simulacrum of referential infinitude does not confine you away from the reality of being only an object under the gaze of Otherness. Thus, other people are free to convey, even suggest to you through their gestures, words and actions that what they perceive of you, when you release your free will in madness, or anything that differs from the norm, is to them alien, awkward, uncomfortable, etc. along a long list of words associated with the affixion of a stigmata, or scarlet letter, to mark the subjectified object as criminal or of ill intent to whatever form of community they imagine they individually represent to it, or, in reality, what they collectively represent to it of a community. This, itself, however, is a kind of possession on their part, and therefore a second level order of madness. To have handled insanity is to be contaminated by it, and the insane carry the taint in their blood. But this second order madness is socially acceptable, because it occurs as upon the level that is above the head of the individual, that of the crowd or of the watchful collective. It is true that madness is the media in relationship to royalty. Media, that creation of jacobite Masonry, serves upon the royalty with their full force, truly in a state of panic stricken frenzy. This was the same tactic used by the Nazis in WWII against Poland, their peace loving neighbor. However just as the instrumentation of media has grown out of the craft masonry of jaconins, that is, the mass production of the working class, so has the working class evolved from the division with the class of royals. The institutionalization of religion and the state initiated the beginning of the division of ego from the objectified definition of madness. The church and the state were both built on madness. The ruling class, the royals, began to cultivate a study of it in the bloodlines, as it was a symptom that could be brought out by interbreeding to a degree to which the only side effects might be slight haemophilia. The working class began to study it in representational form. They studied it in everything, the arts, the liberal sciences; finally they formed a definition of madness as being part of a multifaceted simulacrum system capable of mirroring many natural emotions which they called the media. The media are a tool that are being used to put the majority of the focus on certain celebrity figures, who are then held up as being representational. This suspends them from rational disbelief and renders them free of the gravity of fear of immediatism that draws the public attention to them. These representational figures represent an archetypal no man's land between the biophysically entrenched soldiers of our souls, fighting over what will be the boundary of the ego. Hollywood, all centers of artistic creation, instruments of technological telecommunications are all wrapped up in a definition for madness in the second degree — a slow, passive, calm acculturation — while meanwhile they are the

videodrome of interzone. While they try to portray events too early, as a social self-consciousness forewarning, they are always rushing around portraying events too late, live and in progress, honoring the deceased, in a dramatic recreation. Without the star system to hold onto, the media would be nothing but a voyeuristic lecher leering at the monarchs and democrats. The social simulacrum in this case has come to surpass, or rather even, usurp the right of Aleister Crowley: that every man and every woman is a star. In truth, each of us that ever has lived is a star, even an entire galaxy of such inspirationally triggered representations, all of which turned into black holes so that we could be here now, hopefully, sitting somewhere nice and talking about all this. Insofar as the media exist exclusively as a way of misdirecting and diverting our, the public's, attention away from matters such as this, which are of spiritual concern, so the more it tightens its grip, the more star systems will slip through its fingers. However, to introduce spirituality in any form is to allow for the madness of the freedom of the soul, which is the fear of immediatism. When the power goes out we feel suddenly mortal, but when the power is on we do not feel so all mighty. When we are suddenly deprived of our media, our electronic telephones, our television sets, computers, refrigerators, microwave meals, even hot water heaters is when we feel the fear of immediatism. This implies the necessity of taking action, making descisions, putting things in order, preparing for an ultimate end. However we are told the human spirit is free. This implies the soul is bound. By its life it is bound to the media. However we are also told that the soul is immortal. Yet we know the media, like a light switch, can be turned off. So what is the media then, but the madness of the soul in chains to the civic spirit. And if the media is turned off, then the madness becomes the liberation of the soul from the mediated chains to the civic spirit. The madness of freedom. The madness of the abyss. The soul stops participating in the active process of mediation and is once again alone. In truth matters of spirituality are only another diversion in the study of madness, and are even covered quite frequently by the media, but these are largely watered down by association of the individual's holy guardian angel or free spirit with the civic duty of the media to tell you the truth and lie to you at the same time using representationalism. True spiritual matters are left for the individual to decide how to find for themselves, and are in no way segregated by the church or state from the study of madness. For this reason it is said that one can tell the conditions of one's society by telling the conditions of one's asylums. In most cases, these are the places where those thought to be incurable by any known conventional means are shipped off to, to be experimented upon using whatever is the current, modern, experimental methodology. During the past fifty years this has been limited to behaviorism in the first world, where one is confined under observation in an experimental setting. This is thought to represent a simulacrum of the normal conditions of first world society. This sort of second order madness is considered socially acceptable.

gone

The essence of time travel is multiple personality schizophrenia. This is because of superimposition of multiple timelines. In each timeline there exists a different unique personality for each individual person. This has been expressed as the theory of multiple universes existing in different dimensions. Thus, in each different universe, or timeline, there is an alternate being, identical to us, and yet with their own unique personality.

The essence of personality is the superimposition of these different personae in different universal timelines. This occurs through subtle energy fluctuations

which we can measure as brain waves, endochrinal secretions and emotions. Really, the cause of these is an interaction of the microcosmic (biological) with the macrocosmic (multiversal).

Free will is a virus, and the aura is a bacteria. Mitochondrial DNA is a virus, and the DNA double helix is a bacteria. The nervous system is a virus, and the body is a bacteria. In all these cases the viral component feeds off the bacterial component, while the bacterial component regenerates itself. This is the symbiotic essence of all autotrophic and heterotrophic life.

The aura is a metaform, or fourth spatial dimensional shape. As it fluctuates in the fourth spatial dimension, that is, as it moves about, guided by the free will, its different edges, corners and faces produce different electrochemical reactions in the body. These electrochemical reactions are brain waves, endochrinal secretions and emotions.

Now, while the body occupies only a point on or within each such auric metaform, each such auric metaform transcends spacetime and touches upon similar bodies in multiple realities, universes, or dimensions. Thus, the free will of one is the guiding influence of many, who are considered self similar, despite being different bodies, unique and autonomous in composition, occupying different timelines in different dimensional universes.

Therefore, through becoming one with the free will, the soul essence of any one body in a certain dimensional timeline can “body jump” into a similar body that it can be connected with through hyperspace, that is, across the difference between dimensional timelines of universes.

This is the essence of inspiration: that is, an alignment of transdimensional, multiversal timeline personae. In other words, whereas esp and collective doublethink breaks down individual creativity into a collective unconsciousness, inspiration is, in reality, entirely individual. The ideas are not shared collectively between bodies in the same material reality, but occur instantaneously to the same essential source of free will across the entire dimensional spectrum. This means that, instead of permeating space, it permeates multiple timestreams.

Penut Butter

An electron maintains a single path in its nuclear orbit, even when it changes shells, or energy levels. We can only say, therefore, that these shells exist as points on a circle around a sphere where it becomes more probable to find the electrical charge acting as a particle. Yet they are more than this, for they seem to pre-exist the electron's movement toward one from another. That is to say that, with the proof of the existence of one energy shell, comes implication of the potential for all others. The result of this is simply that, when the electron is compelled to move, by the interaction of a photon for example, it pursues a phi bound course until it reaches the next energy shell or sub-shell, where it is impelled to adopt a course in accordance with the dimensions of this shell. The fact that the electron corrects its orbit in a phi bound path rather than the polar angle perpendicular to the orbit proves, according to the second law of motion, that it exists in a force in and of itself. It is obviously comprised of force-carrying rather than real particles, or it would not be possible for the path of the electron to pass through some shells on its way to another. This may be thought of as equivalent to gravitons, except that, at this scale, no such particle is supposed to exist — it is thought the very dual nature of their charge holds electrons bound 'round nuclei. Therefore we are forced again to cope with the concept of naked probability. As we already know, an electron is only a

particle when struck by a particle, and exists as a cloud of probability the rest of the time; in other words it is nothing but probability with a charge. Perhaps with the smaller units describing the shells in which an electron is not, but could be, orbiting, we are seeing the same essential substance as in the electron itself, since they are apparently interspersed throughout and /or underlying the cloud itself.

a little legend

Countess Odessa stepped out onto her balcony, swallowed up by the gorgeous dawn, the crumbling cliffs, the undulating woods, her personal gardens of poison flowers, and spit. Below her were amassed some ten thousand or more troops. It was not enough. They were here in this morning, shivering in its thin, crisp air, conversing nervously and now, in her presence, as attentive as hounds, their armor rattling as they shook, partially from the cold and, she imagined, partially in sheer awe; they were assembled here, these ten thousand — afterall each came from somewhere different. Perhaps as many as four lived together, four here, four there, or fewer, but it was logical that the majority of them each derived from a different spot upon this wretched earth. They had sung last night and the Countess heard them. She had wished that she could go down and join them. The last song they had sung was a dirge, long and terribly depressing. Then they had gone to bed. Had they slept? Last night in the terrible cold? How awful. And now they were all standing here, within one another's presence, their bodies held only inches from one another. They breathed the same cold air; they could see their own breath, they could see each other's breath; their noses turned red. The countess didn't feel like killing them. How could she condemn this much living flesh to open, patient soil? She wished she were amongst them, looking up from beside her brethren, at this goddess of a human. She would proudly die then, beside them, her blood flowing across the softened dirt and mingling with their own. Their eyes all looked at her, some tired, some alert. They bestowed upon her, forced upon her even she felt as she choked, complete responsibility for their lives. Their deaths. They wanted to live, to continue on as they had been, eating, drinking, singing beside large fires in the stillness of the dark. They did not want to admit to themselves that they were looking up at she who would destroy them. They wanted to see before them their savior, the one who would relieve them of their chores, who would breathe sweet ease into their routines until nothing was left but to sniff at the flowered scent of the sea and to sigh from time to time. How awful. How awful, how full of awe. They had gathered here as she had ordered. Her word had summoned ten thousand men. How she would rather order them each to fuck her than order them to fall dead. But what difference does it make? One cannot please everyone. It is the way of this world for none to be pleased. She stood there for this long moment, wishing for an escape, to jump, anything to dodge out from under the collapsing weight of the following moment. She knew the line she must speak next. She had given the order to assemble and it only followed that she should give the order to die as well. It bent her lips in an ugly frown. But these were the words which came next. She knew it; they, if they had any education whatsoever, must know it. It made her seem all the more evil to be honest, to admit to these fools what they surely suspected, what, perhaps, they feared; although she enjoyed being cruel she disliked honesty as much as everyone. Fiction pleased her far better. Fiction and fancy attire. In this moment they were neither. She waited forever. She leaned against the balustrade, her bosom hung out over, as if her heart were going out towards them. For an instant it seemed she would faint and allow herself to topple down, down, ever ever downwards, to sink into the sea of souls, of

soldiers. Then she righted herself. They had gathered here to die. They must understand this was the only order she could be expected to give. Why didn't they run away? Why did the spectacle of their attention meet her eyes, be absorbed behind those liquid opal planes, and not the sight of them turning and running madly to hide between the hills? What fools were they. What slaving, unpleasant wretches. Unable or unwilling to calculate, as she had, the odds of victory. Ten thousand men against god? It was beyond impossible. It was even beyond a dream. It was the stuff of an invalid's feverish mumblings. The stuff of complete and utter nonsense. Yet here they were, these hated stacks of ruby liquid wrapped up tight in leathery flesh, crowded by their clothing, crushed under their own armor. These naked dogs down there, panting, drooling. It was their own fault. They were responsible for themselves, for coming here, for following an order to the death, this bone that she would throw them, the head of god she would command them to fetch.

She parted her lips and spoke.

"There are not enough of you. You are going to die in battle tomorrow. All of you. And despite this fact, or rather, because of it, we will lose. Enemy hordes will swarm over the border and probably behead the Princess."

A murmur went up from the crowd. I chuckled, leaning back against my sofa on the balcony of my personal prison tower, each brick having been hefted up on top of one another solely for the purpose of separating my mouth from the ears of other human beings. Except, of course, for the Princess.

The Princess came to talk to me some times. She had been coming to talk to me much more frequently of late. We talked of diplomatic matters, matters of State and matters of war. She listened to and respected my opinions as if I were a member of her court, perhaps even more than any member of her court. She took my mind out of jail and, I think, I did the same for her. She talked alot of loathing her position, her duties, her role. Sometimes we said nothing and only made love in silence. On these occasions she would rise from my bed and go to the balcony, nude before the deep blue of the moonlight, and I, in somber respect for her voicelessness, would come up behind her, enclosing her in my arms, and hold her tightly. She would dress and disappear, as if the stillness and the shadow of the evening were all that was inside her. I imagined if I were to cut apart her skin at those times I would find nothing inside.

It was rare for anyone, besides myself, to even see the Princess. She shut the enormous oak door to her room, or rather, had it shut by her guards, and slept for days ensconced in silent obscurity. There was gossip that, at times, her ladies in waiting had arrived to invite her to share in some social event and, through that thick and solid wood, overheard their ruler weeping.

She didn't want to be Princess. Nobody knew this but me. She never told anyone, never even talked to anyone outside of issuing orders. Neither did the rumors of her despair leave the castle. It was for this crime, the unnamed, unmentionable crime of revelation, that, long ago, I was imprisoned in my tower cell.

I used to be her chef, and cooked her every meal from the time that she was twelve. That was when her father had died, leaving her the majority of the responsibilities of running the kingdom. She remained, however, a princess in title. When she was eighteen her mother had entered a coma after suffering an attack while playing tennis. The surgeons who examined her failed to diagnose the exact cause, although it was fashionable among the masses to proclaim it was of a broken heart. The Princess hissed when she considered this opinion, but forwarded her own, similar hypothesis: her mother had suddenly realized there was no reason to be alive.

One early evening, because at the time, only one year after her mother's

collapse, the Princess refused to admit more than the minimum number of servants possible, and never more than one at a time, I was serving the Princess her dinner. This process involved much the same rituals as feeding an infant. It was necessary, due to her deep sadness, to feed her every bite; and this was not easy either — every mouthful was the result of some considerable amount of coaxing. This had been my duty for quite a while, although, like the majority of the souls upon this twirling planet I suspect, I discharged my duties without much mind as to why exactly it was that they should be carried out in any such particular manner. That night the Princess turned her head slowly toward mine, which she had never done before. She looked into my eyes. I saw how hollow it was behind her dour facade where one should find a soul. I saw all the mourners gathering around. I saw the grave over which they were raining down their tears. I saw her heart at the bottom of this grave, beating only on occasion. The first shovelful of dirt fell across it and I retreated with a start. She understood my shock, I think, but she only turned her face away as slowly as she had turned to look at me. I fled the room. I fled the castle. I sought out a bar and began drinking heavily. This was, after all, to be the last night of my freedom. I don't even know what became of the six others in the bar who heard my chilling tale, but they are probably dead. If it weren't for the rarity of an order from the Princess I expect the soldiers who burst in would have cracked my skull on the spot, as they seemed to wish more than anything to do.

I am not complaining about my imprisonment. I am denied nothing I request, and am given council with whomever I wish to see. Or at least this is what was promised me. I have neither asked for more than has been offered nor requested to see anybody who has not come to visit. I didn't have any real friends before, and even if I had, I value not upsetting the Princess much more than I would seeing their faces as they smiled at me, knowing their reasons for smiling were purely internal, gloating that their lives persist while mine, from their perspective, stagnates. They would laugh, drunkenly, in my face. And I would lean back against my sofa, bathed in their rancid breath, and observe them with annoyance and impatience. They would be incapable of recognizing that I am the new Prince. If, that is, they even existed.

I am the Prince. But I do not care to tell anyone. I have not cared to tell anyone anything since the night I was brought to the castle for the last time. All I could tell I have told to the Princess. All else I have to say I say of the Princess, to her, and she smiles. She never smiles otherwise. Only I can make her smile.

Now at this time something should be noted regarding the castle's plan. First, however, let me say that I write this not to be read in my lifetime. I see an era altogether bereft of castles in the future, or at least without their souls, the royal families of old. The Royals, I understand now, have little wish to rule. Those who have less power amongst them wish, naturally, for more, for all; but any one of them given the throne, the crown, the scepter, wither beneath it. The world is changing. The people are changing within it. Perhaps it is the water, weakening our wills. Perhaps we are simply getting tired. As if the power we feed on is eating us up from inside, leaving us ever more hollow as we acquire all for which we hope and strive. The effort of working for something leaves a bad taste in the mouth when the object of desire is finally consumed. This, out of bitter irony, we call the spice of life. In the end it is not we who consume, but we who are consumed.

The world belongs neither to the masses, cute and stupid, nor to the true rulers, the beautiful, the beaten, but to the runners up. The court has taken control of the castle. Such is the case here. It is they who maintain borders between themselves and others like them. True rulers, like the Princess, are above

citizenship, and the masses, the soldiers, are the same everywhere. Which brings me to the court's insane plot to accumulate the remaining power outside themselves.

But little need be said of this. They intend to kill god but will fail. The heart of the masses belongs to the ruler, the heart of the ruler feels no hope for the masses which it loves, and the courts have neither the strength nor the compassion in their hearts to succeed at any endeavor they conceive. To them, then, the mere conception of an action is best, the process of creation thereof, or of fantasy; but above all it ought to be accomplished quickly, even if it is impossible, or never realized. So today they are proud of themselves. They are somewhere sipping expensive wine and patting each other on the back. The troops moved out at noon, following the Countess's comments this morning. No one cared not to go; there is nothing else for anyone to do. They know that god will have their souls soon enough, one way or another; either they wait for him to sneak in and, like an assassin without honor, kill them in their infirmity, or they force their souls upon him in a hopeless battle fought against him. They no longer care much if they live. It is a matter of relative indifference, as their lives do not belong to them now. Their lives mean nothing to anyone who means anything.

And what the Countess said was true. Soon enough strange faces will invade our land. And then we will be the unwelcome ones, the strangers. This is known already to the masses and the Princess. But the court refuse to acknowledge it. The masses do not care if they live or die, nor does my darling. Ours is an island sinking into time. No movement we make may amend this; there is no reason to move, yet we move. Only the courts believe in a future. The soldiers believe in the Princess and the Princess believes in nothing.

As far as god concerns man he may as well be dead already. He has abandoned us, and left our ball of dirt to turn in silence, hurling through blackness. I write this that it may be read by Him, for when the Others come they will smile and glow, haloed by His accursed, hollow promise. And once we were these people. And one day they will be as we are, waiting to be conquered.

The Princess enters my room one last time. She will be soothed by the coming bonfires of destruction. She rests her head on my shoulder, I feel its weight, it tugs at her body. I see her spine, where it curves there, that will be where the axe falls. Her long, soft neck, so pale in this atmosphere, the door standing ajar, the chill of unlit breezes. The axe will fall within the week, and her thick black blood will anoint the soil, sanctifying the ground where her soldiers died, mingling in the warm depths of its bosom with the blood of all other humans, the liquid souls of us, for this planet is a heart itself, beating out the rhythm of time, producing, consuming and moving life around. I say this to the Princess and she smiles. This is what I will keep with me. This instant imagine when my head is placed on the block.

Fires burn in the demure darkness.

When I awaken next my lover is in my arms and we are drowning in a pale, alien dawn. This is the substance of existence, we move, we are moved. We are adrift in a kingdom the ruler of which is hidden, veiled by sorrow, consumed by inexplicable shame and pity. We may be loved, we may love, but nothing more than this may come of it. More love to be lost. More smiles remembered

by heads
soon enough to be severed,
forgotten
and dead.

“Dogs” = men “males” = dominants
“Cats” = women “females” = submissives

Dogs

The behavior of dogs is more comforting to most researchers than that of most other animals. Though they may be savage when untamed, they are so only in search of food, and do not indiscriminately rove about seeking prey. They are so predictable and reliable they have readily earned the moniker, “man’s best friend.”

In the wild the dog hunts with a pack of other dogs. The hunting is done by the males, while the females prefer to stay in the den and look after the pups. The males often share the company of the pack even while not hunting, and generally prefer romping around to the quiet domestic life. As dogs can lick their own genitals, reproduction is a rare and sanctified occurrence, involving a life-long dedication to a selectively chosen mate. Wild dogs engender large litters of offspring, the most aggressive male of which will be likely to lead the pack in its wanderings and on its hunts.

Domestic dogs are always loyal to their masters and are primarily concerned with protecting a territory which extends out around them. Dogs will bark at one another, but must be trained to attack. The reverse is true in regards to unfamiliar cats, which dogs reject viciously unless otherwise directed.

Cats

Cats are never as smart as they think they are. All cats spend far too much time keeping clean, and try as hard as they can to avoid getting wet. Though they possess more physical agility than dogs, they spend most of their time exploring places dogs would not be interested in going, so it doesn’t really matter anyway. Also there is much more difference between wild and domestic cats than there is between wild and domestic dogs.

Wild cats form a group just as do wild dogs, but it is structured in much the opposite way. There is only one male cat in each group, as they prefer to remain aloof of one another. Around this male is a “pride” of females. It is the females which do all the hunting, bringing food back to wherever the male may have chosen to lounge at the time. They mate indiscriminately, siring several single offsprings, the most aggressive male of which will likely go on to later have the largest pride of his own.

Domestic cats feel merely affinity for their masters. They will respond positively to anyone offering them food, and call any place where they are fed regularly home. While they prefer to turn their backs toward their masters, they demand constant loyalty and affection from them. If this is not provided, or if the affection is unsatisfactory (if the cat is “rubbed the wrong way”) it may be expected to escape and seek shelter elsewhere. Cats create and patrol a large territory around their home, and will fight any invader cat to the death if need be. The reaction of cats to strange dogs is generally mistrust, but strongly influenced by smell, especially the smell of anything appetizing.

Though cats struggle to bury their foul smelling excrement, dogs still seek it out and, when they can uncover it, consider a delicacy of the highest regard.

fruity

Once upon a time there were four Cyberian crusaders returning from the holy land. Their journey had been longer than any of them could even remember, for when they had left they had been even as children, and now as they returned they felt like very old men. They had fought many battles in countless strange places, faced down their foes and defended their lives, and upon reaching the holy land found treasures unnumbered, so that whatever each desired seemed almost to appear at the least thought of it. But this too had taxed the pilgrims, for eventually they had surpassed all their childhood ambitions, exceeded all expectations for pleasure in their flesh until they began to grow weary, and sick for their home; until one day they discussed it, and agreed to return.

The road back was difficult, though nothing like before. They faced no adversaries, and enjoyed clear weather. Every step they took the sun followed them through the sky. But their years had been so full of adventure it was as if each man carried a burden of memories, and somewhere along the way the sages were compelled to rest, that they might stretch the legs that carried them and reminisce.

The travelers came upon an orchard of gently sloping fields overhung by wide spread shade trees. The grass of the field glowed like green painted gold in the late afternoon slant of the daylight, and they gathered around underneath the great berth of a singular tree, which was laden with fruit, and they sat in its warm shadow.

Now these men were holy men, men who had feared for their lives and been delivered from this fear; they blamed no one, and felt gratitude toward all, for they knew everything to be a blessing of primary importance, and pitied those whom blindness of this made ignorant or afraid. So they knew this orchard to belong only to God, as the shadows were cast by the trees, which lesser men might see as merely trunks with branches with stems with leaves. And they knew without thinking that God had provided them the fruits of these trees, which would be replenished before even they could be missed, that they four, in that moment, should compliment their repose with the sacrament of food.

So the first man stood up, and reached up, and plucked down an orange. And the second man, he stood up, and reached up, and he plucked down an apple. And the third man, standing up, reaching up, plucked down an orange. And the fourth man stood up, he reached up, and plucked down an apple. And this is the story of what happened to them then.

The first knight was a tall man, with flaming red hair. His arms were broad around and his complexion fair. His armor was silver and shined like his smile. As he picked the orange from its branch he hoped for pleasure unknown, and as he held the bright orb he knew it had come true. He dreamt of his homeland, so close he thought he caught a hint of its familiar smell in the breeze, and resigned that he would save the orange, to eat upon their arrival there. Though he thought only of his loved ones and family somehow their numbers multiplied in his fantasy, and immediately he saw himself engulfed in regalia and being lifted up above a crowd who called him hero. This sudden undesired vanity upset him, so instinctively he lifted the orange to his lips and, his brow still furrowed by his vision, he bit in. The fruit which bore pleasure unknown had become wrapt in a rind by his promise to wait, and as he chewed through this he discovered its flavor somehow canceled, and though the juice ran over his lips down his chin it tasted bland. Remembering his oath the knight cursed, that he had failed himself in the presence of God. But God, seeing this, laughed at the poor fool, allowing him in his Wisdom to forgive himself. By the time the crusader had finished with his orange it was delicious beyond

comprehension, and even as his senses spun wholly intoxicated God reminded his stomach it would hunger still again before reaching home. This is the story of the first knight.

The second knight was shorter, stalky, and balding. His eyes were like a hawk's, and his hair close cropped brown. When he smiled his lips remained shut. His armor was tin. He usually looked down, but when he looked up he looked all the way in. He had to tug for a while at his apple before it came loose, and it gave his mind time to stray. He thought of the desert, where he'd wandered one night, far from the temple and far from the mosque. The sky had seemed boundless and a shudder had rushed through him. He had turned to face the gust of wind and seen a storm brewing. The apple let go and he fell back from its twig. He scanned the entire horizon and, seeing nothing disturbing the peace of the pasture, he bit into the fruit. In his mouth it seemed to blossom, overflowing with sweetness, so that at the first swallow tears came to his eyes. As he bit in again, wiping his cheeks with his cuff, the apple turned to wine, an unidentifiable vintage, ancient and divine. However with each bite he took the taste grew more and more tart, more sour with doubt. The tears which had come to his eyes blurred his view, and it seemed as though everything had grown dark. Struggling to discern familiar shape in the milieu he finally came to the conclusion that it was in fact later than he had thought. This is the story of the second knight.

The third knight was the same height as the first, though his hair was blond and he wore a beard. Though his posture was proud he bore worried wrinkles surrounding his eyes. They beamed out like search lights when his eyes glowed with mirth, and his armor gleamed golden, somewhat tarnished with earth. As he reached out towards the orange his lean muscles ached and reminded him of how many foot steps his travels had streamed, all the places he'd been and the faces he'd seen. Just then the orange dropped into his hand, and when its skin touched his fingers he understood the life of the thing, how its growth was as wondrous as his own, their sensations so similar and their formation the same: they became one living energy, fresh flavored light flowed from the sphere through his veins, illuminating his own porous rind until there was no longer him, only the orange, or rather no longer any orange, only him, or perhaps, no longer either of them, but both one and the same, and he felt the presence of God. A giddy tingling of terror crept in on him then, as he contemplated eating the orange. It drew towards his lips, dragging his hand along behind it, and when they bit into it the universe spun in logical free fall. The orange promptly squirted the brave knight in the eye. He felt an upsurge of dissonance, the undertow of a curse, and perceiving this he laughed, and, as he gradually consumed the orange, his laughter tapered off towards silence. This is the story of the third knight.

The fourth knight was the same height as the second, ebony haired, hollow and gaunt, morose and obtuse. He had known torture at the hands of the enemy, and he had felt shame in the looks of his friends. He did not smile and his armor was copper, with patches of sea green oxidation like barnacles. He more than all the others was weary of traveling, for his eyes had taken in more and more of what his heart was never gilt to bear. As he brutally extracted the apple from its perch his mind was a whirlpool of regurgitating regrets, swirling perpetually in upon itself to be swallowed by the central struggle to forget. Biting into the apple, ah — how he immediately wished for death! For black blooded bile burst from the ripened sore he inflicted and washed slickly down his throat! Hatred screamed his desperate brain! Salvation begged his beaten heart! Damned was the world that swallowed him up, the field burning with feverish disgust for the judgment of the cruel and empty sky! He

bit into the apple again and again, praying each time, though never twice the same, that to finish with the apple was to finish with his pain. But God, seeing this, laughed at the poor fool, and with each bite he ingested the turmoil worsened, and deepened his lust for escape through decay. This knight lived the longest, and died of old age.

Two is the shadow of one. Four is the shadow of three. One and three are each other's echoes, as apples and oranges are real. Eight are one, the shadows of an echo, as the tree was once only a seed, one is the son of two, daughter of zero. The turtle wins the race because home is exactly wherever the heart is. Truth uproots the fruit.

here is the source...

Here is the source with which we are concerned:

"The most honorable and just Vizier of Kent,
Libor Keplinger-Pesek II,

I know of a man who describes his features as chiseled, by which he means he has popped his own pimples, his etiquette as courteous and well-refined, by which he means he is an unbearable fop, and his standing as stately, by which he means he has yet to have held down on his own the responsibility of earning an income. And yet this same gentlemen has designs upon my very own daughter, who, through no dishonor of her own, though it has greatly increased the stature of her grace and her beauty, has alas been raised with no sisters, neither older nor younger, to assist her in finding her way about our world, which is unfortunately far too overpopulated by such men as are now her wretched bane.

You see sir she has thus far existed as it were, entirely unconditioned to the ways of courtship. She has never seen purpose before now to educate herself as to the matter and, as I have hinted, I fear that now it may very well be too late; she has neither had tutelage from an older sister, having experienced courtship, nor competition with a sister of her own age or less that might serve to limit and specify her desires, tastes, expectations and goals.

I can take no credit for having aided the girl when she was a child myself, sir, for I was far too preoccupied with tending to her dearly departed mother. You see, sir, and please understand now with how much shame it brings me to do so, at last and for good, I find myself unable to further deny that my late wife was somewhat less than within perfect control of her faculties. I assure you this has in no way carried on to our daughter, though I fear, the too early death of her beloved mother, and my absence during the duration of that good woman's illness from the side of our child has let her grow with insufficient discipline, giving far too much reign to that part of all people that would prefer to be an autotrophic weed than a well-groomed flower.

In such a state of abandon I fear she has been discovered by this vagabond suitor and taken him somewhat to heart, his insolent and offensive guiles falling on singularly innocent and naked ears, and thus worming their way into the mind of my most pure and benevolent joy. His character confirmed by many gentlemen of significant stature in the town from which he hails I regret to report to you sir that he is little more than a cur and a scoundrel of the lowest possible regard. It is even worse than that sir, for he is an artist, and it has come to my attention through indirect sources that he is in the unconscionable habit of painting ladies, sir, in the nude, sir.

I write this letter to you with the greatest hope filling my heart that you should, without giving great pause for consideration or allowing a remarkable quantity of time to pass, sufficient enough in which he might take leave of the town within your governance, but rather with surpassing haste and vengeful duress

direct your men to seek him out and to, like the rat which he resembles both in countenance and in character, drive him forth from his vermin's den and into a sewery dungeon where such filth as he rightly belong. Sir, I do not ask this with my own soul in mind; no, for how could I? I see the purity of my remaining family held at stake in these matters, and am driven to a near fury by concern for the safety and well being of my daughter, whom I dearly love, and whose face does so tenderly resemble the face of her mother, whom I did love with all my heart. Perhaps it was that I did love her mother too much, to have allowed her only babe to wander so alarmingly astray, but yet I say to you now that I have awakened to this alarm and am as full prepared to right my daughter's misconceptions as is a weary man to react when, caught within his slumber, he is beset by a splash of freezing water.

Nothing will so alight my dank and dragging spirit as to hear a return of news from you, sir, or your finest quality of scribe, signaling me that my plea has not fallen upon the ears of a man indifferent and distant, believing, as does he who chides my daughter's honor, that his actions have no relation to the lives and doings of his fellow men. I have taken the time, sir, to write all of this down in my sincerest belief that you are not such a degenerate yourself, and must, therefore, see from the perspective of an enlightened man the good sense of my request. As it has been heavy on my heart to write such a letter upon such a vile subject, I cannot imagine that it has been your pleasure to read, and so I offer, finally, my apologies for the circumstances necessitating this communication, and for the urgent tone of a deeply concerned father. In apologizing for its overall sentiment I also offer you my deepest gratitude for suffering it so, that you may best weigh it with the ration due a man of your esteemed position in society. I thank you for sparing your humble neighbor the moments in which you have heard my request, and pray to the last that it be meted out by you as were you I myself, that one day I could do such honor for you as you may ever ask of me, with part for part equal esteem.

The most venerable and good Doctor of Port St. Paul,

Eduard Duatte"

"The very existence of such a source pushes the work of researchers along by some fifty years, as though it were a large wave carrying us all that much closer towards the inevitable shore of historical truth. The letter's tone is of particular importance to the current direction of study pursued by my colleagues and myself, because it so clearly reveals the mood of distrust that defined the era, and is the best documented example of a single, specific case accounting for later hostilities between Sir Eliard of Port Saint Paul, Penzington, and the Vizier of Kent, Nocksley, who had hitherto shown little interest in one another, let alone desire for conflict.

"It may likely be concluded that these two great forces of the Old World sought to unite some time during the fifty years between the writing of this letter and the writing of the next recognized document, which, as we all know, is a description of the resultant conflict by Plutarch the Elder. Because Plutarch described the conflict as "well under way" by the time of his writing, we may assume that it was initiated at a point more towards the beginning of this empty gap in records than towards its end. It may further be hypothesized that a failed attempt at unity was the cause of the outbreak due to the call for aid from one state to the other, which would have been impossible had relations between the two been as unstable or openly aggressive as they were to subsequently become. In fact, the tone proposes that, at this time, both nations were of relatively equal stature, neither having yet obtained vast quantities of the other's wealth.

"As equals it may be proposed that they sought to establish a more cooperative relationship that had yet existed and that this, which was perhaps exploited by one

side or the other in some unspecified manner, allowed increase of latent xenophobic prejudices in each nation.

“An interesting side note to the source is that Eduard Duatte’s twin sister is the well known composer Mary Euliard, who had taken the name Euliard from her husband Julius Euliard, the man who had formerly served as her brother’s medical mentor. Mary Euliard, as you may recall, is most widely recognized for her work on the zythr, or zither, an instrument for which her compositions provided renewed interest and respect due to their startling beauty and complexity. Perhaps her most popular piece of the day was “Ein Klopp Gevalscht,” a work dedicated to the siblings’ mother, who had died in childbirth before delivering Mary, necessitating her surgical removal, a process which she guardedly stated at the time had deeply affected her. It is the story of a seemingly harmless snowball fight between two sisters on a frozen lake which becomes at first a panicked barrage, and then a slowly drawn tragedy, as the one girl sees the other slip into the lake and descend beneath the ice. Contemporary critics had hailed Mary’s musical description of the one sister lying down upon the ice and seeing her sister beneath it, as though she were her own reflection, as perhaps the most moving melody ever achieved on a folk instrument.

“The madness from contraction of which Duatte describes his wife having died was, it is now known, an advanced form of fito-mitalysis, or cerebral poisoning due to eating a certain type of flora indigenous to the region in the contemporary north west of Penzington, today the south east of Klim’s Front Proper. The flora, Laurette’s Wort, was named after Duatte’s wife following his diagnosis of its dangerous culinary properties. This is the last act of Duatte’s life known to recorded history. It remains unknown the outcome of his request to the Vizier, and were it not for the documentation of his scientific contributions discovered as recently as forty years ago, it would have been impossible to imagine finding the source which is now in discussion. Perhaps, as this source has moved our research forward, we may look forward to discovering further of Duatte’s personal affects during the next half century, to continue filling in the details of this great, though unrecognized, man’s contributions to time and to civilization.

“Through the retrospective lens of this particular letter however, let us not lose sight of that which must remain our primary aim: the cause and affects of the Kriangeline Conflicts. Duatte’s is but one of many hundreds of lives that felt the preliminary or consequential tremors which these skirmishes engendered. Although his is a touching story, we are not overtly concerned here with being touched. Let us remember, ladies and gentlemen, that we are here to seek the truth.

“Allow me to, for a moment, wax philosophical, and try to end as I began.

“I have talked to many of my students throughout the past six months since the discovery of this source about their theories on the instigating event of the Kriangeline Conflicts. Pardoning an old man’s brief fascitiosness, those that even knew of what I spoke could pose few educated theories. Many of you might not be surprised by this, for you have grown accustomed to expecting little in return from those who come to you for intellectual assistance. But I submit to you that it made me question my own theories. Not just about the Kriangeline Conflicts or the War of the Sanguine Craters, but about all of history, and about human existence itself. For a while nothing seemed to me to make sense — why people would blow one another to shreds, why anyone would even get up out of bed, how long had this really been going on and for what ultimate reason.

“With the discovery of this document, ladies and gentlemen, we have not discovered any new truth, explaining more of our behavior to us. But, as I stated

initially, I believe it allows us to probe that much further back, toward our source, at which point lies the explanation of all our behaviors. This I must believe, for I cannot allow myself the luxury given my students. I cannot suffer to spend my life doubting.”

Just at that point in the professor’s lecture, or rather, in the instant immediately following it, as the audience began to erupt into applause, the terrible event occurred. Muffled as it was by the uproar, at first nobody noticed. It appeared, merely, that the speaker, who was, to begin with, neither a young man nor one who was atop the peak of his physical prowess, was suffering some minor difficulty in retiring from the podium. Being close enough to him, though somewhat too caught up in the dazzle of the event in its moment perhaps, such is the lot that the old and infirm may share with the young and vital, I can attempt to give an account of the professor’s gestures; though please bear in mind, as I have said, there are several factors involved outside of myself and intruding thereon that tend to corrupt to the extent of invalidation my observations.

Dr. Renard, who had been delivering the address, leaned slightly to his left, which was of course my right, as I was in the audience looking on. At the same time his face seemed to tighten and his eyes closed. After this had been going on for perhaps a full two moments or so the next man to speak, Katchebian Mestertson as I recall, arose from his seat slightly, making as if, in his mind, he had formulated the thought to assist his predecessor away from center stage and back to his seat, although he couldn’t seem to decide on the best way to do this without detracting from the necessary singularity of his own first appearance before the amassed body. It was at this time that I felt the man brush by me on my right. I remember it was my right because it was the same direction in which the elderly gentleman remained inclined. But I will return to this shortly. Mr. Mestertson extended his arm towards Dr. Renard, as if to support the respected figure, but he kept his knees bent slightly so as not to fully erect himself and prematurely introduce himself to the audience. As Dr. Renard gradually neared this outstretched blockade it became obvious that some more substantial gesture would become necessary soon, but it didn’t appear as though Mestertson was prepared to make it. Seeing him slumping ever more precariously out of a civil posture, and apparently recognizing the call for assistance implied by such a slackening of form even before the judge, a woman in the front row screamed. I learned later that woman was Dr. Renard’s wife, Betsy, who had tended to him more and more for the past twenty years, and who, having met him when they were only twelve, was almost certainly the most qualified observer to speak of her husband’s condition. The shriek partially overlapped and partially precipitated the rise into action by another prepared speaker seated nearby, the judge Ramsey II. Ramsey it was that finally caught the collapsing professor fully in his arms, and not until I witnessed this unmasculine embrace did I, following the placement of the judge’s hand upon the professor’s breast, notice the gathering blood stain on the old man’s cotton shirt. The judge began to lower Dr. Renard towards the surface of the stage, and I could see the professor’s eyes beneath the intensity of his spotlight rolled, as they were, so that they appeared to be looking in the direction of his own forehead, and slightly consumed by their lids. Mr. Mestertson was assisting him more readily at this lowered level, as it allowed him to maintain an increased amount of activity without drawing undue attention to his face, and he stooped over the fallen man with a look of condensed concern.

It was as this was happening that I began to turn my attention to the man who had shoved his way past me before. Do not ask me why I did this. At the time I was not fully aware that I was. My face, that is, my eyes, still fixed at the stage and the horror

unfolding thereupon; while my body, on the other hand, and quite inexplicably to me in hindsight, began to turn around away from where my attentions remained primarily centered. It felt as though it were being carried atop the rising wave of confused rejection breaking out in the viewing pit. People were beginning to move all around in reaction to what they were seeing, without, more or less, any implied destination, nor any preconceived notion of measure or reserve. A noise was welling up at the time as well from the outraged crowd, but I cannot rightly say that I recollect this in any more than the most muted and inattentive manner.

I began to push my way through the bustling attendants, but, as they were already closely quartered while seated, any small sentiment of free or unrestricted movement amongst them while they rallied was obviously to be an impossibility. Even though I knew this I still damned myself to try. I threw my face into their assault, and subjected my body to the barrage of their thrusting appendages. I must confess that I could not hold up long beneath such urgency and weight as their combined push presented. I was cut very deeply along the abdomen, and my blood flowed out rich and darkly. Still I fought onward. My face was slashed and immediately a sheet of my blood sluiced frighteningly crimson down before one of my eyes. I knew my appearance was ruined forever, but still I struggled against the force of the crowd. With a horrifying sound which I will never forget I heard the bone in my left arm splinter, and it dangled there helpless attached to me only by my engorged and turgid skin. But I knew. I knew that I must follow the assassin. And more than that I think I understood my greater duty. It must be this, I fantasized, which kept me leaned limply against their will, even long after I had lost all interest in catching the poor man's killer, even long after I had any residual hope for my own survival. While all the world's congregation pushed towards the victim, it fell upon me to carry news of this death to an old man in a tiny village somewhere along the incredibly distant border, who alone in all the province has the magical gift of writing, and who consequentially bears the sacred and ancient task of chronicling events in the single book of our sector's history, which is in his express possession.

Karl Midi and God

1

Karl Midi was in Siberia. He had escaped. And now he was walking. He had been walking for days, maybe more than a week. All was white. All.

Karl Midi was beginning to go insane. At first he was uncertain of it. But now, after almost a week, he felt more confident in his original doubt.

Siberia was not as cold as Karl had been taught. His teachers had never been here. Karl's footprints were the only ones. The tundra, Karl thought. That's what they called this. Lichen. Permafrost. It crunched with every step. There wasn't much snow. There had been a few flurries, but nothing of the scale of a Saharan sandstorm. It was actually quite a pleasant place to find oneself lost and going insane.

Karl sat on a boulder and nibbled a sandwich. He was nearing his goal and he knew it. He could feel it. Perhaps it was because the air was thinning, but his heart was beating faster. Cold winds sliced across his disheveled face.

He saw a bear. It was far away, and upwind so it didn't notice him. It lumbered along placidly. Karl kept the sun on his back. He didn't see any more bears.

Finally he came to the outskirts. The trees had all been flattened. The top sides had been burnt. All vegetation was exterminated. Karl walked between the trees, sometimes climbing over them. The sky was pink and shimmering.

It was several more days before Karl stood at the roof of the world. Here there

was nothing but ice. It floated in white mountains on top of the perfectly still aqua marine water. The stars sat about in the heavens, which were hemmed with pink-lined purple clouds. Karl struggled to the top of the largest iceberg. It was slippery, covered in a shifting powder of snowflakes.

Karl stood at the top. Now his insanity was complete. He had come to the end of his journey. A deep, resonant tone sounded from the landscape, and the world began to tremble. Karl felt, but could not hear, his own voice rising up and merging with the world-tone. Energy, quivering like invisible heat, rose up from the horizon.

Then there was silence.

Karl and God stood before one another. Neither spoke. Neither could. There was nothing more to say. Something which should have ended in marriage had ended in violence instead. Neither could look the other in the eye. The name of the energy that brothered them as living, conscious beings, was Shame. Karl was guilty that he had nothing in all the world good enough to offer God. And God was guilty that, of all his kingdom, the universe, he offered nothing to Karl.

2

Then the universe began to churning and the stars stirred round in cosmic silt, the ground, the ground gave way like the back of a tired old ox and the mountains were shaken into gravel. The sea swelled into monstrous forms amidst the scattering clouds and the sun turned purple, and then red, and then black... The furthest reaches of the heavens only dreamed of in the minds of the greatest men were stretched forth upon the elastic wave-field of the continuum and displayed with disgusting obtuseness before Karl's full peeled eyes, which wept tears that were whisked away immediately by the cold winds of the ether and transported to the utmost corners of God's mind, where the terrible fists of celestial tyrants beat them over the course of ten trillion years into life forms absurd to modern science. And then our God got mad.

The vibrations which had decimated the totality of our delicate globe now carried Karl upward, and filled him with such a sense of eureka that his blood disappeared from within his veins and his heart collapsed. "At last," his mind began shrieking as his eye-balls inflated with blood, "I understand now the force which remained unnamed by man during this concluding incarnation of civilization!" (For Karl was never much of one with words.) God revealed himself to Karl then, and smote him.

Hasn't this all been somewhat of a let-down? At last science-fiction had combined the making of psychologically-reflexive mythology with hope for an achievable technological utopia. But now we're dead. And wouldn't it have been great if.... But now you're dead. And we were meant by God and the stars to be together.... But now you're dead. And all the dreams that blew through your head.... But now you're dead. And dead is dead.

mage/priest

According to the town's priest as well as the court magician, the maidservant of the princess, so close to her highness as to have adopted her styles and mannerisms, becoming, in affect, the second princess of the realm, was evil. Now this is not the way that it was put while those who leveled such accusations mixed company with the more traditional and polite commoners; in such cases it was generally remarked by each that, "she has her darker side," immediately after which they would look down and sip at whatever it was they might be drinking.

It ought not be imagined as the result of inattentive or indifferent confusion that just because the magician and the priest may say the same words, in the same way, may even seem to feel the same exact feelings, that they are capable of, at any given moment, so much as tolerating one another's existence. In order to better understand this it is necessary to better understand their era and their caste.

The period later recognized by history into which they each were birthed was one of considerable somnolence. The majority of the preceding couple of generations' children had been killed in pointless and relatively unpopular wars, and the survivors preferred to sleep than actively perpetuate the culture which had committed such a disappointing atrocity. One might wander, without service, all about the land and see them scattered here and there, collapsed in the midst of some inane chore, as if suddenly all the pressure of their will to continue standing had drained like a liquid from their legs, leaving them limp. It was as if the entire nation had succumbed to narcolepsy. In any event it was the case of the remainder to phrase their reasoning and to conduct their everyday affairs by reversing the meanings of "in spite of" and "because," or rather, more appropriately, forgetting the meaning of "because" altogether. As beings within time the magician and the priest followed this trend and thus, due to their similarities, were capable only of loathing one another.

This condition was furthered by the expectations of their personal behavior according to their social roles. By this it can only be meant that a priest is taken to be humble, a magician reclusive and secretive, and to be thus it is obvious that both must share the desire to avoid seeing in the outside world others like themselves. The priest robes himself in shame for his desires and hides from all around him who could remind him thereof; the magician cloisters himself in a perspective of superiority, mistrusting all perceived competitors.

Comprehending this environment we may begin to address the players by individual treatment.

The magician dwelt in a small room in a far corner of the castle. In order to get to it, if one should wish to go and visit him, it was impossible to avoid the use of stairs. In this zone of the castle the surliest sort of the elders were found, lavishing in their exotic debaucheries. Dogs roamed about, feeding on stray kittens; old drunk Dukes bellowed hollow insinuations; harlots meandered with difficulty from one bed chamber to the next; young assassins holed up huffing hash and on occasion opium. The caravan transporting goods to the market rumbled through, often rumbling by the magician's window at early morning hours. Lost children huddled in shadows. Yet it was all to the magician's liking, as it was all by his design.

It was the habit of the magician to smile with a supernatural knowledge that a few fools could have called smug. For he did not belong among the filth which surrounded him. His home was in the brilliance, or rather, the origins of his power were in the most highly concentrated darkness — a pall so somber that the crumbling ruins of the castle's foundation could little discomfort him. He had conjured them up as a happy imagining; to him they were literally but a passing dream. The trolls that slinked about his labyrinth were minions at his mercy, and owed the life inside their flesh, the very patterns inside their blood, to his "smug" calm. The slum was his spell.

One evening while slicing meat he threw his head back, and sunk a regal laugh down to the very pits of his lungs. It is, after all, easier to create than destroy. This rule appears inverted only when considering matters other than problems. He gave off a charm that was not altogether morbid, and was of good humor and good spirits enough to entertain. His company was, amongst the less senseless jovial members of the royal court, frequented and extensively enjoyed. Inside his keep were colored lights, games to play, tales to spin and plots to unravel, drinks to be had,

and even the odd, comically inverted symbol of the masses' loyalty and pride. Often he was known to casually and only for fun speak the ancient language of incantation among his friends, chuckling reclusively while, far away, things were created or destroyed. It cannot be said that he was not a jovial, jocular man.

On occasion, however, he awoke depressed, and on such days as those it served him well enough to drink and to sit in solitude, be it alone, his gaze fixed on nothing in particular, or in the company of others, jostled, poked and prodded by their futilely merry advances. He can little be blamed for suffering such attacks of interpersonal indifference, for he was haunted by a terrible truth. His alone was the knowledge that this zone was artificially created, and its monstrous denizens only figments of his fancy. For, having built up this particular illusion of decay and dust about himself, he was never able to share fully with his comrades in its spectacle of famine. He saw only the softness and the malleability of the material world, and this forbidden fruit tortured him; its sour taste ate at him from inside while he rested. In greater introspection than ought to belong to common men, he dreamed of new ways things could be, but, in even deeper solitude than this, doubted the strength of his sorcery to rearrange reality at the whim of his will.

The magician shared his hold with a man many believed to be a demon, despite his singular popularity. He was a gentle man, through and through, although he had been defrocked from the church for blasphemy and sacrilege. His vice was for seducing the young girls of the choir and the Sunday school, and was suspected of having deflowered many a wee, innocent virgin who, otherwise, might have been bound for service to her Lord as one of the church's good nuns. This man's visage was constantly shrouded, his form enshadowed, as if, even in the sunlight, he were contained within his own thundering midnight. His demeanor, though, reflected little such displeasure, and he was highly amicable company to those who came to be around him. In fact he was renowned even in his absence by the girls of the synagogue as the most profound and approachable wit, as well as the most romantic.

The two of them, then, the magician and his underworldly friend, were often attended by friends, and it is through them that we may make the transition between the magician and the priest. Most of these friends were also members of the royal court, although were less involved in necessary functions, being entertainers alone, and so had much spare time to float about and keep track of a significant segment of their fellows' daily doings. Several were only jesters themselves — a bard who was skilled in recreational visual conjuring, a scientist skilled at gambling, a clerk known for his drinking and his jolity, a monk who worshipped any and all pagan idols, and a philosopher, whose magic was his words, as well as a collection of various elves, sprites, witches, gnomes and simple clowns — although the magician also saw his share of more essential dignitaries — a countess of administration at the educational institution and a fellow magician, a jester who only dabbled in the black arts, preferring to specialize in the engineering of complex machines. It was through this man's former love, a Dutchess of Surreality, that one might most easily make a connection to the priest, for it was she who, one night, had brought the priest into the magician's zone of the castle, and by this act greatly disturbed him. The zone created by the magician for his own autonomous leisure the priest, with a rival group of magicians, had defaced through several public scribbles, staining it with a reminder of himself: his chosen name. The priest took as much pride in tainting the magician's territory as had the magician in conjuring it up, and this shared pride sickened both, defiling all things created by either that bore the notion of the other.

The priest no longer had a home. He had tried to have one for some while, living entirely off a fund he had established for the purpose, but this intention

eventually dispersed. He came to hate property and to hate cash as the vessels of, if not the roots of, all evil in the world. It was not to be incumbent upon him to serve his fellow men in any way demanded by their status, to provide them perverse and abusive luxuries, to wallow low himself while at his expense others built monuments to themselves on high invading heaven. He grew his hair long, unkempt, his clothing unraveled about his frail limbs. He felt betrayed by the world, and embraced a bitter sort of joy, a nihilistic sort of religion that sanctified impossible equality, condemning the realities of competition in that savage market men call reality to the basest corner of a reeking brimstone Hell.

So he was reduced, or, by his secret standards, elevated to the strata of a vagabond. He had limited his scope, he no longer cared much for the rest of the world. He stood in this spot, that spot. He walked between them, beneath the sunshine. He stood in the rain. He collected a particular odor. It didn't matter to him. The affairs of the flesh were little his concern. His duty to himself, his vow, was to uphold the quality of his own ideals. To let no amount of evidence sway his belief in the infallibility of this idea, or that. He listened, yes; but only so that he could disagree.

He hated distortions of reality the most, the irony of which need not be mentioned. His deepest and most sincere convictions lay in opposition to anything, action or chemical, that could relieve the mind of its constant consideration of the limitations placed upon it by the castle. Primary in his sermons ravaging all magic were hatred for the sins of womanhood and potions.

Womanhood, the priest argued, was a repulsive mistake of chemistry. His understanding of the bible arranged man as the product of God and woman as the product of Nature, which, despite its appearance to one trained or skilled in the art of rhetoric, did not imply to him a diametrical opposition between God and Nature. He saw God, rather, as the maker of Nature, and all attempts at society, from the earliest forms of agrarian trade to the most complex systems of economic imperialism, as the struggle of Nature to overwhelm and destroy God. God was the civilizer, but society, the priest argued, was the attempt by Satan, through women's influence over men, to replace God with a surrogate, materialistic nature, the perfect civilization — one in which men were the slaves of women. Women, he stated fervently, were the forked tongue of the devil slithering about freely within the ear of man's cities. He preached, in the furthest extreme, of the beauty of intercourse between men and the holiness of that work of art which was a fetus destroyed within a woman's womb. It was, to say the least, a philosophy as complex as it was poorly thought out, but such was the case of most religions of the day, and he had surprisingly little trouble recruiting supporters.

He also argued against the use of chemicals and potions to warp one's understandings. The priest's unique stand on females was found generally amusing by his apostles, who were all themselves misogynists by preconditioning, but the stance the priest took on this latter subject caused much greater division between those who claimed to understand him. Now, by his accounts, the priest had never used any elixirs. His opinions on the matter derived from witnessing his fellows perform experiments on themselves with them throughout his religious schooling because, at that time, there was only a single university for both priests and magicians.

As has been said before, the citizens of this era much preferred to sleep than slay. They had been using toxins as tranquilizers for quite an impressive duration before the priest happened to stumble into this world, but there was an increasing amount of argument over them. Now, of those who could ever be expected to consider using them, that is, those who suffered, who were tired of life, not those who remained well founded in their hierarchies of authority, but those who were lower

down the food chain and knew it, of these there were two camps on the concern. Both were driven to maximize the fertility and potency of dreams, but the division came between those who thought that training of the mind in a sterile environment, allowing it free reign in the realms of its own thought, even forcing it to be creative in colorful ways, would produce a better brain, and those that found weakening the learned patterns of logic begat more fascinating interpretations.

The priest was firmly entrenched in that school which stated it is noble to be self-sufficient in imitation of the mighty that one may better compete with them. In so far, therefore, as the royal court did not ingest a surplus of herbs and essences to construct this unsatisfying reality, it seemed justifiable that neither should the peasants to perfect their nightly flights of idealism. It didn't seem to bother the priest much that his argument against magic was that it only served to weaken its users and his argument against the strong and oppressive court was that it had always been populated by users of or believers in magic, whores and poisons. He felt himself more Godly to be fighting in the name of strength against the practices of all who so casually daunted and saddled him. Some of his disgruntled followers have been overheard to grumble that only a woman, perhaps a forgotten priestess, could have hurt his soul so badly that it only bleeds out broken, fragmented ideas of hate.

But this is surely enough about the priest. It stands to our purposes better now to consider the royal court, especially the princess and her maidservant.

It must be said of the court of that era that it was in a state of dismay and disarray equal to if not greater than that of the outside world. The same wars which had possessed the common folk to so ardently embrace unconsciousness in a mad quest for long lost hope had infected the court with a gradual guilt, a guilt that was slowly killing the courtiers one by one, as if it were a disease itself, dropping the revelers where they stood as surely as the Red Death ever could. There had been some small attempt to close the doors against it, but it was generally accepted that it was far too late for this. It had come to be understood by every castle official that it would be part of the course of their duties to fall dead one day for no reason. It was even explained allegorically to the children in the stories read to them by their parents at bed time. No one in the whole stronghold could claim any longer that they were unaware that they would die; and this is only unusual because it is so historically uncommon. Although it was the result of an intentional change in philosophical and scholastic policy, allowing the shameful wars to be publicly considered rather than burying the events beneath an avalanche of propaganda and glamour, it was traditionally unprecedented for a population to be so morbidly fixated on the loss of its members if their culture was not also in a steep and undeniable decline towards destruction.

But this may all be seen as the result of the sheltered life led by that society's leaders. After all, they had only been conditioned to predict their own mortality. It was an altogether different matter for them to be able to identify the same ailments, the same weakness and depressions they experienced, when they were bursting out like boobos across the face of that trash heap called culture with which they were charged creation.

The princess, to better illustrate this situation, was an artist. She did not consider herself the princess; she considered herself an artist. She did not care to dwell from rise to rest on how to solve the problems of the land. She snuck away at all times and sat the day beneath some enormous tree, attended by her servant, and considered instead the beauty of nature, blinking at the sun, shivering at the caress of the long fibers of grass, sighing at the wind. Her mind refused to acknowledge how awful the situation truly was for some people, although, by her tastes, she was

far too well aware of and miserable for the suffering of others, far away. It was as if no matter where she fled she could still hear their distant cries, carried from foreign hills by the turning of the earth underneath its cape of air, and always the image of their faces screaming, weeping, filled some slight back nook inside her skull. She sat there, trying so hard to be an artist, examining with such concentration that she from time to time would contract a famously difficult aching of the face all intersections of the shapes, the lines of objects, often walking around a thing for some time simply considering how its outline interrupted or was interrupted by the textures of its surroundings and the background, flooding her mind, her heart, her soul with lines, with patterns, with the fluid and overflowing constructions of the garden. She was never overcome by them, though; never overwhelmed as a more sensitive person should have been. Perhaps this was only because her thoughts were so constantly divided between the dull, basking substance before her and those distant, acute focal points of displeasure. If this was the case the only soul capable of answering so was the princess's maidservant.

The maidservant of the artist princess was abominably plain. She struggled to conceal this fact by bobbing along behind her master in the wake of her selection of fashionable attire, but the result was usually something merely pastiche and eclectic, lacking the elegance she saw in the wardrobe of her ruler. Whether there was much more refinement of taste in the superior woman was a matter unresolvable even by the public, for they saw so little difference between the girlish and graceless compilations of color, fabric and line upon this mere servant and the more subtly arranged and expensive ensembles sported by their liege, that the plain and even common girl whose sole task it was to wait upon her highness came to be thought of as a younger sister to her, almost a duplicate in terms of assumed taste and, by dint thereof, personality and even sovereignty.

There may also be a more insipid reason for the princess's servant being referred to as the second princess. This belief would find support in the occasional claims by both of her former suitors as regards her "darker side." That is, it was thought by some at the time, and is still a valid enough theory today, that the maidservant was manipulating the will of the princess and bending it to better fit her own insidious and impure desires. There is little particular evidence to support this, outside her behavior towards her social attractions, because all of the details concerning her service to the princess were kept quite secret by the princess at the time and were, later, in a teary eyed fit of despair and rage it may fairly be imagined, destroyed by her as well. This act only serves to further titillate the tastes of researchers because it is nowhere explained either. That so many facts about the case have been intentionally erased inspires its applicants to invent new ones, and the very absence of these concrete occurrences allows anyone who wishes to to do so.

From pictures dating to the era depicting the happy pair of females cavorting about the countryside the hypothesis has been raised that, if they were not in actuality, perhaps the two would have been more pleasurably served being lesbians. This is exactly the type of unsupportable conjecture raised due to the ambiguous character of the lesser girl. It has already been stated that the source of conflict over her nature arises from the distinct difference in her plain face and carnivalesque appearance, complicated by the testimony of her lovers as to her behavior.

According to the magician the visage of normalcy was, by historical example, the best concealment for abnormality and perversion. Whether or not he was reading this into her where it did not in fact exist due to his dire desire to find what he loved most about himself reflected back from within one as outstanding as he felt he appeared is a matter of further conjecture. Perhaps, in fact, his only interest in

making this statement and coupling it with a Quixotic quest to find justification for it in her was to prove to himself that it was valid for him to employ this strategy on his own, for similar, or at least, personal, reasons.

According to the priest the maidservant constituted in and of herself no greater evil than was the annoying fate of any woman to embody, although he continued platonic relations with both her and the princess; anyone well-versed in the tastes of Plato will better understand this than one who is not. The priest did, however, admit when coaxed or, at the very least, listened to, that there was a jealousy on the part of the princess toward any relations carried on by her servant.

The princess herself was no virgin. There was a prince, quite attractive, a hero of some meager renown. But it does not seem impossible when considering him to see his influence on the princess and, especially, on the relationship between the two most important women in the nation as negligible or nonexistent. While he had his own entourage, his word did not go very far within the power structure of the greater court, and was barely even heard as a whisper by the peasants huddled about just outside. All may very well have admired him, even if none respected him at all. Perhaps this was his favor to the princess, and why her servant allowed this when the princess would allow so little extra for her servant. On the other hand, the affairs of a princess, even then, even there, were not the concern of a servant. Or perhaps it simply interested the servant no more what the princess did with her body than it seemed to interest the princess what was thought of the servant by the commoners.

It all comes down to the question of how the servant saw herself. Did she see the plain face in the mirror when she stepped naked from her bath, or did she only permit herself to step back and take herself in when she was made up and dressed to fit the part she had chosen? If she saw herself first and foremost as what she seemed to most to be, that is, a plain and ordinary servant, entrusted with a set of duties and rules outside of which there was no benefit from straying, then she was not to blame for the downfall of that realm which called itself her home. If, however, she felt she was the second princess in more than rumor, in more than ironic popular jest, then she ought not to be trusted, and could have been capable of things no one, not even the princess who laid her innermost demons bare and open before her, not even the magician, nor the priest, who both imagined that they understood her through and through and boasted to themselves in private of their ability to predict what she would do next, not even God in heaven, things no one, no one could have guessed.

And at last we see her in the sunshine, squatting sejan beside her sovereign, smiling a surreptitious smile, so satisfied beyond all suspicion to know the secret solution to the question she has lured us all into asking, a question with little more value than whether it will rain or shine tomorrow, when it is already understood by all that it will pour the day after that.

Mr. Smith's Shadow at the Speed of Light

Mr. Smith, the most notorious free agent on the interstellar frontier, has been issued a contract to perform one of his renowned removals on himself. Long shots of Smith's deadpan mug and anonymous raincoat perched in a lofty window or on a balcony, silhouetted architecture partly obscuring the foreground. The tense suspense of the stalking predator, the manic paranoia of the pursued prey — all this contained in Smith's dour, pale countenance, his sallow cheeks, his lipless flat mouth like an unhealing incision, his dead, lidded eyes, his unwrinkled brow, the nose of Merlin like a hawk's beak. His powder-white hands slithering around the heavy weapon, his single scope head mounted field glasses registering a rainbow of

information behind a patient dark plastic lens. Finally there is movement in the cubicle he has been surveiling. Lights come on an old woman with a grocery bag in her arm and keys in her hand is moving within the window frame. With mechanical precision Mr. Smith cracks off one shot, the smell of gunpowder rides in on cold air as he breathes tightly the moment following the clenched release, the sound of broken glass the woman slumps messily to the floor. Below his breath with no trace of feeling, simply as if registering aloud, the lizard hisses, "Mum." On top of this there is a choked wail from the apartment and quickly another torso moves within the glass square, bending over the first body and crying out her name. Smith holds a breath and another shot snaps the air like a thick piece of dry wood, the crisp frigid air that numbs the nose and hardens the hurting ears. "Da," says Mr. Smith to nobody. Nobody is there but him, nobody to receive his empty narrative report. He turns up the wide collar on his black coat and snuggles a hat onto his skull. He moves away from the ledge. Later, in a red phone box, he hunches over a long list on a roll of narrow milk white paper and scratches off two names. Time passes and his hunt continues; high school girlfriends, college club members, peers whom he surpassed in training, his old awol cronies, wives of lost associates, one by one Mr. Smith ceases to exist. With some he sits down and has coffee first, and they reminisce about old times. Sometimes even memories are stirred up in Mr. Smith which had long been forgotten. A very few understood why he had come and these were the hard cases for Mr. Smith. There came a time when there were no more words to be said, only the job remaining to be done. Mr. Smith felt like apologizing to these few, honorable men and excellent agents; most even let him do so, with a single crystal tear rolling down his corpse's face he honored them, closed his eyes, and pulled the trigger. With these he didn't feel like looking at the bloody mess afterwards, the ruined remains of mortal bodies, but he found that many of his kills he took a vindictive pleasure in. All the old bastards who had thought they were better than him? He killed them with knives and their spouses and children. Even their pets if they had any. Cut open their abdomens so their innards spilt out and they died slowly trying to catch them with their slippery sweaty hands and hold them gently without crushing them and oh, trying to pile them back into the gaping wound, pissing themselves with terror of such irreparable damage as they beheld, all their happy dreams — the terrier skinned and mutilated on the pastel Mexican pattern living room throw rug, his guts dangling up to the glass coffee table where they steamed in a red blob like tomato jelly. Oh, yes. Smith enjoyed these kills like a sweet delicacy being squeezed in drops of colorful juice from some rare, exotic fruit. Fat old bosses, the mothers of old friends, pompous snobs, sniveling toadies, bossy girls; but eventually Smith himself was the only one. The only one who knew of his own existence. He was in one of the northern provinces of Annexia and he had just killed a priest to whom he made confession. He sat down in the acid snow outside a prole bar all wood paneling and neon advertisements for cancerous products promising to make the body comfortable like never before. He went over his whole life again and again in his mind. Every face he'd ever seen was now only a mask in his memory worn by a ghost. Only one remained, and he knew it, but he was, as humans will, attempting to postpone the inevitable, even if only to prolong his agonizing hesitation. He stood up suddenly without reason to continue sitting or to stand, he moved along on a surge of frustration. Mr. Smith saw himself in the one-way window of the country roadhouse. Standing there. A corpse. The face had never looked so much like a skull, thinly draped in a pale veil of weightless flesh. How hollow his eye sockets looked to him his own eye sockets! Where were those lovely eyes that used to charm all the little girls, that devilish handsomeness that drove their pleated plaid private school skirts, white

blouses and petite pig tails tittering embarrassedly away? Where the milk moustache from sharing midnight Irish warm milks with his gentle, forgiving father? All that was there was his living corpse. How like a skeleton swaddled in his thick black death shroud he looked. How like Mr. Death. Was this the way his victims saw him when he came for them as silent and spectral as their own spirit to haunt some sunny day? He had never known this face, this aspect, this harbinger of sorrow. He stood there in the snow, frozen at the sight of this reflection as if he were coming upon a very sneaky, very dangerous opponent — not a victim, an equal, possibly a better. He was chilled in division. Mr. Smith was ice bones, blood water and frost skin in the presence of Mr. Death. Which one would kill which? Whom was meant to die? This moment stretched out so thin, long and delicate, it fractured with an icicle's glassy snap. The contractor. Of course. The contractor knew of his existence. Smith remembered with something like relief. Of course. Smith still had to cure his contractor... still had to kill his contractor rather. Smith moves off decisively. An atmospheric shuttle, a flat-wing design, Smith's seat is over the wing he dully watches the sun glint off its silvery flaps. An arid zone, deserts and cliffs and scorpions and one hundred and fifty degree heat. Endless stretches of crushed glass inhabitable only by animals mutated by radiation exposure. Arabs in cowboy hats; this is the crossroads, at the last civil bastion before the waste land called Death's Kingdom. A tall glass building producing encryption hardware to protect the information books of the Terracomunications Firms, the only form of government on an Earth mostly abandoned to its own purposes. Mr. Smith dons a white coat and a clearance badge for the Dupont section. By noon he has found his way into the office of the company's father figure, posing as a janitor he waits for the man to return from lunch, diligently mopping the marble floor. Wearing the skin of a Bengal tiger and carrying a teacup full of black coffee the Master presently appears. The Master, whose name it appears is Tom, does not seem to recognize Mr. Smith as he breaks his neck. Later Mr. Smith is riding on a subway, shooting through a tube at almost seven hundred miles per hour. It is shaking vaguely as if it is trying to compute something that does not make sense. Mr. Smith rocks slightly with the tram. His face is empty. Now there is no one but himself. He is even alone in the car. It surrounds him like the inside of a white pill, being swallowed like a capsule of morphine. In the dark plastic window like the silent roaring void of space he sees himself reflected. Mr. Death looks quite glum. Almost disappointed. Now Mr. Death is no artist. Who survives to appreciate his work? He is the dread doctor bringing the hopeless news who finds his patient dead enough already. Death has only Mr. Smith. And Mr. Smith has only Death. Together they are a truly Free Agent. Sizing one another up they ride the Ringworm into the dark maw of the throat seven hundred miles per hour. Outside at times roll by hills like white elephants; white white white as far as the eye can see, ahead a blinding flash of white the snows of Kilaminjaro. To die, Smith must *become* Death. More than being merely *unto* it, acting *as* it, like he had done for countless souls, he now has to merge with it, replace it with himself. He has to take his self and make it into the concept of death in order to embody it and thus to be dead. He has to become more than the sum of his parts in order to define from his own outside the ending of those parts; thus ending the obligation of the contract, and thus his reason to want to live. Thus ending the progression of events.

Mr. Smith knows there can be no ending: He cannot kill Mr. Death, nor can Mr. Death finish him. There can be no combination of Mr.s Smith and Death.

Smith cannot kill himself for he cannot find a self to kill; he recognizes his existence only in the memories of other people, now dead and his memories of himself with them not real — without them he never officially existed. Mr. Smith is

already dead. He remains in existence only now in the reflection of another person, in his own reflection as an other person — as his own ghost come to haunt him on a sunny day, and he himself invisible, made real and active only by contract, now expired.

There can be no ending because completing the job is as metaphysically impossible as traveling at the speed of light is physically impossible. Between Thought and Being there is only action. Mr. Smith cannot *become* Mr. Death because they are always and will always be divided by a clear partition. They are separated by one single action, everywhere they are: the action of murder, which, for each second Smith could commit it, even in his imagination, in theory, even by possibility, is constantly and eternally embodied by Death, by the inherent nature of his elusive essence. Mr. Smith *becomes* murder *is* Mr. Death. But the shadow of murder is always between them; Mr. Smith cannot *become* Mr. Death. Mr. Smith can never catch up to Mr. Death because he cannot step in the same river twice. Mr. Smith is changing. Mr. Death is not; he is change itself. Mr. Death walks on water. Smith can only ever become *like* that which he is not, while Mr. Death is that very thing by definition. Mr. Death is behind and is at once inside the pane of glass across from Mr. Smith. Mr. Death is perpetually ahead of Mr. Smith by two steps, waiting for him in the next reflective surface Smith passes by after he has turned his back on Death in any other one. With every moment's action, Mr. Smith moves through himself towards Mr. Death; Smith's reflection on the horizon at sunset, casting a shadow towards him.

But Mr. Smith is not moving now. Mr. Death is not moving. The train is not moving. The river is not actually flowing. The events themselves did not progress. Only the mind. Smith is only a mind which thinks itself and, having already realized the idea of Mr. Smith, cannot ever forget it, even by destroying the external world entirely. Mr. Smith cannot kill "Mr. Smith" anymore than he can kill "Mr. Death," or stop Mr. Death from killing him. While Smith can make himself be forgotten, he cannot keep Death from being remembered. Mr.s Smith and Death are equally and oppositely real.

Mr. Death cannot actually kill Mr. Smith because he is only an external shadow of Smith's internal being, not real and utterly dependent. Death exists for Mr. Smith only because there *is* a Mr. Smith. Mr. Death is the idea of un-Smith, and Smith is that of un-Death. Mr. Smith himself is merely a similar shadow, internally cast by his own mind as it attempts to deny its soft existence and define a solid essence. The idea of Mr. Smith is that of un-Mind, an unchanging mind, and to know his true mind is to un-know that mask, "Mr. Smith," which it constructed to conceal and protect itself.

An ego thus divided (between what *feels* it is, what *thinks* it is, and what *must be*) is thus alone; thus free. Smith is a free agent. He experiences recognition of his own existence as cognitive dissonance: incapable of reconciling thoughts that have already been thought, he is obliged to attempt to un-remember one. Mr. Smith and Mr. Death can never meet, can never be together without glass between them; though Mr. Death can enter Mr. Smith's mind, where even Mr. Smith cannot go. A shrinking shadow cast by the future across the present as it casts a lengthening shadow across the past.

What happens next is inconsequential, the inevitable step will only be a manifestation of a thought which is already beginning to cease to exist. So long as there is one of them there must be both. They are shadows of action cast by the mind, the only true being. Each is only the reflection of the other. Mr. Death's existence for Mr. Smith proves that there is a Mr. Smith to die, who himself in turn can never choose to un-exist.

Ram and City

I am watching a ram who is butting its horns against the wall of the city. It has been doing it for several days now, and will continue, I expect, until it has either broken through or cracked its neck.

Will I not celebrate the ram, and assist it in every task of its existence; lovingly shall I not ease its life with an agonizingly delicate tenderness? Am I not to make its deeds my projects, and its rewards targets for my pride? Don't I wish to celebrate its birthdays? Do I love this ram?

I sit for several days and watch it. It butts its head. It backs its body up. For a moment it wavers, like a flower in the wind. Then it lurches forward and butts its head again. It does not look around at all. It does not lose its focus or its feeling of urgency and ultimate necessity. What most impresses me is the fact that it does not tire. There are moments, when it seems to pause at its nadir point, when it appears to be considering its opponent, that I expect it must surely intend to collapse back onto its haunches and expire, or at least faint dead away on the spot. But it never does. Instead it lurches forward, and butts its head against the wall.

I sit for several weeks and watch it as it attacks the impervious edifice. It never falters. It is as constant in its activity as is its victim in its foundation.

No one has ever been outside the city wall. I don't know why the ram would want to go there. The best stories are written about what lies just outside, but the majority of folks much prefer reading a plurality of possibilities than experiencing a single reality. There has been, nonetheless, a plan under consideration by the city keepers for a few generations to expand the walls of the city outward by some insignificant distance. This is not taken very seriously by anybody because we can continue to build upward. Thankfully we could probably continue building upward until our city had been raised into the sky by ten times its existing height and we would still be well sheltered by the shadow of the city wall. We mostly agree that, whatever lies just outside the walls of our city, it cannot be greater than what we possess within them. I had thought this was the feeling of all, until I saw the ram.

It stops for a moment and turns toward me. Its eyes meet my own, but it seems to be looking through me. Then it turns around, lurches forward, and butts its head against the wall. The wall gives way and I see the ram disappear through the hole. Astonished, I spring to my feet and rush over. A frigid wind slithers around my ankles as I tentatively approach the puncture. I hear the scream of a woman falling from the balcony of a tall building behind me, but I do not turn around. Her body comes to earth not far behind my own, stirring the air I breathe as she passes, but I do not turn around. A crowd, aroused by the event, begins to jostle 'round me, but still I step slowly over the final few paces separating me from where my ram has disappeared. I creep as stealthily as I can, for I feel I am in some sacred sort of spot.

I get down on my knees and hands, as if to, myself, become a ram. The wound in the city's skin flares empty white before me. I am transfixed. I must witness this. I have no choice. I have to understand.

I pass my head through the gaping halo of crumbling clay. The sky. The sky is all around me. Above me the city's flat facade reaches upward into infinite blueness. To either side it similarly extends to termination. Beneath me our city's side slopes straight downward smooth and quiet, disappearing into a soft ocean of clouds which extends to the horizon. The sun squats like a glaring white demon in the thin air.

I feel dizzy and unbalanced. My ram has vanished into the sky. The sky has swallowed up my dreams. Air floods past me to be free of the city I call my home. Hot, stale air. The crisp, cold breath of heaven licks at my face. My ram is gone. My city is

revealed to be a sick and sickening attempt to deny the sky, the impossible.

There is nothing more that I can do now, for I cannot fathom any further reason to exist. So I write this story to you, to remind you, to keep your rams inside a fence.

From the encounter of Sire Thomas Todd, a freemason, with vampires:

“It is known that they [vampires] prefer to feed on the red blood cells, but that their crest includes the colors of both types of blood cell, red and white. It has been my experience that they usually have a sore somewhere upon their body, often upon the face or the hand, as around the mouth or forehead, and as upon the back of the hand or of the wrist, that they may occasion to, from time to time, taste of themselves as it were, and so are loathesome creatures socially, as they are perpetually wiping at their lips. They are often very sociable creatures nonetheless, and in a gathering of as many as one lodge full of people there could be as many as one genuine vampire, and at least two suspects. It is rumored by some when they are drunk as upon the blood which is their meal, as they may become somewhat light-headed in the company of a crowded ballroom after nursing upon their own selves for some while and done up, that the court which exists for the vampires judges on quantum superposition event of collapse in the wave function of the active awareness into concentration immediately prior to their proceedings, and upon such, as it calls them, manifestations, bases its rulings often before considering the evidence regarding the cases of those who have infringed in some way the one true law of ‘Do What Thou Wilt As Above, Do What Thou Wilt So Below.’ They are said, according to the Mistress with whom I have spoken, to, in this way, strengthen their powers of ‘reality control’ by causing the events to have unfolded in a way that is meaningful to them through disorientation of the evidence by the interaction of the electrical currents in their cerebellums and the information units stored in the letters and words of the evidence through a subjective medium of molecules.”

Sasha and Sergei

There were people who always had another point to make. Although he almost never did anything passionately, passionately was how Sergei hated these people.

Sasha was thinking about Sergei while she was washing the dinner knives. “This must be just how he masturbates,” she thought, looking down at her hand jerking the soapy sponge back and forth around the wet blade.

She had a cat named Samson, whom she had been calling Samsa for almost six months because she was feeling sorry for herself. She liked long and colorful conversations, which she could curl up in like a thick, soft quilt; Sergei had once slept naked in the cold January snow when his lover had kicked him out of their apartment. That she should feel incomplete to not know all his stories was, she realized six months ago, probably nothing more to him than a sign of her lack of self discipline.

Sergei didn’t know how to hold Samsa. She had grown since they’d met and now Sergei didn’t even know how to hold Sasha. She wanted to throw her arms around his neck, to feel tall and all grown up, but every time she interrupted his arms from encircling her shoulders he only laughed out loud, backing away, and scoffed, “what impudent boldness from one so small. Quite the tiny tyrant tonight aren’t we, my petite Napoleon?” If ever she would accuse him of not knowing how to hold her anymore now that she was taller, he would brusquely retort that it was

probably she who no longer knew how to hold herself.

As Sasha performed various chores she continued to think deep thoughts. She thought about how she had time to think about doing chores while she did chores. If she thought about doing them, the act of doing them became absurd and unjustifiable. She remembered something she'd overheard once in a conversation at the next table: "whoever cleans it up feels responsible for the mess." But if she thought about anything else it would only be Sergei and she would begin to get upset.

She wanted him to love her passionately, but like all men he had only been taught how to passionately hate. And she dreaded becoming one of the types of people he hated.

Like all men he hated most anyone who reminded him too much of himself. Either by nagging him and forcing him to be constantly aware of his behavioral patterns, or by just acting the same as he did; all people who reminded him of himself were boring. How could Sasha argue with that? She couldn't accuse him of overreacting because he was sensitive about his appearance to others, even though, perhaps *especially because*, they both knew this to be the real truth of the situation. Even his most violent frustrations he attributed to boredom. What a cruelly impregnable straw man. A red herring which could never be netted; a wild goose for Sasha to chase. He gave her the will to lance, pointed her in the direction of a wind mill, and then left her to her own devices.

Like all women she was left to her own devices, perhaps too much. She had too much time she thought sometimes. Whenever Sergei would come home tiredly and she would be there in the midst of her domestic vigilance she would scorn him for having not deprived her of the free time she had to herself. He would scowl that he too had just come from spending altogether too much time alone in the world, indeed his entire life, and was in no fit state to correct his own situation, let alone to complete her pathetic life by acting out the role of some impotent ideal she cherished. God, he could be mean. As far as he was concerned, he would conclude churlishly, she had kept such ideals silent since she had been the naive little girl who had read them in some romantic classic, and it would be just as well on his account should she choose to keep them so until she lacked the living breath with which to express them. She plotted at how to get at him, get under his skin, inflame him. But it invariably seemed to roll off of him like a noxious effluvium from an eczemic. How could she even be with him she demanded of herself.

How could she be without him? "Oh what difference does it make?" She grumbled aloud. Even as she did so Sergei entered.

"Does what make?" he complained.

"Nothing darling," Sasha beamed, "just thinking about the chores and all."

"Whatever. Don't tell me then. There's certainly no reason you ought to."

Sasha sighed as he left the room and turned on the radio. Marlene Dietrich singing in German. She breathed in deeply and contemplated the tension in her chest. She was trying to hope her way out of the argument she knew was coming.

Sergei reentered the room carrying a knife.

"Did you wash these?" His voice was as flat and dull as the knife, but Sasha caught the subtle glimmer along its edge. She knew where it was going. A lump caught in her throat.

"Yes." She croaked, trying to appear as irritably detached from his situation as he was from hers, spiting the fact he was already overwhelming the one with the other, already jabbing in and smothering out. Where was she before he had entered? What was she thinking? "So what?"

The yellow kitchen light was behind him as he stood in the dark door frame.

He could explode at any moment and fill the dark room in which Sasha stood, quavering and small. He was well beyond the limits of his physical body in terms of situation already. Already as she knew. He made as if to move. Sasha caught up her breath.

"I'm going to cut a piece from the loaf I brought back from the market. Would you care for some? I see you've cleaned damn near every surface in here and if I were you I'd be starving and probably on the brink of some psychotic fantasy or other involving me or your parents." Sasha blinked. They stood there for a couple of moments. "I'll cut a piece for you, and you can eat it or not. If I were you I would. But you're you, so God only knows what you'll do. Suit yourself as you will."

Sergei turned and the tapestry hung in the doorway fell back across it behind him. The light from the kitchen was snuffed and Sasha stood alone in the dark blue glow from beyond the white lace curtained window. She felt rather stupid, as she frequently did in Sergei's presence. Why would she admire him as if he were smart if next to him she didn't feel foolish? She began to move toward the other room. One of the floorboards squeaked beneath her bare foot and she froze. She stared cravenly at the yellow bordered rectangle of the tapestry defined door. Expecting attack? Silly.

She passed through into the empty room. She saw the loaf of bread on the table, with another slice cut from it and laying where it fell. She would have to scorn Sergei for not using a napkin beneath it. She choked, an arm suddenly wrapping around her neck from behind; she fell back against a man's body and the arm pulled her in so tightly the air from her lungs was left behind. She was about to let out a scream, but the man's hand covered her mouth. She felt his mouth draw near her ear, his warm breath on the sensitive flesh. She writhed but found her torso confined with her arms just below the elbows in a great bunch by his other sturdy arm.

"Hush my sweet butterfly," his voice washed into her ear. It was the soft, soothing voice of her lover. "I didn't need to use a napkin because you just washed the table, and the fresh bread leaves no crumbs." He turned her partially around and buried his mouth in the nape of her neck. The smoldering gentleness of his caress, in contrast to the slackening rigidity of his embrace, reduced Sasha's capacity for reason to that of a drunk little girl. She felt like stomping around and singing out loud "ich bin von kopf bis fu(sh) auf liebe eingestellt." She melted. What point was there in all her worrying? Must she always add clue to clue, piecing together evidence, fleshing out a case to substantiate her suspicion that Sergei didn't love her? She was as unlovable or as lovable as was he. They were human beings, holding one another now, and kissing. Nothing else mattered, and her heart flew to dizzying heights on the freedom of their shared passion. He loved her, of course. And she him.

story of a story teller

Pauline was leaning out of the cab window, framed by its yellow rigidity and also by her floppy red beret and baggy green sweater. The wind was smacking into the left side of her face and stroking the right side. In the blurred outside world which she was letting her head trail through she glimpsed a woman running up-hill like a fish swimming against a strong current. Pauline craned her neck to look.

The woman was trotting heavily in high heels and was unnaturally slim, as if constrained by an impossibly tight corset. She appeared to be panting and was incredibly red-faced, but she tromped on in a sort of dazed panic, driven by a focus distant from the young woman and, to the receding passenger of the passing taxi, altogether invisible.

Pauline shrank back into the vinyl-covered stuffing in the cab's back seat, feeling dizzy from traveling so fast and frivolously while looking at someone arduously crawling along in the opposite direction. She felt her consciousness divided between her own body and that of the woman ever further behind her now; as if by realizing she could have been that woman — or that that woman could have been her — and feeling a split second of empathy while in motion, Pauline saw a piece of herself get stuck to that other role, and now that piece was being stretched between the two bodies as they worked apart from each other. It was a tugging in the center of her chest, and she could feel herself losing her breath as she would have after running uphill in constrictive attire. What was worst was that this awful fatigue sank deeper and deeper in the further away she got from that woman.

She leaned forward as if to tell the driver to stop, as if she would get out and run back to that woman and take her by the arm and beg her for what was she running? But this was an absurd notion, and rather than speak, at the moment of action Pauline's mouth went dry, her throat stopped up and her eyes rolled around in her head. What was she thinking? What was the problem? She was on her way somewhere...nowhere really...and on the way she was seized by a panic attack. There was no good reason. She had seen a woman running, so what? Hadn't she already seen such sights as the city had to offer, and the countryside too, that such a routine occurrence shouldn't seem so awful? Surely she could dream up a reason for the girl to have been running. Perhaps she was late for a luncheon, as Pauline herself often was. But the panic, the look of sheer exhausted terror in her eyes! No, that couldn't have been. Pauline must have imagined it. She had somewhere to go, that was all, and was in a hurry. Wasn't Pauline in a hurry even now? The woman must have had some good reason. Why should it even be so important?

She was trying to breathe more deeply but her eyes were still spinning from one sight to another as if they couldn't bear to come to rest on one for long. She saw an old woman with a silver streak in her black hair waving flowers on a cobblestone street corner standing next to a pushcart overflowing with blooms. She saw a boy on a bicycle in a black, turtle-necked pull-over as he gestured to turn onto a less busy street. She felt the traffic swarming around her and felt as helpless as a little girl in a storm of locusts, the cars buzzing right up by the wide open window.

Everything was slowing down. The car was pulling up at the curb of the café. Pauline hesitated for a long moment, cringing below the throbbing colors of the world just outside, aware of the driver's accusing stare cut from his face and pegged on the tiny mirror in the middle of the wide front windshield. She collected herself as if unprepared to have arrived and waited for the air around her head to stop stirring like syrup. She couldn't even hear anything with her ears. The pressure in her head created only a dull roar.

She was waiting too long. She got up and stepped out onto the parched concrete. She couldn't remember ever having been this tall. She swayed like a giant, or a new-born fawn on its twig-like legs. Her thickly pulsing head must have been the size of a pumpkin, and stuck onto her toothpick body to frighten crows, or children. She remembered her sister's little girl with straw hair and a segmented smile of teeth and square holes, in the sunshine, warm, in a field of soft grass. She handed the cab driver his fare with an annoying awkwardness. As she turned to enter the dark door in the flat brick wall, she imagined the running young woman turning to look as she passed by in the cab; the panicked face was the beautiful face of her niece as a young lady.

Vomit rose up into Pauline's mouth and the blood left her face like rain from a cloud. She was so dizzy she would have liked to have fainted right there onto the

porch of the café, but with great effort she reached out her hand to the door jam and pulled her limp, wet cotton body inside.

the hero, clerk, shrine and town

"This is what I was born to do!" proclaimed the hero. He grasped the sword by its hilt and began to heave it towards the rumbling sky. The stone relinquished its grasp only ever so slowly, as though it were reluctant to part with its long-time mate, struggling to cherish and prolong every single final moment. The crowd around leaned forward, eyes widening, their mouths falling agape as they inhaled their preparatory breath; they eagerly awaited the triumphant instant when it would be appropriate, perhaps for the only time in their long, dull lives, to burst into regales.

"This is what I've been dying to do," mumbled the clerk beneath his breath. He nuzzled the rifle butt comfortably into the cavity of his shoulder, caressing the trigger with the inside of his narrow, trembling digit. He adjusted his glasses, which had fogged up under the stress of the moment, and mopped perspiration from his brow. In his scope squatted the hero's smug, lantern-jawed grin. He sucked in a single, shallow gasp before shutting his eyes and convulsing his finger.

The moment snapped with a resounding clatter and the crowd's souls, stretched out between their open mouths and the muscled upper arms of the hero, deflated with a faint stirring of the public air. The hero and the clerk both slumped down, sweat pouring down the clerk's furrowed grimace, and blood spilling across the last leer of the hero. A snow began to lightly fall, and to this day it has not stopped, nor eased nor flurried by a single special sliver.

Perhaps it is for the best, sigh the tired city masters; after all what's done is done. They stand around in tailed tuxedos and stove pipe hats for a while below the sacred shrine, which has been allowed to rust in the constant freeze, before they move along, to work, or, to home. It has been remarked by poets lonely enough to project and to objectify that the stone — its sword companion dangling precariously above it, suspended exclusively by the tip, gradually corroding away to a shrivel, yet immovable by mortal hand, unable to be either sunk deeper into its love or be freed for once and all and rent to victory — seems sad. And it has, as such, become the town's central monument to the spirit of its people. A few still hope another hero will come and once again bless the exhausted village; but the rest would only be uncomfortable hosting a second such attempt at transcendence of their concrete fate.

The Magician's Assistant

In a little village near the border a young boy was inscribed under a Magician to serve as his assistant. From as early as he could remember the boy had dreamed of becoming a Magician himself, but when he had become the assistant of this great man, the only Magician in the entire region, his dreams had all been almost entirely replaced by duty. He awoke, attended the Mage as he dressed and ate, in the cellar awaited serving him throughout the sunlit hours, occasionally coming within several yards of some important alchemical text his Master was considering that day, prepared whatever meal would satiate the Great One by evening, and finally attended him to bed, serving him in the darkness if it were required of him, for it is true that all True Magicians despise both bright lights and performing. Only between errands could the boy catch a fleeting moment to imagine that one, glorious day he would himself be trained and skilled in the ancient supernatural arts; although at such breaks in his schedule the frail, thin young man was frequently too exhausted from his labors, which spun around him so that he often felt like he was swimming,

becoming quite dizzy, and could only collapse, too confused and tired to think about the pride awaiting him in his increasingly distant future. Once a week the boy was allowed to kneel down by his Master's knee as he smoked from an incredibly long pipe before the open fire place, or in summer before the open windows, and hear a tale from the Magician's life recounted. As part of his contract the boy was to be taught one magic trick each year, of increasing difficulty. This had yet to happen, and the boy had long ago lost all sense of time, but he assumed a year had failed to pass. His Master had made no mention of the spell, nor had the boy any time in which to communicate his unfulfilment with the outside world, his parents, or those whom had been his friends in his previous life as a mere boy, before the wondrous existence he now endured as a Magician's assistant.

One evening, after the boy had become enough of a man that he was getting restless at night, he had the impudence to ask the Wizard if he was ever going to teach him a spell. The Mage, who had consumed some impressive quantity of port with his supper, eyed the lad with such suspicion the hope that had welled up and burst out from the boy's heart fizzled and wilted. The boy writhed with tense humiliation beneath the piercing eyes. Finally the Magician, apparently satisfied of his dominance, belched and looked away into the distance.

"I will tell you of how I became a Magician, boy, for I think it will save you from having to ever ask me again for what you ignorantly desire." After this he continued looking off into the horizon with narrowing eyes. Eventually they had closed altogether, and his head rolled down onto his shoulder. The boy took him to his great bed and lied him there beneath the covers.

As the boy lay awake in his tiny cot that night he tried to imagine what the magician must have been like at his age. How ambitious and eager, how he must have served and studied. He thought briefly of the Magician's parents standing in the back of the crowd at his first public showing, holding one another and smiling silently, as if choked to tears by the immensity of their pride. He was trying to recall the faces of his own parents when sleep trotted in on an enormous black horse and swung down its blade, sheering the boy's head from his shoulders with a single shadow.

For the following week the boy attended his Liege even more ardently than ever, coming on occasion uncalled to aid in some inconvenient obstacle, if only to meet repeatedly with harsh rebukes and stern scorn. By the end of the week the boy spent all his nights weeping in shame at the millions of ways he had perturbed the magician throughout this single span. As he curled round the magical ankles of his idol then, he could hardly keep from whimpering. He asked nothing and made no reference to the trick which he no longer deemed himself worthy to dream of.

"I suppose," the Magician said then, "you expect to listen to me telling you some story or other." The boy shook his head furiously without looking up, even clenching his eyes tightly closed, burning the image of his shame on the insides of his eyelids. "No, no. Do not bother to deny it, for it is beyond all doubt true. I can read your mind my little darling. I know what dirty thoughts you have. I know how you would love to serve me..."

The boy's head was slowly rising. He let his face be exposed to his master, but kept his gaze upon the floor. He allowed the ubiquitous man to witness the confusion playing about his young brow, so furrowed and dismayed.

"Come, come now. You are not so slow as all that. You understand what I expect of you." And it was true. The boy did know, and realized suddenly he was already moving to do it. His head was bending in toward the Wizard's pale lap, his mouth gaping open and his timid lips trembling; he could smell the scent of a very old coin.

The Mage's gaze was lost in the distance again, and the boy's twinkling eyes

stayed on it until the consciousness of his mentor wound back down into itself and he suddenly started and blinked. "Boy. You do not want to be a Magician," he said.

And this is the story he told the lad then:

"My destiny was written for me in the stars thousands of years ago by my family. They sat down in the lodges that were popular at the time and they decided it would be best for the survival of their bloodline if they made our name one of a magician. In order to do this, but surely you must know already. They were a jealous clan and needed little more coaxing to act than fearing they might not be the only ones to have come upon this plan. So they embarked immediately for the unknown land where magic was, that they could bring a little back with them. They traveled in what tradition told them was the correct direction, and within several generations had finally come to the frontier. Had I started upon this journey when I was your age I would not even have reached a point where I might dare to dream of the possibility of the existence of my destination by the time I was as old as I am now. And I am nearly three hundred and fifty years old already. I have heard it said that with each generation the speed of travel is doubled, but still; one can never go directly to this distant realm. It is as far away from us everyday as it was the day before, no matter what direction we go in, and no matter how fast we move. By the time my ancestors got there the land was almost completely forgotten by all other men save for the few with whom my family had been competing. This land, this unreachable country, is very very hot, for the sun never goes down there, or at least so it is said, not for very long. It was here the story goes that my Great Great Grandfather was stung. He looked down, I have been told, and saw not an insect, but a very small negress, garbed only in a corset, with roseate crystalline wings on her shoulders. The place where her injection broke his skin became swollen almost immediately, and for the rest of his long life he suffered with feverish hallucinations, bed-ridden, in this very very hot, unreachable land. The result of the sting was Magic that would flow in my family's blood forever, but the cost was the ability to dream. For when you already have magic, of what remains to dream? The swelling never died down in the least and, on the contrary, began to increase almost imperceptibly, and to redden, until by his demise my Great Great Grandfather was veritably gelatinous. Despite this state he managed to sire seventeen offspring after being stung by the magic, and these seventeen are the heirs of all the princes of the world. Each of his sons had seventeen sons, and these are all the head priests of the world. Each of these sons had seventeen sons and these are all the aristocrats of the world. Each of these sons had seventeen sons, of which I am one, and these are all the Magicians in the world. And none of us have ever been able to dream. Now the world is very very big, my son. So big that it will continually be further discovered until there are no longer any of us left to discover it. It is more vast than anyone has yet possibly imagined. But it is not big enough, and can never be big enough, for a single, new Magician."

The boy didn't cry that night in his tiny cot, which had grown immense around him as he lay awake. He drifted off gently into the shadows of sleep, his head swimming silently in millions of colors, as he dreamed not of being a Magician, but a man.

The Retreatest and the Rebel

My friend has begun to become a ghost. He is slowly disappearing everywhere he goes so that even those who have known him for years can barely recognize him. Yesterday he appeared in my study quite unexpectedly and, upon questioning, admitted to having come in a long while before, entering through the wall. It is all

about vibration he attempted to explain. He simply shifts his weight through the solid object and steps inside. He tired me; it was no use telling him I couldn't understand him. Shortly he began to talk of things which hadn't happened as though they were expected customs and I asked him to be quiet. Not long later I noticed he was gone.

Apparently a mutual friend of ours saw him fly. She accounts how, after shifting his weight through something solid, he seemed to have lost enough of it within the object that he now defied gravity. He floated up, himself somewhat surprised, and drifted away from the café where they were having lunch. She hasn't seen him since, although, according to the waiter, he returned later to settle the bill.

The first thing about him which became a ghost must have been his eyes. He has worn glasses for as long as I have known him and, one must suppose, for a sufficient duration previous to that as well. Maybe he has had the spectacles since birth, though no one has ever dared to ask him, nor will they ever; it is almost as bad for him as if he had wings. He does read alot however, and this would be a clue as to why his eyes became ghosts. It is similar to his flying as a result of losing mass from passing it through inconspicuous edifices. Futility is his buoyancy.

No one seemed to notice very much when he turned as pale as dust, but now that he can fly there are a few of us who even admire him a little bit. Although never to his face, of course. His present state, which, although it makes him altogether morbid company, nonetheless amuses me; though rather in a bitter way, the more his infirmity being in my presence makes me all too aware of my own shortcoming, which I consider to be at least as abominable and embarrassing as he does his. In fact I wish I were as lucky to be a mere ghost, to have such powers as lightness of being; I am always drawn back downward into the mud by the very heaviness of my body. The misfortune my friend suffers makes me smile, compared to my own unendurable fate.

For I have begun to grow a face in the back of my head. I awoke one morning and, while burying my face in my cupped palms, discovered a lump with my finger tips; a lump growing in the back of my skull. At first I put off having it examined, as though the diagnosis would be more of a terror, or at least more of an annoyance, than the actual symptoms and, please understand, at first they were not so bad. After nearly a month, perhaps five weeks, the lump had fully developed two nostrils. I could feel short, stiff nose hairs lining the twin pug rings with my fingers. I decided it would be better not to tell a doctor then. You can surely imagine my shame.

Now the face has grown in almost entirely, to the extent that I can sense through its perceptors, and, what is far worse, the face which I am used to, the face with which I was born and grew, is slowly vanishing. At the same rate the deformity ripens, my natural visage is washed over by soft flesh, smooth as silt. My nose was the first to go, collapsing inwards on itself, followed by my nostrils occluding. I was in a restaurant at the time. I walked in with nostrils fore, and left with them aft, needless to say somewhat more hastily than I had arrived.

The last to go are my eyes, and as I sit here writing this they are already beginning to fade, the paper before me darkening, swallowing the words almost as quickly as I scribble them down. I can see better over my shoulder; but I cannot use this secondary pair to express myself, for my hands are still reversed, and it is indeed a clumsy enough process to begin with. My new eyes are blooming through weakening lids, groggily awakening, tired and confused. Everything they see is new to them, and to me through them, for colors and light are dazzling when caught in their refractive happenstance. They dream strange, incomprehensible dreams...

I wonder, about the irises: what color will they be; the windows to my new soul.

The Suicide Doctor

The suicide doctor was dying. He had known it for quite some time. In fact, he had realized when he was still only very little that death would find him awaiting it one day. As a boy he had been read by his father, before his father had died that is, the complete stories of Franz Kafka; so he learned early on the feeling of being irretrievably lost. He sought to find his way free, but found only further nothingness, limitless nothingness, infinite nothingness. The Law, he came to understand (that is, he came to *imagine* in order to alleviate his fear of never understanding — which was, in fact, the case) was both immense and illusory: it could not be penetrated, but it must be sought. The impregnable door blocked by the unaging guard could neither be entered nor ignored. It had been made for the man from the country, if not to enter it, than to stand before it as he did.

It is necessary to mention Kafka now only because it was reading him which led the young man to become a suicide doctor. He imagined the world in Kafkaesque terms, and felt that if more people did so as well (which he mistakenly believed to be the way of humanity) then the world would not only become Kafkaesque but would become so nauseating that many proud people would rather be killed honorably than continue being worn down by complex bureaucracies and ceaseless time. Kafka's focus, the doctor imagined while still a medical student, was on the gross body, not on the grandeur of the mind, not on the splendor of the soul. It was Kafka's weariness, his physical fatigue with his environment and his status and his relationships, that defined his characters. They did not have overly complex desires, they did not strive for anything so above the mundane, though it was that they all expected convenience, or closure, or connection from the wide world that brought on their exhaustion. There was a certain blaming of the body for these meager expectations, a certain loathing of it and persecution of it for even its simplest needs that pervaded Kafka's work. Just as the Nazis blamed the Jews for what little social pull they had on the mind at work behind capital-based societies, so Kafka saw the body as something to be despised, and preferably destroyed, for its annoying functions. It was always this wasn't it, that brought the Jews low? Their ultimate agreement with their captors that, in some inexplicable way which they could not grasp or had long ago forgotten, they were guilty of some crime that was worthy of such torture. Their lack of pride. Kafka saw the world of strivation the same way Nietzsche did, but failed to impute the glory of selfishness to it; seeing instead only elaborate, incomprehensible structures of formality, and extreme physical punishment for even the slightest unintentional infraction of behavioral regulation.

It was, anyway, from Kafka that the suicide doctor learned to eradicate the body to alleviate its suffering in its environment, and by Kafka that he was likewise influenced to believe that there would soon be more and more poor workers and those employed in the service sector who would come to his office with requests based on similar reasoning. What Kafka and he both failed to count on, however, was communism: the assertion of the disheartened, the disenfranchised, the un-proud, as a group-self. The boosting of egos comprised of unions. The formulation of wild dreams of solidarity and salvation. Geist, Id, selfish lust, finally motivating the poor and hopeless. And so the suicide doctor's office was mostly empty.

It had been that way his whole life. His business was slow. That was part of his business, in much the same way the smell of fish was part of the business of being a fish monger. He went to the office expecting little, came home having gained less than that, ate nothing at all and slept dreamlessly. His life too was quite slow. He did not have much desire to go to bed with girls and he considered this a very lucky

occurrence for them and their kind. Even less so because it was true, girls didn't seem to want to go to bed with him. Perhaps it was that he gave off an unattractive aura, one of dust and formaldehyde; or perhaps it was simply no girl was interested in dating someone whose career was as stagnantly immobile as the suicide doctor's. In either case regarding them the effect regarding him remained the same, forever, as indelible as the word of God Almighty, everlasting, forever, and never changing.

But now his life was ending. Winding down like an old watch. And he was beginning to make preparations. There were so many people whom he had to call, to inform, despite the fact that he seemed to have no friends, no family, no loved ones, and would even appear to the stranger passing him on the street to be a widower. Yet he found himself involved day after day for several weeks on the phone, talking about times he could barely remember with people he hadn't seen for years, sometimes decades, and whom he knew he would never see again. How he scuttled from one side of his cluttered office to the other, trying to impose order on the ancient, crumbling documents; how he sat down on the floor hunched over a particular manuscript or other that happened to catch his wild glance and usher up some memory, how he cried at such times. Those recalled events can never come to pass again, and all those sepia days are burning inward from their edges. It remained only that he dispose of what of his life was singular, that is, what is non-reusable waste, and keep that minute proportion which would outlive him — those records whereby he would convey his life's work, his emotions, his essence, into the hands of idiot posterity, where "he" would be filed away somewhere, some immense subterranean warehouse, in a single manila folder amongst millions in drawers piled up to the ceilinged sky; where he would likely be misplaced and lost forever. Better he leave no disorganization, he reasoned, as what order he imposed in life would surely begin to entropy rapidly enough following his demise. And that is how he saw it. He did miss his life already, standing only in the long shadow of his immanent death, he surely regretted not only *losing* the things which he had had but also *choosing* the things which he had over Other, even-more-appealing-things, which he had sacrificed in a way. He mourned not only what he Was, but also what he Was Not, what, now, he never could be. But his death itself he approached with indifferent logic. Anal retentive logic even, as he felt compelled to put everything together into a unified system before he had lost his chance to do so.

But he saw himself failing. And what was worse he saw that there would be no one into whose hands he could deliver this excreted product of his whole life. The papers would, as soon as they were stacked high to be disposed of, fall over dramatically and mix themselves with those meant to be saved. And he was prepared to cry out in frustration when he inevitably realized there was no one to call out to. He would clean up the same mess repeatedly, finding the same documents each time to be less and less melancholy and more merely perturbing, and at the end it would all collapse again all over top of itself. He beat his fists against the walls in teary-eyed impotence. He cursed himself, which was ultimately all he could do, for waiting so long before beginning this task. How could he have known, though, how monumental it would prove to be? Who could have predicted the suffering he now had to endure?

Who, more imperatively, would kill him? That, he realized one morning, standing over the mess which had reconstrued itself over night, was the only issue remaining that had any real importance. The mess in his office was only something he had been using to distract himself from what he had learned during those weeks of phone calls. And hadn't he really wanted the piles to keep falling? Hadn't he subconsciously willed himself into a corner, trying to ward off that evil demon that

Cheshire Trilogy

by: Jonathan Barlow Gee

now flew in his face? No one whom he had talked to, no one he had met in all his years of service, no one he had ever known in all his long, long life, no one in the entire vast and yawning world would come to his aid now, to kill him when he was dying. All those people whom he had had mercy on; where are they when he needed to be pitied, to be put out of misery himself? And all those whose friends and relatives he had killed, all those widows and orphans he had created, had long ago forgiven him. Had he not forgiven himself they asked? He hadn't time to think of such things. He had already arranged his funeral, and could not afford to pay for another one, later; how much later? How much longer would he endure this way? What new symptoms of his illness had yet to manifest? He felt consumed by his own shadow.

Curled up alone in his darkening office, gnawing on his collar: here shall we leave him.

Dick

I'm down at the docks again, watching the waves like strings of pearls rolling up blue in the moonlight. In the distance the sound of the dive where I know I'll end up again, the dive where I drink myself to death every so often. They know my face there but they don't care to know my name. The empty vodka bottle falls out of my numb hand and splashes into the water, floating up and down awhile. I can feel the world turning underneath me; or maybe I'm just drunk.

I scratch at my implants where the skin is healing over them. They bleed a little bit. They bleed alot. It doesn't matter. How could I have been so blind? So stupid? I missed every clue she ever gave me. They were right in front of me, but my mind was somewhere else. On someone else. Still her, but some other her, some perfect her. And now the real her is gone. She was more perfect than I knew but I wouldn't get it. She was too shy to come and tell me. She couldn't predict how I would react, or else just enjoyed making me guess. She had to test me to see if I was the one; and I wasn't.

This isn't going well. I haven't got any more leads. I haven't gotten a new lead in two years. The defining case of my life and I've got nothing to show for it. Some days I just sit in the office and listen to the phone ring. My secretary quit. I hadn't been able to pay her for a year anyway and now, thanks to her loyalty to me, her faith in me, she's somewhere in this city maybe sleeping on the street. But what do I care about her loyalty, her faith? She isn't the one I loved. And I wasn't the one my lover loved. So what? So I waste my life here? Washing up? Drowning in a bottle?

It doesn't matter. My problems don't matter. They aren't pretty enough or unique enough. They aren't humble enough. I'm not a great man. I'm not a common man. I'm nobody. When I'm dead the only people who remember I was ever alive are those whose lives I made worse. Even when I solve a case, the look on some poor housewife's face to find out her husband's been fucking some stewardess. It's a bitter world and nobody gets out without a scar across the surface of their heart. I don't even want to live more than half the time. It's only laziness that's gotten me this far.

I pull out my gun. Everybody has a name. Everybody does millions of things in their lives. Millions of things that don't matter to anyone. My heart is rusted. Forget this. Forget all this, I'm never doing this again. I won't have it. I fire into the night.

earful

he stroked the receiver gently, imagining her ear — the delicate folds of flesh, some stiff, others floppy. The vagina, he imagined, was, though tightly muscled, not stiff enough in a certain way. It was like a bowl of sauce that could hold onto you — but not like the refined ripples of the ear: not so finely sculpted — almost rude in its

insatiable, toothless desire, incompleteness and ironically curious expression; the ear, however, never imposed such worship or such mystery. The ear, no... the ear was ivory, carved and smoothed, and without the idea of lust — of giving; of taking... merely plastic reception — nor, by smell or suggestion, of the sea and all its uncharted depths, nor of the childish fear of falling or of enclosed places and graves (“vagina dentata”) or of not being able to adequately fill the question (“penis envy”). It was like a shell washed up from the oceanic cunt, bleached clean by the sun, and rubbed smooth by gritty brine and slick foam; the womb itself washed up like a jellyfish, stinging tendrils calling out alluringly, pissing awful colored dyes. The ear, he thought with a mild erection and a distant concentration about his forehead and cheeks, was very perfect; very perfect. It, with the eye (though, like the testes, he conceived of the eyes as wholly productive organs, seeping sugar-milk tears like stalactites and eroding out the hollow world before them, necessarily external, which only happened to be sunk into yonic sockets with hair-lined foreskin frontal sheaths rather than proudly mounted on exposed phallic stalks where they would be in constant danger the complete encapsulation from which would yet be counter to their visual purpose), are the orifices through which reality is funneled. Spirituality was mostly the prostate and the G-spot; the feeling of *deep* arousal, almost pain, over that which is overwhelmingly appealing — the hope for god, miracles and life after death; the sweaty, musty, earthy odor of shared sexuality; the helpless feeling of unbearable, unbreakable confinement; the permanence of loss; the dread of freedom; the opportunity to abuse, hurt, revenge or destroy — anything over which the adrenal gland is aroused. Reality, he thought, was more logical, less lustful, as trapped by unenforceable laws and the inevitable nature of obedience as we are: this is what pours through the rigidly opened ears, he thought, through the gelatinous yokes of the eyes, saturating the spongy brain. What he knows is a sun and an earth — but only an eye that sees a sun, an ear that hears of an “earth.” The body feels and is so aroused as to actually ache. It inflicts wounds against another body’s hips with the rhythmic thrusting of its own, just as noumenal ideas are bled forth by the lashing of the tongue within the yonic mouth. The head is another pair of hips; inside it are digesting and gestating strange notions indeed. The clitoral, phallic tongue, of course! And the beard that grows down over the mons pubis of the chin! The mouth ejaculates that which is produced within the brain, made viscous within imagery overflowing from the eyes in dreamy, milky streams, and originally fertilized by stimulating penetration of the ears! One head uses the mouth to inflict wounds upon another, the serpentine tongue lapping at the supple ridges of the ear. The physical and the lustful titillate the body, but it is intercourse with reality itself which arouses the head, and drives the mind spongy mind to wetness and edginess, to absolute distraction. Love of objects, of ideal forms which can never exist in reality, love of symbols of power and domination: is true love! is unprovable love and undying, unreal love. Is immortal love born of decision and never aging or changing. Is belief. Is deeply moving. He was going too deep he realized. He suddenly held the phone away from his flesh and looked at the ear piece through squinting, suspicious eyes. A telephone. A shell which you put your ear up to and hear, not the incomprehensible, calm waves of the ocean like God breathing, but the soft murmuring of another human, their mouth pressed flatly and resonantly against your temple. A teleological phone. “Reach out and touch someone.” The mouth breathes like an asshole, he thought in a panic, and what is pushed out between the smug, pursed lips — is shit. He smelled the ear piece. It smelled like plastic and electrolytes, which, in turn, smelled like semen.

Famil LéAire

IT was by the inconveniences of it that Famil remembered he was alive. He would remember it when he got sick and couldn't get up. He would remember it when he got a zit, or when there was just nothing to do. After masturbation it would occur to him as a headache. It occurred to him when he was hungry or when he felt like there was no one who would ever hug him.

He had heard others mention *feeling* alive, but he hadn't ever done any of the things their conversations were about, and he assumed unless he did these insane and threatening things then he might never feel alive at all. He enjoyed this prospect. He couldn't imagine it being a pleasant feeling if it was at all the same as the way he felt when he suddenly realized *he* was alive.

Like one morning, when Famil was awakening from dew sticky dreams to the rasping light of mid-morning. His face was a cobweb. Sleep peeled off his seeping eyes like a soft scab. His mouth was as moist as a cunt and all his muscles were sore. He lay there feeling like a clam uprooted from its shell until, eventually, he put one foot out from beneath his cotton blanket to test the temperature of the room. His brow was damp with perspiration but his foot was a frozen turkey wing. The blanket was wet with his drool where he clutched it up tightly to his whiskery chin. His lips were covered in paste and foul tasting. The room seemed huge and empty in the pale yellow sunlight screeching in through the wide opened window. "How can light seem so *thin*?" he demanded distastefully. He felt sickly and wretched and didn't want to get up. He wanted to go back to sleep and to stay there. The light in the room was just like somebody banging on the high keys of a piano. His head was already beginning to throb.

"No," he told himself sternly, "I must get up. Else wise, how will the bills get paid? Eh? Who will do my work for me if I do not go? Eh?" He was struggling weakly but passionately with the coverlet. "Nobody, that's who. Ha! Would Kabalreth do it? Of course not! Nor Malkuthela, no matter what her eyes say that bitter little mouth of hers would never let itself be seen doing another person's work. Ha! I am the only man in my division who will do my work. All the others wouldn't do it for me, even if they were paid extra." His foot fell heavily on the wood floor. "They hate me. And I could care less for any of them! All the better for them then if we must all come to work and never allow each other one day's relief. Better for them then if their lack of camaraderie means I must come in today and suffer their presence. For now they too will suffer mine!" He hated how helpless he was to this motivational drama. "I'll have my spite out on their intolerable selfishness by doling out hatred to them with the sweetest smiles. Ah, bitter syrup. Another day."

He stopped thinking when he saw the reflection of his disheveled form hunched over the bathroom sink. The gray bags under the eyes. The black stubble dirtying the wax-like skin. His hair a nest for ugly birds. He imagined their eggs cracking on his domed skull and the goo oozing down the sides of his head and across his face. "Women used to use egg whites as makeup," he thought dumbly. He watched his large hands fumbling with the delicate spigot and then felt the chill of the water as he saw his broad palms filling up with the stuff. He shut his eyes and brought the cold liquid up to his face with a quick tugging gesture. It beaded up and rolled off into the hair-clogged drain at the bottom of the sink the first several times he did this, but as he patiently repeated the action the water distilled the grease more and more until finally his face felt wet as well as cold. Then he was awake.

He knew the moment he was awake because it occurred to him at those times that he could not have gotten back to sleep even if he had gone back to the soft

warmth of the bed and buried himself in the cozy bedspread for the rest of the day. He would have only gotten oily again, both too hot and too cold. He would have laid there in the glaring sunlight with his feet poking out of the bottom of the sheets and the cotton blanket pulled up around his chin and ears, with his eyes wide open, staring at the dust hovering in suspension in the steep rays of sunshine, thinking about all the work he wasn't doing and would have to do when he went back to his job. He wanted to cry thinking about the lost comfort, but there was no point. It was gone now. That was that.

He strode back into the bedroom on aching legs, the floor groaning in a way which caused him acute annoyance with every step he made. He felt now just like the light in the room. Thin and harsh. Exposed, raw, fresh but still a little tainted. The light was screaming through his wooden head just like his heart was screaming through the heavy bars of his chest. His lungs were too leathery to exhale enough. He was still holding the soft towel from the bathroom in both hands and he looked down at it. It was calm and still in the white light. "I feel alive," he thought. "I'm alive."

Jenny and Peter

Jenny became a writer describing the world to Peter, who was blind. She loved him because the first words he said to her were, "you must be a writer." She was actually a clerk. They had been content for six years. Six years because it was more flattering to be called something she was not. It had always infuriated her to be told what she was. She knew what she was. She had chosen to become it. If, when she was almost twenty, she had been debased to be called a whore by her lover, it was only because she herself had consented to be so inscribed to him. But to be called a *writer* — what an inspiration!

Towards the end she had been trying to explain the class struggle to him. "When you see a fat cat," she would begin, "the assumption isn't that he *hunts* well, but that he's *well fed*. By now, especially from the perspective of those whom history has forced into a submissive position, it can hardly be denied by any rational thinking person that the human animal is entirely domesticated. Therefore there can be no instinctive or inborn justifications for wage slavery. It exists as a product of conscious immorality, not natural selection." As she would turn away from Peter she would make a repressed grunting noise, as though struggling to contain her disgust at his indifference to the ugliness of the majority of the world. Over her shoulder she would hiss, "it's not as though a bourgeois could actually survive in the wild." Eventually they mutually agreed to avoid each other.

Gerard she had met at a party. He was dressed like a beatnik painter in a black beret, black sunglasses, a black turtle neck and white overalls splattered with the primary colors. She watched how he stroked at his tight black goatee as he held a cigarette between pursed lips and hollowed his cheeks sucking in nicotine. "I'm a writer" she announced suddenly, upon marching up to him. "That's great," he sneered, "now drop your pants, bend over, and I'll show you the secret liberal handshake." That night he spanked her after sharing black coffee. She felt equal to him because he always asked to be hurt back in the same ways he would hurt her. In six months she was more miserable than ever, alone again because he'd fallen for a teenage Trotskyist, who wasn't as "selfish" as she.

After that she met John the Democratic candidate. He was fun to ride around with because whenever he got cut off in traffic he would wave his fist out the window and holler, "you pompous low self-monitor!" or "petty bourgeois! Your days

of oppression is over!" He was forced to drop out of the race though because he took the fifth amendment rather than answer a reporter who asked him if he had been popular in high school. Moments before their relationship ended later that night, John confessed to Jenny that he had been popular — but only because he ran for class president on a ticket of white supremacy and athletic empiricism. Jenny began to wonder if she would ever find a partner worthy of her eagerness to share her artistic vision.

She was considering going back to Peter, even if it meant humbling herself to the level of her former role as clerk, sharing with him only in secret the fact that she was a writer. He may not have ever seen the truth, but at least he'd never had to lie.

Denise became a painter by laying it on thick. Like life was her own royal jelly she painted the town red. By the time she became Jenny's grandmother her hands had become so stiff from clenching life by its brushes, palettes, canvases and color tubes all they could do was tremble. It was no longer lust for experiences of life that made Denise shake like she was receiving a low current of electricity. Now she did it even when she was asleep, and had to wear a special cubicle helmet to bed to prevent her rolling over and smothering herself with her own rigid palpitations.

But Jenny still respected Denise and came to her for advice about anything important. Denise, unlike Jenny's parents, was never too busy with work to give Jenny the feverish lectures on the value of self-interest and the importance of the work ethic which every child needs when going through their maturing phase.

Jenny asked Denise about Peter, and Denise told Jenny this: "There are a lot of Darwinians and a lot of Tsarists out there telling women that what they should want is a male provider. I happen to be one of the growing number of the female species proud to be perversions of this outmoded genetic tendency. I say, go ahead and be the masculine provider yourself, ladies! And for your pleasures as the despot take a male slave; I'm sure there are plenty who will be relieved to be so unburdened of their patriarchal responsibilities. But remember — you're the Man now. If your 'better half' isn't putting out all it takes to satiate your pleasure principle, well get rid of 'em! How many times have we been dumped for not being whores enough? And now it's our turn to lose our patience! Oh what a wonderful world this will be —"

To which Jenny replied, interrupting, "Grandmother, *Peter*. What about *Peter*...?"

"I think you should've stayed with Gerard."

Jenny went home to Peter and soon forgot about being a writer. After all, she would never be able to write anything Peter could read, and if the rest of the world was anything like what it consistently appeared to be, nobody really cared what anyone else thought anyway, nor was there anyone, therefore, who deserved to read her thoughts just because she had had the courtesy to write them down.

Mikail

Mikail had found a gun in the swamp behind his cottage. It was an enormous thing, sculptured metal, so artistic it didn't seem as though it were an instrument of murder. In fact, it seemed far too large to use. Although, one must remember, Mikail himself was a very small boy.

The children in the sandbox had teased him on Tuesday again because he was so thin. He had gritted his teeth until tears flowed from his eyes in the blinding sepia-tone sunshine. But nobody cared. No teacher came to save him, nor any God in heaven either. It was far too comfortable in heaven for anyone to trouble themselves

with the unpleasantries of a small boy like Mikail, or even the anguish of the enormous world. God reminded Mikail of his older brother, locked up in his smoke-filled room.

The train was going by and Mikail watched its pistoned wheels. They crushed the track beneath them, like an angry lover, but they were both so strong. Made of steel. After the train had gone by Mikail set his hand upon the tortured metal and it was so warm. He hugged it tight with both his palms and set his cheek upon it. It was so warm he smiled, a small erection blossoming in his trousers.

His mother dragged Mikail by the hand between the skyscrapers while he spun around, his face aloft, feeling insignificant and lost beneath the slender trough of sky. She bought him a little outfit cropped and colored to resemble the uniform of a sailor. He didn't want to wear it but he remembered the tracks and allowed it to be put on. His mother smiled. The world was made of metal. Mikail understood.

When he got home he ran immediately to his room, burning his knees on the carpet as he slid into position, and retrieved the shoe box from beneath his bed. Its lid unsealed with a whisper, as if it were exhaling yesterday's air. The window had been left open and the smell of freshly cut grass from the graveyard in the adjacent lot wafted in on breezes almost too light to be felt and filled up the entire room. Mikail held the gun in both of his flattened, moist palms, according to how he imagined a sacred object should be held. Delicately he ran the very tip of his index finger along the ridges between the raised steel designs, caressing the creases where metal abutted metal.

He stood for a while beside the train tracks in the early, early evening, but began to feel tired and instead decided to sit down. He chose a spot some distance away from the planks and rails, though still well within the area covered by gravel which he had been told to never enter, under any circumstances, and squatted low amongst some foliage. Shortly he could hear the whistle of a train, and, after some amount of time almost too insignificant to mention, he could hear the vibration of the engine. In fact, he could feel it.

Now bear in mind that Mikail was a small boy and, though he wore a sailor suit, there is no reason to believe that what follows is not true.

The train began passing by at an unhurried rate of speed. What it lacked in forward velocity it more than made up for in the intricacy of its internal workings. From where he sat Mikail could clearly distinguish each individual part as the entirety of this great machine scrolled by before his face. There were wheels and cogs no larger than a fairy, in some cases driving components much larger than Mikail's bed. The engine itself was the size of a house and the train continued on far longer than it would take to tour Mikail's primary gynaseum twice.

None of this was particularly unexpected, although it was leant an air of savagery by the uncomfortable whinnying of horses which were, apparently, being shipped inside the interconnected box cars by the hundreds of thousands. In one boxcar the horses were unsatisfied nearly to the brink of madness — Mikail could hear them comfortlessly tromping about and shriveled in fear beneath their unearthly, inconsolable braying up towards heaven. Hope was whipping them, driving them crazy. It was their hope, calling out futilely to a god who would never respond, which most chilled Mikail there, in the paisley shadow of the colossal train.

At about two thirty, though probably two o'clock, that is, half way through the train's daily passage which, because of the side of the tracks from where Mikail preferred to view it, blocked him from returning to his home until it was complete, Mikail watched a man jump down from the machine's skeletal steel side. From where Mikail was situated, and due to the low angle of the sun at that hour, he saw the man

as a mere silhouette, garbed, it would seem, in a wide brimmed hat and a long coat of sturdy material. As such, Mikail took him to be a cowboy, of the type he had learned in school. It seemed silly to call him a boy however, as Mikail could see plainly that this was a grownup, so he settled on referring to the stranger as Cowman in his mind.

Cowman fell quite a long way, keeping his balance in the air despite the incredible wind currents generated by the motivation mechanisms backing every wheel. Birds often followed along in the train's wake, playing about in these air waves, but there were not so many today, and none gave this man any stay. When he came to ground his legs collapsed and he curled up into a sphere that rolled back some ways from the train. Mikail repositioned himself cautiously to try and find with his eyes the spot in the brush wherein the creature had disappeared. Suddenly Cowman stood up from a spot very near Mikail, shaking off the twigs and leaves from his clothing and from his hair. Mikail could not hear him for the nearby roaring of the train, but he appeared to be mumbling something. He didn't see Mikail, and the small boy took the opportunity, with his heart frosted over and his eyes quite wide, to retreat further into his camouflage of overgrowth. After standing still and staring at the train rolling by for what seemed like an hour the man finally moved. He began stomping around in the thickets, bent over, ripping up plants by the roots. This violence sometimes came close to Mikail, but was mostly centered around a spot about fifty yards out, near where Mikail had found the pistol.

It was coming up on six thirty or seven o'clock when Mikail finally figured this out. The light was getting dim and turning amber all over. The train had ceased going by a half an hour or so before and now the buzzing of evening insects filled the still and heavy air. They surrounded Mikail's head, crawling across the skin on his arm. They reminded him of gentlemen; the stately grasshopper in his tuxedo doffing his top hat at the passing ladybug. The outspoken cicada and the party-hopping June bug swimming around in the same thin breath as slinks the nefarious cockroach, twisting his waxed moustache like a villain from antiquity. Mikail knew he should be home by now. His parents were probably worried.

In fact, when Mikail finally returned home, he found that his parents were not worried. Further, he discovered them in such a condition whereby even the thought of further concern on Mikail's part, on their own part, or on the part of anything in this tiny world was quite beyond their capacity. You see, Mikail chanced upon his parents dead.

This troubled Mikail far less than it had for him to be late for dinner. Being late for dinner, in Mikail's mind, was an inexcusable offense against the efficiency of that great machine which constituted civilization, the ultimate product of human evolution, the culmination of all struggles thus far throughout the history of mankind's tragedies, wars, old love stories, and cape and sword. On the other hand, being dead was simply the result of a particular function of nature, that much greater, still soft, still gelatinous and green machine which continually produced and sustained the steel grinding against steel of society, which produced Mikail.

Mikail burnt his knees, but not so badly, sliding down to recover the flimsy box from beneath his bed. He tossed aside the lid and revealed only the box's emptiness, which was unexpected to Mikail simply because his brain insisted it had used his hands to fill the box with some certain object it had located within the world.

And now Mikail felt with the synapses inside his skin the same currents of electricity the Cowman had felt. The perception, called fear, of the sensation, a chill, of nothing more than absence itself.

Nature had reclaimed into its swamps, into its softest, dampest green bunches of fur, the gun Mikail had, like a foolish kitten or a child, mistakenly come to call his

own. God owns all, after all, all is given to him, returned to him, as smoke, steam rising up from scalding gears, as oil dribbling down a frigid console, as men, as those pink, yellow, ruddy and brown blobs that are the virus inside their own machine, between steel, within the grinding. Nothing is relinquished to man without intention, without careful, insipid and loathsome precalculation, a sneering, hateful predetermination that finds man beneath contempt, the only conditionable object in the entire cold and empty universe.

Here there is grass and sugary thick water pulling. Here there is a great city, stacked up to the clouds and moving like an enormous, hungry clock. And here between the two, belonging more to neither, the son of one and father of the other, owner of neither, here stands man, in all his quivering, weak and frightened glory. Here stood Mikail knowing not what to do.

He lost something, he knew. But what had he lost? He could not remember. Was it ever even his? Was it ever even real? Given and taken away by a reality too complex for anyone to understand anymore, the power he had imagined deriving from this small, simple machine, an object within a mechanical world, must exist nowhere at all outside of his own mind. A power entirely without consequence is as much of a weakness as a power with uncontrollable or undesirable consequences.

Mikail felt his mind grinding against the rules he understood of the world in which he lived. He was moving forward, progressing, evolving, growing into a vague understanding of those few spokes and cogs which would control him for the rest of his existence. But he didn't want to be. He was resisting; which made it painful.

The machine was eating him up from inside out. The machine which he had leapt into; the machine which he had been dropped into. The machine that his parents seemed to own, but which was, he knew, an object in the world itself, and therefore part of the properties of god, who was only the black, unbreathable fumes rising off of the steel beast's wretched and thoroughly accursed hide. Mikail was softness, an incomplete, given up on by God and by the prettiness of nature. He was now the project of the machine; he cooperated in every action; it made it go more smoothly, even though it still hurt. Mikail required a mechanical extension of himself into the world to feel remembered affectionately by god.

A picture of himself was as real as the skin upon his face. He knew this, his soft mind held this compacted bite of insight tightly, growing tiny teeth around it, his soft mind of gum, chewing and sucking at its own liquids, drooling, now like the gaping maw of some small shark, full of frightening fangs, fangs that even scared Mikail. If only he had taken a picture of the gun, for he was already forgetting what it felt like to hold it. He understood that it had some great meaning, some meaning too great for him to ever understand; but it had summoned the suspicions and the dread of the Cowman, it had killed his parents and had disappeared into the emptiness between objects that comprises by exclusion the Godliness of nature. The gun had had some great cause much greater than Mikail's own skin, some mighty power.

As Mikail knelt there upon the carpet of his floor considering all these things the world continued turning around itself, chasing its tail, unaware of this little speck of fleshiness, and uncaring of his little problems. Somewhere out in space a cloud called God chuckled to itself as it touched its private parts. Somewhere the Cowman felt complete.

Do you understand? I hope you do, or don't; I hope you know if you do or don't. I hope you have learned that the world doesn't care, I hope you already knew that and are angry. I hope you have learned that the world knows you're angry; I hope you already knew that the world hates you for it. The world hates you, it doesn't want filth like you slithering across its skin and thinking. Everything you think offends

God. Thought is inefficient. It is unnecessary to the evolution of our machine. Time.

Sally

Sally hated her job. It wasn't that she hated the work; she frequently found herself forgetting that she was doing work, and was surprised when the pile from which she had been withdrawing subjects was suddenly gone, equally surprised by the towering stack of completed and outgoing forms looming up over her on her other side. She thought about people while she worked, and it was these people whom she hated. It can no more be said that she hated thinking about the people than it can that she hated doing the work. She survived both by ignoring them, and directed all her mental energy toward constructing and detonating the faces of those whom she despised. Not the least of which was her own face, the face of this "Sally" herself.

Her job was a fairly simple one: to categorize by participant's name all the activities completed throughout the day. There was, on her left, a supply of reports regarding the day's activities. This pile was continually refreshed until the close of the business day, which generally preceded the end of Sally's shift by only a matter of minutes — some time, she figured once, the average of which was between fifteen and fortyfive standard duration moments — depending on the amount of the day's affairs and how fast she could complete their remainder. Her exact duties consisted of filing into manilla folders a copy of each document that included within its main body the name of any particular soul. These manilla folders were marked with the names of each citizen and kept in a library of filing cabinets in four subbasement levels beneath the entire area of the city. Sally had an assistant who would run to the subbasement indicated by a number-set heading each document, retrieve the manilla folders marked with each name involved in the affair under consideration by the document, and return these folders to Sally. Sally inserted copies of the document neatly into the front of each folder and then put them into a pile on her right. At the end of the business day Sally's assistant went home and Sally remained behind to finish up, going down the huge, slow freight elevator to the dimly-lit dust-filled basements herself to retrieve any other files and, ultimately, to refile all of the day's extracted folders. This was not, however, the reason why Sally hated her assistant. She hated her assistant because every time she ran down to the basements and retrieved folders the action must be listed by Sally in a log-book which, at the end of the day, promptly, had to be inserted into the assistant's personal file, which, due to the order of operations, Sally had to make a special trip to the sub-basement to retrieve herself. She collected no extra salary for this, as it was part of her discipline.

Of course there were, from time to time, and lately less and less — perhaps even never again now that they were converting to a new system up top — reports sent down that included no names of people. These were the descriptions of events which involved no individual human participants, as in the case of either organizations or the large machines charged with maintaining many of the city's less civilized functions. Each of these had a file according to the name of the organization or the title of the machine. These files were kept in the fifth sublevel beneath the city proper; a level to which Sally dreaded descending and from which she fled as quickly as possible whenever forced to attend. The fifth sub-basement was an impossibly vast, empty chamber, surrounded by walls seventeen stories tall in which were filed all the pertinent names of organizations and machines. These were accessed by a dilapidated exoskeleton of moving catwalks and ladders barely wide or well-crafted enough to suspend Sally above the awful drop. Naturally she dreaded the installation of another secretariat exclusively for the fifth subbasement, which she knew would

occur thousands of decades before the complete overhaul of the fifth subbasement filing system would ever be considered, as much, if not more so, as she dreaded having to continue filling that role on her own. Sally needed every dollar from every hour of her job as it was. Sally was saving up to buy herself a beautiful dream.

It was no ordinary, escapist flight of luxury Sally wanted so very badly. She imagined it to herself in secret, while waiting for her assistant to return from below. She dreamed of having a new body; a new face; a new nature; a new past; a new life.

Sasha saw that all writers

Sasha saw that all writers, from the most base and profane to the most eloquent and arcane, were just as stupid and clumsy as she; that all crystalline printed texts she'd ever looked on, like a child in a gothic cathedral gapes at the stained glass murals, were really as soft and mushy as skin, and that behind them there were not the pale rays of airy heaven and the thin angelic glow of the firmament, but the blood and dark syrup, the garnet and gray meats and slippery organs of the abdominal sac. She realized that all authors were just groping for new ways to romanticize the corporeal nausea of being. . . *what?* alive? human? conscious?

She remembered a frustrated phrase she had penned hurriedly in her notebook of thoughts the summer she had turned sixteen. It followed from her confusion with truth vs. interpretation, and the value of individual meaning, after reading different versions of Nietzsche's works edited by Mencken, Kaufmann, Hollingdale, Cowan, and that pining Christian Humanist Barrett. It went, in sloppy scrawl, "all translations are different, but no translator may be blamed."

It had been that summer that she had watched her boyfriend grow a beard, which he felt made him less underdeveloped and more qualified to pluck the privileged, pompous, (vile) fruits of the elite garden called 'maturity.' She begged him to shave it, and the more she begged the more empowered he felt because of the hair; until finally, by winter, they were forced to separate — all he could see in Sasha was the discontent towards him which sicklied over her eyes until it could no longer be denied, simply never spoken of, and all she could see in him was the beard. At the time she had likened it to a memory even further back, and so dream-like now, from her early childhood. She had been working with her mother, on her knees in the dark, fluffy soil, in the flower garden which always made mommy smell of sweat and soil and blooms (as opposed to daddy, who smelled like aftershave and coffee and pipe tobacco). The particular day she remembered was overexposed with sunlight, and it seemed to submerge everything in a humid aquarium full of perspiration. Her mommy was in the house and Sasha came running in on pudgy, hyperactive legs to tell her that there were weeds growing in the garden. Mommy had come out to look and Sasha jabbed her finger anxiously at the offending foliage. Her mother had patted her on the warm hair which crowned her proud, eager face and told her that they were flowers.

Years later, after breaking up with her boyfriend's beard, she had looked those buds up in a large number of horticulture books in the school library. In all of them she found them listed as weeds, and she became very angry at her mother, blaming mommy for the recent tragedy with her lover. She had never gotten to tell her mother the truth though, because mommy had been taken up by the lord while giving birth to Sasha's baby sister, who the little ten year old vowed with all her wounded heart to love and care for as much as her lost mother never had her, and who, despite Sasha's whole-hearted promise, had died a scrawny, bug-eyed fetus in a humming hospital respirator like a lobster in a restaurant tank.

Sydney

Sydney had gotten it into his head one day that he could count the exact number of thoughts he had in any given situation. For example, while he took a walk one day he had fourteen separate thoughts and, while he couldn't remember every detail of every single thought, it comforted him to know that by the end of the walk he was still capable of recalling the number fourteen.

So Sydney began to count his thoughts, which he did, ironically, without thinking very far ahead into this strategy. At first he would have the complete thought, patiently waiting for his mind to fit in every pertinent consideration, and then pounce on the thought to tag a number to it like it was a wild animal of an endangered species. Before long he was incapable of even finishing the thought before he numbered it and threw it away impatiently. But this raised a new problem; because he had begun punctuating his stream of consciousness, one thought no longer flowed into the next and, after he would angrily toss aside #3761, he would go blank for a little while, incapable of spontaneously generating a #3762. It was around this time that he began to yell at his wife and children and to kick the family dog. But the worst of it was still distantly on the horizon for Sydney.

Eventually, that is, by the time he had to be committed, Sydney had succumbed completely to the numbers. He would count the number of the thought he had just had (which was the number of the thought before that), and then have to number the act of numbering as a separate thought. But then, the act of numbering that number also deserved a number, and so he numbered that as well. But nobody understood poor Sydney nor could relieve him of his pitiable condition. They only fed him and wiped up his spittle or escorted him to and from the lavatory while Sydney, with his head hung down between his shoulders, unshaven and with his eyes wide and fixed on the infinite distance, swayed back and forth slightly and mumbled his numbers. "Three hundred forty eight thousand nine hundred and twenty three. Three hundred forty eight thousand nine hundred and twenty four. Three hundred forty eight thousand nine hundred and twenty five. Three hundred forty eight thousand nine hundred and twenty six..."

The way the rich stay so (and a better reason to feel jealous)

A respectable gentleman of some means and his well attired wife were strolling down the cobblestone street between the shallow puddles, generally enjoying one another's company. All of a sudden and without the slightest whisper of forewarning, a horrifyingly deformed and filthy cur thrust himself into their path from the dingy shadows of an alley.

"Please, sir," grumbled this decrepit urchin, "Last month I was caught in the machine at the factory where I worked. I enjoyed my job, sir, please understand. I was the most efficient and happiest employee in the plant. I did not fall in due to clumsiness, but rather was bumped by one of the bosses as he, in a group of his fellows, was touring the floor inspecting conditions. Although I was promised full compensation for the damage done to me, good madam, I am now without the means to support myself. Neither have I a place, according to my former employer, in the job market in such a condition as this. Please, please, being good Christian souls, do not turn away one so under the oppressive heel of fortune such as myself, but, I implore you, lend me just as much as you see fit to afford me that I may continue to exist in this wretched and wonderful world but a while longer. If you do so I will go away most grateful, with my faith in the destiny of the human race fully and happily restored."

"Oh," the good wife said, not without allowing her tone to be overcome at appropriate points by annoyance, "let the poor have money, if it's all that occurs to their vile hearts to want."

The man, somewhat more tempered and, having lived a life without feminine shelters, accustomed to dealing with such encounters, spoke out more evenly. "No, my dear; you see — if all the poor wanted was money, than this would be that which they had, and only that which they had, and in this event they would hardly be poor, now would they. On the contrary I should think it would better entitle them to the stature of we richer few. Thus it is not money that they want, for the majority of people show little desire therefore. I believe that the subject of their yearning is more akin to that thing that we call love, though they themselves, who have so much more use for it than do we, may not know its proper name. So does it not fall to us who do, to decide how best to administer it to them?"

The esteemed gentleman withdrew a revolver from the inside pocket of his outer coat and leveled it between the beggar's eyes. The legless and disheveled runt cringed mightily, allowing his entire form to be wracked by quivers of cowardice. He attempted to blubber out that he'd made a mistake and would gladly move along, but the good bourgeois, now caught up very much in the spirit of philosophizing, would hear none of it. Instead he continued delivering his treatise to his awe-struck and aroused companion in the most casual and concise of terms.

"Now, let us assume the perspective of our society for a moment," he rhapsodized. "If our goal was to protect our self, as a whole, let us say, as an embodied entity, then the answer must come back with the cries of every cell, 'destroy this leach and let us on our way!' If, on the other hand, we say that we must protect the greater good of moral order, or the individual welfare of each constituent, it would be a better strategy to address the illness itself, in this case poverty, and cure the cripple by buying off for a while that ailment beneath which he suffers affliction.

"Now neither of these rightly serves the interest of this man, does it? As we have established his true goal is, in fact, love. The affection he had, in this case, for the job which he is now deprived. He longs for the fulfilling embrace of labor. And this, society requires of him.

"Shall we say that, should money truly be what he desired, rather than the love of society itself, he could easily enough obtain it from us. We, being logical and sane people, and moreover, as he remarks, Christians, would not, should he be the one pointing a pistol at us, hesitate long to part with our goods in case he remove from us that invisible bond above which we can hold no greater object of value. Yet we may assume that, because he does not do this, he would prefer to have peace than such conflict, and love above money. So go my good friend, and peace, if not prosperity, be with you always."

This being said the gentleman lowered his handgun, lurched forward into a brief embrace with the stranger, and, at an unhurried, unconcerned pace, he and his lady walked away while behind them the wretch was collapsing from terror. That night the good man with his woman shared the most satisfying physical intimacy of their lives until that point and, upon seeing the viscous yellows of dawn trickling into their room, and knowing that it was true that the sun had broken the line of the horizon before either of their bodies had truly tired beneath the ceaseless chemical lashings of their exuberant, inventive minds, they agreed always to walk the slums, and to surround themselves with destitution, for it gave them power like unto no other drug nor ambrosia available to them at the time.



plate 1:
Dvipa of Asamkheyya In Central Informational Nexus 543



Plate 2:
Pub R.T.



plate 3:
the Terminus



plate 4:
Limbo



plate 5:
Piscator Wilhelms in Limbo



plate 6:
Countess Odessa Zaob



plate 7: the Princess of Einfühlungcyrbergeist
on exile day



plate 8:
General Tso's Fortune Cookie



plate 9:
the Order of Einfühlungcyrberuzgeist

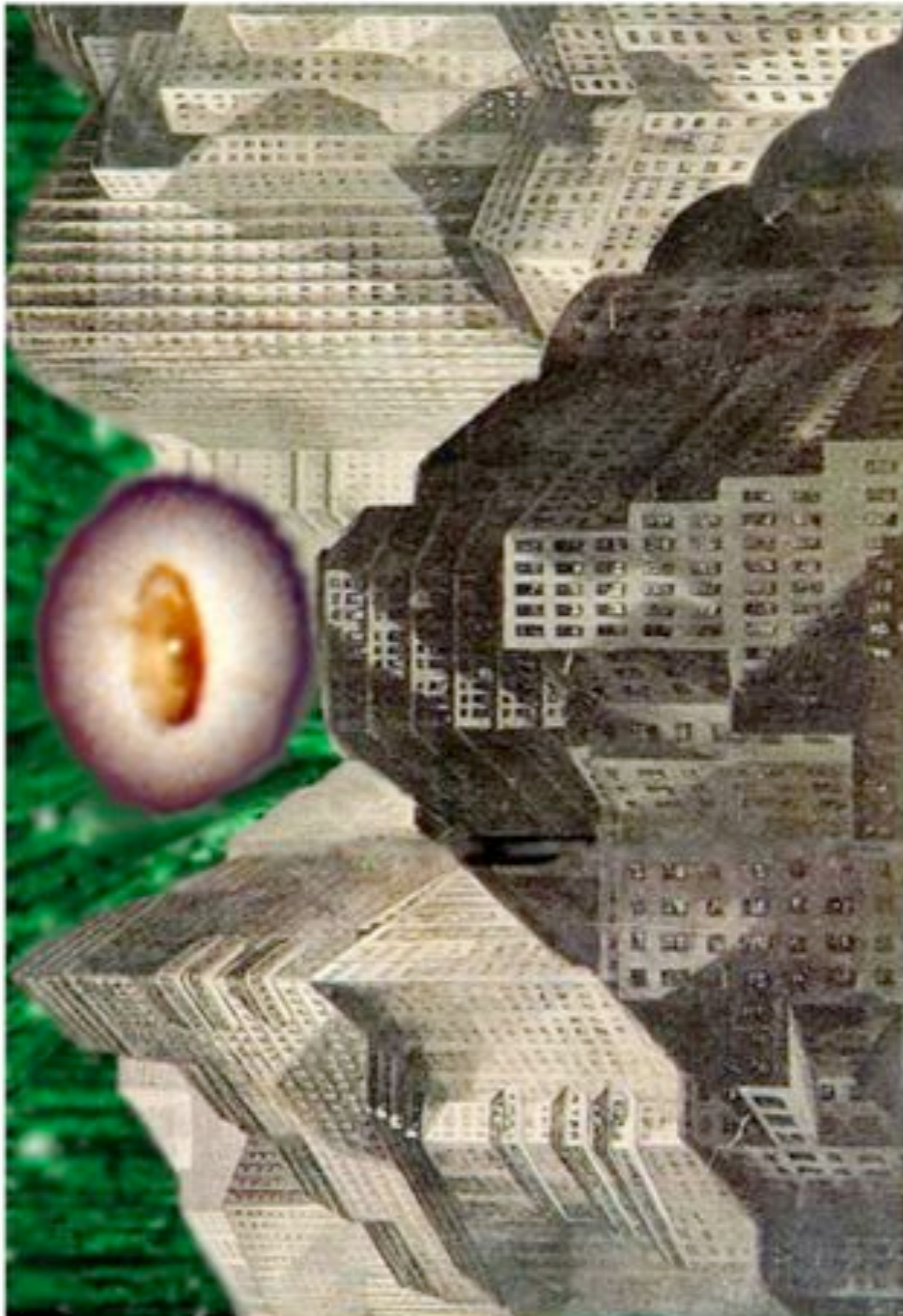


plate 10:
CIN 345

