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Creepers created by Austin Armatys and John English.

Editor In Chief Austin Armatys **Editorial assistance** Corey J. White

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Designer, wannabe writer and amateur accordion player, Kelly draws inspiration from the classically macabre and delights in the morbidly absurd. Practicing digital design and dabbling in short form writing pieces, he hopes to one day win the affection of a minor royal from one of the great old European houses. Influences include Joe Abercrombie, Kentaro Miura, Claude Debussy and 50% of Tom Cruise movies.

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Ganzeer is a multidisciplinary artist who works seamlessly between art, design, and storytelling. His work has been seen in a variety of art galleries, alleyways, and museums around the world such as the Brooklyn Museum in New York, Greek State Museum in Thessaloniki, V&A in London, and the mad streets of Cairo during the Egyptian uprising of 2011. His current projects include a short story collection titled TIMES NEW HUMAN, and a graphic novel titled THE SOLAR GRID, which has awarded him a Global Thinker Award from Foreign Policy.

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AKA Dic Lombardi. AKA Rat Dickie. AKA Beef. AKA GoblinLover69.

WE ARE CREEPER



Words by
Austin Armatys

Photos by
Kaaren Armatys & Oliver Dodd

The beach has two faces.

I realise this at age 13, my skinny
arms buried in the sand to
counteract the poison coursing
through my veins.



I've been stung by physalia utriculus, which in Australia we just call "blue bottles", and the little jellyfish have left angry red lines that throb where their tentacles lashed my skin. I embed my arms up to the elbows in the cool sand, and it makes them feel better somehow, the weight of the moist earth lessening the intense ache.

Around me, sun-worshipping families actively pursue relaxation, parents lying on towels and chatting while their children frolic unattended at the edge of the surf. The crowd is oblivious to my fear, my terror invisible as I consider the possibility of some heretofore unknown allergy to jellyfish toxin. I'm scared I might die—it certainly feels like it, my heart racing, limbs pulsating with pain—but I am entirely too full of pride to ask for help. To the casual observer I probably look like I'm playing some weird game—inserting myself into the beach arms first, burrowing like an animal, face fixed in a half-grimace, looking around for help that won't come, because why would it?

Kingscliff is a beachside town in northern New South Wales, and when my family first visits in 1994 it is still a quaint and quiet place, yet to be transformed by foreign capital, the real estate game, and a tourism boom. But some of the locals know what's coming: on our first trip into town we sit for lunch at the local bakery, and my father laughs as he points to graffiti carved into the wooden table. It says DIE YUPPIE SCUM in crude slashes and hacks, violence implicit in its form. I try to imagine the person who did this—were they laughing, was it just a joke? Or were they grim and serious, their act of petty vandalism fuelled by genuine hatred? Could they even be watching us right now? I look at the black BMW parked in front of us—my family's car—and know with certainty that we are the yuppies they want dead.

The beach has two faces. During the day it's idyllic in the ways you already know: seagulls and hot chips, crystal-clear water and body boards, big umbrellas and tiny bikinis. But then there's the other beach, the beach that's actually a trap. This other beach is a slave to the endlessly undulating ocean, a vassal that lures in unsuspecting victims to drown or disappear them without a trace. This is the other face of the beach, hidden in plain sight: this is the beach that can kill.

One night I overhear my parents talking about a murder that occurred in Kingscliff a little over a decade earlier in 1982, the same year I was born. From these intercepted snippets gruesome details have been extrapolated: two hitchhiking 13-year-old boys were kidnapped and taken into the dunes by a pair of men—AWOL soldiers; lovers and Satanists. The men raped and tortured the boys before they made one of the schoolboys kill the other, forcing him to bash and bury his friend half-alive in the sand, leaving the truant teenager to suffocate in his shallow beachfront grave. The men then drove their unwilling accomplice home, injured but alive... and burdened with a tale so terrible that it is impossible to know its true weight.



...a period of my life marked by an obsession with Stephen King and Twin Peaks, and I found

Although this scenario might seem outlandish, it was all true, and, as I found out many years later, the actual details of the crime were even worse than those I overheard—more disturbing, crueller, more depraved. If you want to know for yourself, you can search for the murder of Peter Aston. But I can't recommend it. There are some things that best remain unknown.

From then on poor Peter Aston was my secret companion on our trips to Kingscliff, bound to the beach side town where he met his end. This was a period of my life marked by an obsession with Stephen King and Twin Peaks, and I found myself hopelessly drawn to the types of strange stories I was warned not to consume because my parents feared they exacerbated my night terrors.

They might have been right, but that didn't stop me. Peter Aston's murder at age 13—my age at the time—was one of these forbidden stories come to life, made even more powerful and alluring because it was real. He followed me around, a wraith that couldn't be dispelled or reckoned with through exposure or inquiry; this was a world before the Internet (for me at least) and I was essentially still just a child, lacking in resources and agency. Peter's Aston's story couldn't be confronted, and so it grew mythic in stature.

Peter's dark fate haunted me: in a personal ritual I would sometimes walk along the beach by myself at night, traversing the sand dunes in the darkness, wondering if I was passing over the very spot where he had been killed. The night acted as a portal, and when I passed into it, the world was transformed, blurred at the edges. What other mundane horrors constantly surrounded us, parallel realities separated only by the barrier of time? What strange charges did they send out into the ether? How did they reverberate through us, their weird echoes altering things in ways we could never know?

Sometimes Peter followed me into the daylight, too. One day I found myself exploring the in-construction housing estates that were springing up on the edges of town. They were good places for skateboarding—plenty of concrete slabs and smooth sidewalk. As I pushed further into the heart of the sprawl I began to notice the strange absence of other people. Although it was a Saturday, I could see no evidence of humanity. The midday heat was oppressive, the air itself still and shimmering, the world around me was completely silent, veiled in haze. As I neared a corner I could hear a swing creaking, a child's bike being peddled furiously, the tell-tale sounds of children playing. Finally, I thought, the spell had been broken. But as I turned the corner only an empty playground was there to be seen. I felt dazed,



myself hopelessly drawn to the types of strange stories I was warned not to consume...

frantic. I pushed on, lost and desperate now, caught in a labyrinth of identical roads dotted with near-identical houses, the street signs suddenly unintelligible glyphs that offered no clues to exit.

Eventually I came to a disused lot, filled with overgrown weeds head high. I thought I could hear the crashing surf on the other side, even though it didn't match where I thought I should be, so I pushed through the wild suburban foliage, using my skateboard to clear a path. When I reached the other side, it was night time—how was that possible? How had I lost so much time?—and I was on the beach, alone, back in Peter's sand dunes, the darkness of the Pacific Ocean stretching out before me into infinity. The lights of Kingscliff and my parent's apartment shone in the distance—the lights of family, of safety, of life itself.

I turned towards those lights.

I ran. 🦴



Him

Solvent
2017, Digital Photograph



PEACE & QUIET



Words by
J Clement

TIM SAT IN THE DARK.

Candles gone, food gone. The power had been out for almost 2 weeks now. He sat by the window of his tiny studio apartment. Through the window he could hear the occasional shout or a car alarm screaming to life. Distant fires danced and swayed on top of his reflection in the window. He was hungry. He examined the discarded chocolate bar wrappers, chip packages, protein bar wrappers, energy drink cans, soda cans on the floor. He was thirsty. No electricity equals no running water, something he had never known before the world ended. His cat, Squish, sat impassively across from him, on the other side of the tiny apartment. Squish looked around, bored, and then looked at Tim. Squish looked away and started grooming himself.


Squish was a medium-sized grey and white British Short-Hair.

He was 7 years old and getting fat in his middle-age. Tim had no particular attachment or sentimental feelings for Squish. Squish was far too aloof and didn't need much in terms of human affection or attention. Tim appreciated this about Squish and, more importantly, the general low-maintenance nature of their relationship. Squish got food, water and shelter from Tim. In return, Squish banished the attendant loneliness that would creep-up on Tim from time to time.

Tim made his way to the kitchen and got a glass. He then walked to the bathroom and knelt down on the cold linoleum floor. He scooped-up the toilet water and choked it down. The first time he did this, he had wretched and threw-up most of the water. Not this time. The water slipped down his throat easily. Cool relief temporarily flooded his mind and body.

Tim had grown-up in a small town full of nobodies in the middle of nowhere. Despite its small stature, the town was overflowing with people. People on the sidewalks and on the streets. People in his neighbourhood and in the hallways of his high school.

Everybody knew everybody, and everyone knew each other's business; every single minute of every single instance of eye-wateringly dull minutiae. This person lied to that person about this thing and that. That somebody slept with this person's ex-whatever, and so on and so on. Time moved achingly slow. Tim's young life was terrorised by the intrusion of all these other mundane and pointless lives. Their banal questions and blank eyes were suffocating. He longed to disappear, to be left to enjoy his earthly pleasures in complete solitude. He never understood the desire that most people had to be around other people. He would recoil in horror at the thought of listening to mind-numbing stories about their shitty weekends spent in the company of their mouth-breathing friends. The smell of burnt coffee on their breath. Their voices became white noise as he stared with disgusted intent, white specks of spittle forming in the corners of their dry mouths.



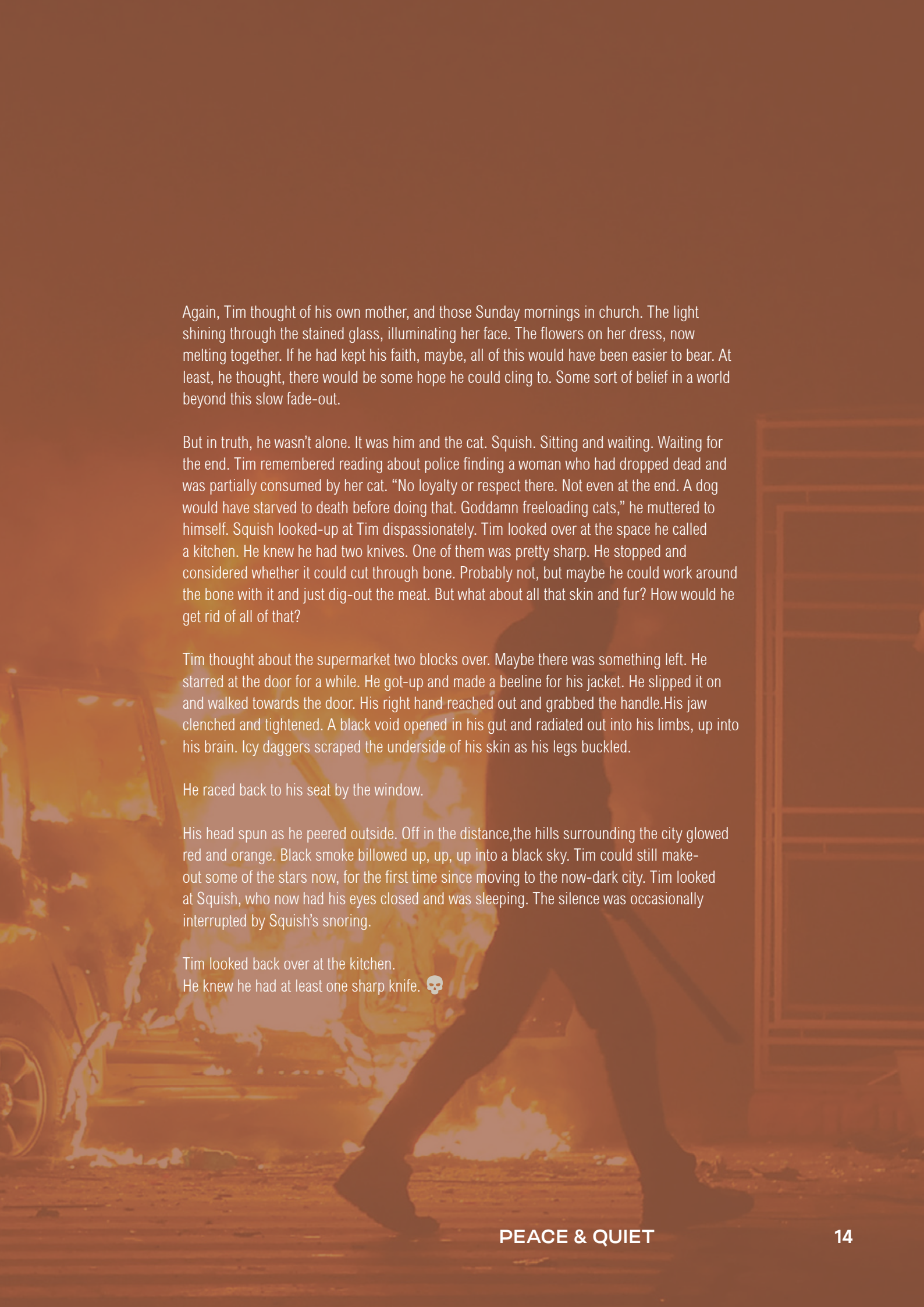
Tim's delirious mind wandered. He remembered sitting in church as a child. He could still hear the monotonous drone of the pastor, the veins bulging in his neck as he spoke of salvation from sin. The hours wasted by his mother's side, sitting through those endless sermons. He thought of his mother. He couldn't remember the last time he had spoken to her. Perhaps she was sitting alone and hungry in the dark, the same way he was. He could still feel the twinges of resentment towards her stirring around his chest. As far as Tim was concerned, she was guilty of a long list of crimes, not least of all condemning him to grow up in a small backwater full of mindless drones. He could never share her faith, her belief that there was some form of divine relief at the end of this life. He remembered sitting by her side on those uncomfortable wooden pews, the flowers on her church dress entwined.

He recalled the look on her face as she listened intently to the preacher's words, Tim's small heart full of disgust. He vowed to leave the church and the town and to never come back. Even then, his sights were trained upon the city, and disappearing.

And he did. And it was easy. In the big city, they scurried around like rats. Home to job to restaurant to bar to home to bed to sleep to wake-up to do it all again. One could simply be amongst it, but not of it. Another dour commuter on the subway; head bowed down into an illuminated phone screen. No need to even leave the house. His tech job allowed him to work from home. Just Eat, Grub Hub, Seamless, Postmates, Delivery.com, Eat24, Orderup, Muncherey. Food came to him. No need to drag his body through the garish isles of the supermarket. No need to face the un-washed masses, comparing prices, trying to save a buck so that they could buy more slop to feed to their hog-like offspring.

All of that was gone now, replaced by something else: the fear and, more maddeningly, the loneliness. But did he now fear the loneliness or, more specifically, the fear of dying alone? Not just dying alone, but starving to death by himself in a pathetic studio apartment, the remaining vestiges of fat broken down until there was only muscle feeding upon muscle. He remembered watching news reports of children starving to death in faraway places. The distant and numbed horror in their eyes.

The unfathomable grief in the eyes of their mothers.

A person is running from left to right across the frame. In the background, a car is on fire, with bright orange flames and black smoke rising. The scene is set at night, with the fire providing the primary light source. The person is wearing dark clothing and is captured in a dynamic, forward-leaning pose.

Again, Tim thought of his own mother, and those Sunday mornings in church. The light shining through the stained glass, illuminating her face. The flowers on her dress, now melting together. If he had kept his faith, maybe, all of this would have been easier to bear. At least, he thought, there would be some hope he could cling to. Some sort of belief in a world beyond this slow fade-out.

But in truth, he wasn't alone. It was him and the cat. Squish. Sitting and waiting. Waiting for the end. Tim remembered reading about police finding a woman who had dropped dead and was partially consumed by her cat. "No loyalty or respect there. Not even at the end. A dog would have starved to death before doing that. Goddamn freeloading cats," he muttered to himself. Squish looked-up at Tim dispassionately. Tim looked over at the space he called a kitchen. He knew he had two knives. One of them was pretty sharp. He stopped and considered whether it could cut through bone. Probably not, but maybe he could work around the bone with it and just dig-out the meat. But what about all that skin and fur? How would he get rid of all of that?

Tim thought about the supermarket two blocks over. Maybe there was something left. He starred at the door for a while. He got-up and made a beeline for his jacket. He slipped it on and walked towards the door. His right hand reached out and grabbed the handle. His jaw clenched and tightened. A black void opened in his gut and radiated out into his limbs, up into his brain. Icy daggers scraped the underside of his skin as his legs buckled.

He raced back to his seat by the window.

His head spun as he peered outside. Off in the distance, the hills surrounding the city glowed red and orange. Black smoke billowed up, up, up into a black sky. Tim could still make-out some of the stars now, for the first time since moving to the now-dark city. Tim looked at Squish, who now had his eyes closed and was sleeping. The silence was occasionally interrupted by Squish's snoring.

Tim looked back over at the kitchen.
He knew he had at least one sharp knife. 🦴

Dread Crew

Art by
Jon Weber

Words by
Matt Dickie

This artwork by Jon Weber is taken from "Dread Crew", a supplement by Matt Dickie for the cult game Mordheim.

Unlike the majority of the undead legions in the world of the game, the Lord of the Vampire Coast employs no necromancers.

His Sires may keep undead bound but not raise any of their own, although this does not mean his armies are weaker, on the contrary, the Mad Dragon of the New World's mastery of the dark arts is phenomenal.

Boosted by relics stolen from tombs of the Old Ones he is able to command massive armies of undead over thousands of miles, his reanimated servants acting with more intelligence than their Old World cousins, using guns and rigging ships as if they were truly alive.

His Sires scour the world pond for fresh recruits, luring raiding ships to their doom, hauling massive sea beasts back to the coast to be raised by Luther himself as rotting leviathans.

The Dread Crew's most important mission is to retrieve artifacts for their broken lord, searching temples and islands for trinkets or inscriptions that may mend his broken mind.

You can download the full supplement at www.ohnothingpress.com/dreadcrew





GROUND CONTROL TO LEROY QUADE

Art and Story
Ganzeer

THE GUN'S MUZZLE pressed hard against the base of Leroy's head. A strong recoil and muffled sound. Not a bang, more like a snap, followed by a sharp metallic jab, deep into his brain.

The echoes of a cruel sting, and then the incoming stampede of a migraine. A small plastic cup was handed to him. In it, two 1000 milligram beasts claiming to be medicine. His throat was very dry and feeling very, very tight.

"Can I take these up the ass instead?"

Leroy was a futurist. Nothing to do with the fascist futurism of Marinetti, or the transhumanist futurists of Silicon Valley bent on unattainable immortality. Leroy liked the idea of death. He believed that without death, people would likely be far shittier than they already were. Knowing we're only here for a short while drives us to be productive, he thought, to be good to one another, to leave behind a good, sound reputation.

But then again, plenty of folks are shit because they know they'll be dead. They operate on the basis that they ought to live their short existence to the fullest, and to hell with the world and anyone else inhabiting it.



Canze
— — — — —

NOT LEROY QUADE.

Leroy wanted to get shit done. Not for personal glory, but because he had ideas. Ideas he felt would make the world a better place. But they were also ideas that needed a whole lotta work to transcend from the realm of fantasy into the world of reality.

The key, he decided a long time ago, to making sure that all his ideas become reality before his inevitable death was to be the best version of himself he could possibly be.

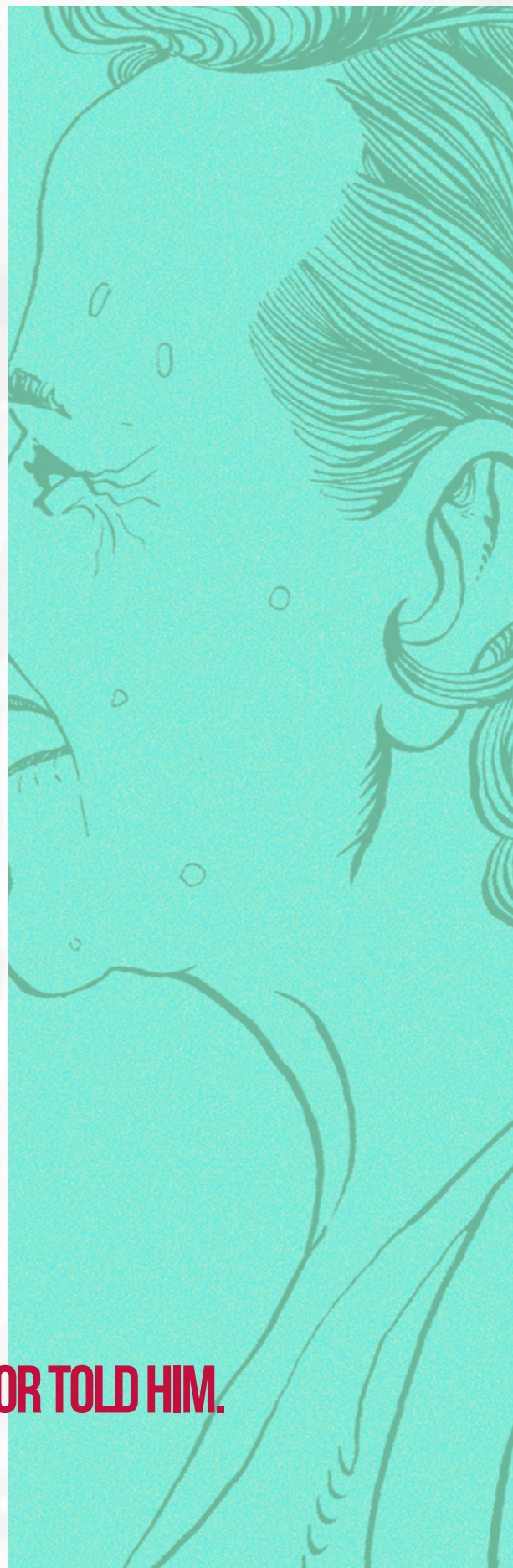
This didn't only entail eating well, regular exercise, and proper sleep. It also entailed streamlining his existence. His wardrobe was comprised entirely of black and white, stylish enough to look presentable, but not so stylish that anything would fall out of fashion next season. A single color wardrobe was far too boring, he argued, but a palette limited to only two colors avoided that trap while also making the prospect of mismatching not possible. The fabrics were all natural: cotton and linen for summer, wool and leather for winter. Never acrylic or polyester.

His weeks were identically planned, making precise hours for work, play, self-care and self-improvement. There was no such thing as an idle minute in Leroy Quade's life, because even those he had a plan for with either his trusty e-reader or one of the 100—exactly 100—podcasts he was subscribed to.

Every Tuesday at exactly 6:00pm, groceries for the week were left at his doorstep. They were the same items every week and nothing was ever finished prior to week's end, nor did anything ever last longer than a week. Saturday afternoons were for preparing his entire week's worth of meals, and Sundays were for visiting his sick mother, and the evenings were always for socializing, even on weekdays.

“FORGET ABOUT TODAY,” THE DOCTOR TOLD HIM.

Leroy's life operated like clockwork and was close to perfect, but he knew he could do better. Which is why he decided to undergo the procedure.



“TODAY, YOU SHALL LINGER LIKE A ZOMBIE, BUT TOMORROW YOU’LL FEEL GREAT.”

“Is there anything I need to do differently?” asked Leroy.

“No, not at all,” said the Doctor. “Don’t even think about it. Just go about your day as you normally would and the chip will do its thing without you even noticing.”

“Thank you, Doctor,” said Leroy, although all he wanted to do was kill the Doctor—along with every other living thing on the planet—before rolling over and dying in stupid agony.

It wasn’t until a week later that Leroy began to notice something was different. When he walked into the kitchen to prepare his morning espresso, he wasn’t even thinking about it. It wasn’t like he was sleep-walking; his actions were very deliberate, and his motion extremely precise. Yet his mind was fully focused on other matters. The A.I. was at work. It picked up on his repetitive actions throughout the week and was helping him perform them without thought. Leroy loved it. Even though these actions were so mundane and repetitive they didn’t require any thinking on his part, they had still used up enough brain-juice to keep him from being able to think about other things. Not with any kind of depth anyway.

This chip in his head, though, was a game-changer.

Later that day he found himself in courteous conversations and phone calls without being the slightest bit disconnected from his work. Not even in a superficial sense, but he was actually fully engaged in complex calculations. He was completing tasks with his mind, all while his mouth and body were engaged in other things entirely.



It wasn't just that the A.I. automated everyday tasks and conversations. It was as if it was simultaneously fueling the thinking part of his brain as well. It got a feel for his needs and gave him a little push, making everything seem easy and straightforward.

When he visited his mom at the nursing home a few days later, he sat with her and told her about his week, fed her, and went through old family pictures with her without ever leaving the work in his head.

He was never sure these visits made any difference to her, but the nurses reassured him that after each visit they could always see a rejuvenated spark in her eyes. Which made Leroy feel a little guilty for ever thinking his visits weren't necessary. She preferred to be alone with him when he visited, under the canopy in the garden outside, just around the corner from the tall trees and maze of bushes surrounded by pebbles and stones. Where it didn't feel like a nursing home, and instead felt similar to the park she liked to take Leroy when he was little.

Squirrels would tread towards them but then change their minds when they got too close. The birds were musical, and the trees surrounding them were lush and alive. Not like the rest of the place, lingering somewhere between life and death. Filled with elderly folks biding their time without purpose or drive. Leroy's mom never voiced any of this, not explicitly, because she was a vegetable, and could no longer speak.



NOT THAT YOU COULDN'T TELL WHEN SHE WAS UPSET: SHE WOULD SPASM IN HER PLACE AND MAKE THE MOST HORRIFIC WHINE. BUT WHEN SHE WAS HAPPY, A SERENE SMILE ADORNED HER FACE.

When Leroy showed up, she was never happy to be inside, nor was she happy if he was busy on his phone or drifted off mid story-reading. She demanded his undivided attention, even as a vegetable. Armed with the chip, Leroy hit all the right buttons and left knowing his mother had received the most satisfactory visit she'd gotten in a long, long time.



That same evening, he enjoyed drinks and laughs with friends without ever leaving the work in his head. He even went home with a girl he was seeing on and off, the one semi-irregular thing in his life, and gave her the best orgasm she'd ever had, still without leaving the work in his head. Leroy felt superior knowing that he could get it up and perform all while getting serious work done. It was the first time he'd ever slept with the girl (with any girl actually) since getting the implant, and started to wonder how the A.I. knew how she liked it. Surely it would need to analyze a pattern first?

THAT'S HOW HE UNDERSTOOD IT, BUT IT SEEMED LIKE THE A.I. WAS TAPPING INTO SOMETHING ELSE. MEMORIES PERHAPS? INNERMOST DESIRES? WAS IT TAPPING INTO HIS DESIRES OR HERS? AND IF IT WAS THE LATTER, THEN HOW? ANALYZING HER BODY LANGUAGE THROUGH HIS RETINA? OR WAS IT ACTUALLY READING HER MIND?

Leroy didn't dwell on it too much. He didn't need to. It was the work that needed his focus.

Everything else in life —everything— could be automated.

Leroy arrived at his mom's the following week in the full embrace of automated living. He wheeled her out to the canopy like he always did, and started by feeding her the beet strawberry smoothie he had prepared from all organic ingredients. He had prepared it yesterday afternoon, along with his entire batch of meals for the week, and had done so expertly without giving it the slightest bit of thought. He spooned the deep red goop into his mother's mouth with loving care and eyes full of affection. Inside his head however, he was preparing the final ins and outs of the launch of his aerial ride-share venture.

He was so close now, which was only possible because he was finally a fully functioning human being. Unlike his poor old mother. Leroy's hands let a drop of smoothie stuff run down the side of his mother's mouth, and stared at her, waiting to see if she would lick it off without his intervention.

Nothing. She couldn't even do that.

Leroy put the jar of smoothie goop down, only half full now. He stood up, took a few steps away from his mother and reached for one of the stones lining the walkway.

Leroy's mind snapped away from work and wondered what the fuck his body was doing. His body walked back to his mother, who was spasming and whining now. Clearly upset. Not because Leroy held the stone high above his head ready to bring it down on her face, but because he hadn't finished feeding her the smoothie like he always did.

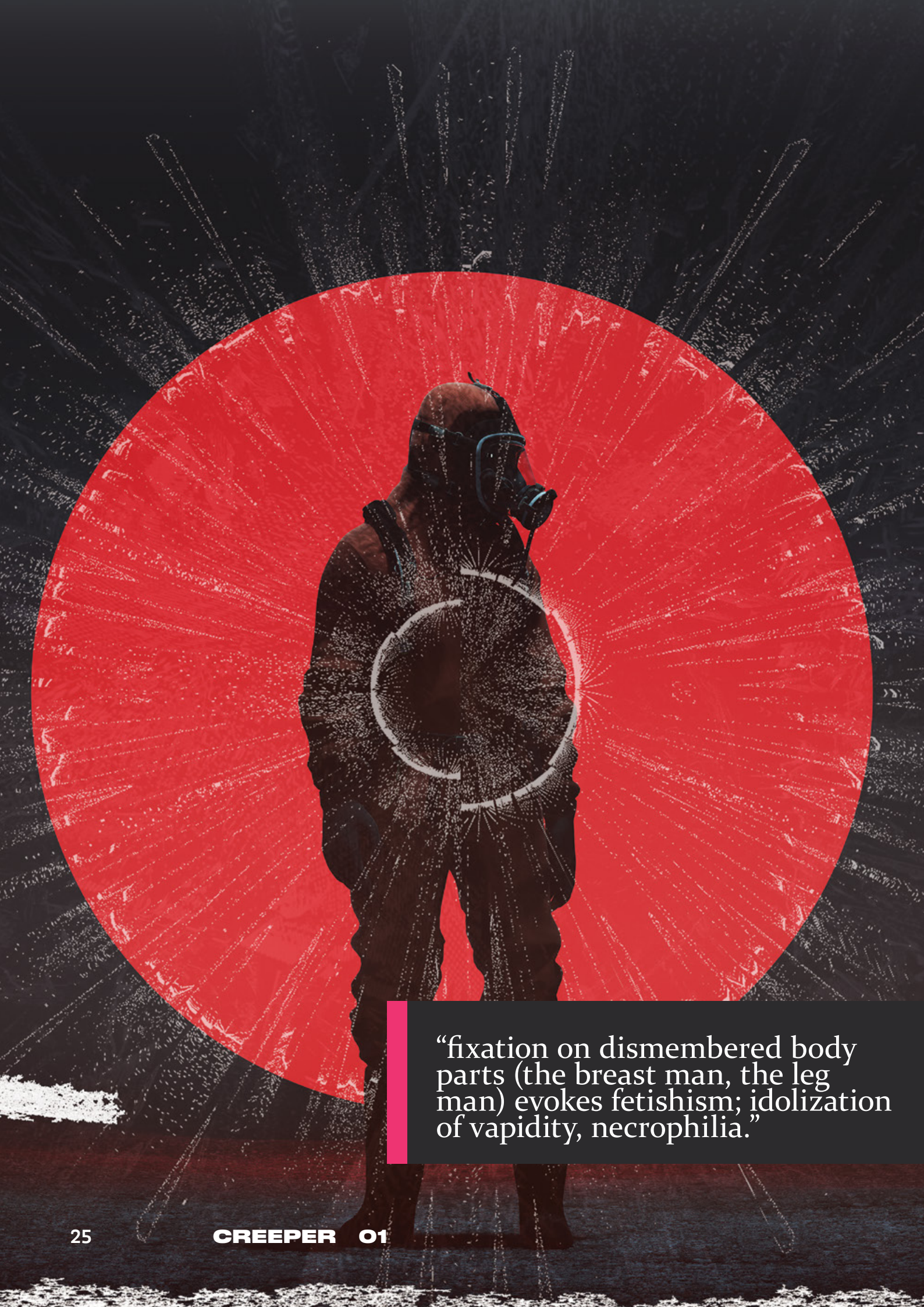
The stone came down and red bodily fluids splashed in and around the smoothie on the ground. Leroy's mind screamed at his body, told it to stop, but his body wouldn't listen. His body knew how to cut the fat out of Leroy's life better than he did, and continued to pound his mother's face until it became indistinguishable from the red smoothie fed to her only a minute ago. Leroy's mind cried, but his eyes did not. He told his body to take the stone to his own head, but his hands ignored him. Instead, the bloodied stone was dropped to the ground and his body walked away. It had a mission to do. A better, more efficient Leroy Quade to provide for, for the betterment of humanity at large.

Leroy's mind told his mother that he was sorry and that he loved her very much, but his mouth uttered not a word. Not a single word. 💀

Ritual

Solvent, 2018
Digital Photograph





“fixation on dismembered body parts (the breast man, the leg man) evokes fetishism; idolization of vapidty, necrophilia.”

SEX IN PIECES

**Words by
Tom Syverson**

**Art by
Sophie Sauzier**

A conventional feminist understanding of the male appetite delineates a subject-object relationship: objectification is the process by which the female body is rendered inert by a violent, imperious male gaze. That's all well established in feminist theory and elsewhere, but certain horror films suggest a more complicated picture. These films make up the small but pronounced subgenre of dismemberment horror.

They provide disturbingly literal metaphors for a particular feminist understanding of sexual objectification as a process of bodily fragmentation. According to this view, men don't see the female body as an integrated sexual object but rather a composite construct; the female body is assembled in the male imaginary using sub-objects of independent sexual significance. The logic of male desire operates according to an erotic mapping of the female body, forming an anatomical catalogue used to separate a woman's subject from the sum of her body parts.

In this sense, objectification occurs in two stages: first, to split the feminine subject from her body, and then to split the body from itself.

We see this not only in male-female relationships but also in the way men relate to each other. Men differentiate themselves in homosocial discourse by identifying variously as breast men, leg men, ass men. Dynamics of race and class intersect with these choices because heteronormative male relationships are always mediated by a third term—in most cases a woman—and thus for men the specificity of desire helps constitute and sustain group identity. This is why the normative horizon of conceivable male pleasure takes the form of a crude anatomy chart: blowjob, handjob, titjob, footjob. In short, male heteronormativity consists of breaking women into pieces.

Some of the more morbid minds of feminist theory have drawn special attention to this tendency. In *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, Catherine

McKinnon noted that the male “fixation on dismembered body parts (the breast man, the leg man) evokes fetishism; idolization of vapidty, necrophilia.” (pp.110) In *Right-Wing Women*, Andrea Dworkin wrote of the “paring down of a whole person to vagina and womb and then to a dismembered obscenity.” (pp.16) Perhaps most classically, Carol Adams in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* drew a direct connection between misogyny and the animal slaughterhouse: “women raped, butchered, and eaten...are linked by an overlap of cultural images of sexual violence against women and the fragmentation and dismemberment of nature and the body in Western culture.” (pp.65-66) Adams argues that in western patriarchy, animals and women become “overlapping absent referents” through butchering and erotic fragmentation. It’s through this disintegration of the whole that patriarchy objectifies and devours women and animals, such that they become overlapping metaphors for each other’s degradation: concurrently yet very separately, patriarchal capitalism rapes mother earth as it lowers rape victims to meat.

Adams reads the pervasive imagery of dismemberment in western culture, from Greek mythology to contemporary magazine advertisements, identifying a striking “paradigm of metaphorical sexual butchering...[that] is a basic component of male pornographic sexuality.” (Adams pp.88) The epitome of this metaphor appeared on the June 1978 cover of *Hustler* magazine, which showed a nude woman’s body passing through a meat grinder.

The horror genre has its own story to tell. One can’t miss the standard slasher’s preference for female victims, and there are hundreds, maybe thousands of examples one can point to of female victims being mutilated by male killers. Most often, the murder is accomplished using

implements intended for dressing animals and dominating nature: butcher’s knife, meat hook, machete, chainsaw. But going deeper and more specific to the notion of erotic fragmentation, consider three films that focus on dismemberment in particular.

Herschell Gordon Lewis’s *Blood Feast* (1963) is widely considered the first “splatter” film. The story follows the inimitably creepy Fuad Ramses, an Egyptian caterer and full-time devotee of the goddess Ishtar. As the film’s resident expert in Egyptology explains, during a four-hundred-year period in ancient Egyptian history, the goddess Ishtar was worshipped. Opulent blood orgies were held in her honor. Ishtar is described as both a source of maternal authority (“the Mother of the veil of darkness”) and an instigator of sexual desire (prior to her blood orgies, “lust would reign over the land”).

Fuad goes on a killing spree in a crazed attempt to stage his own blood festival for Ishtar. His murders have two characteristics. First, he targets only young girls, often leaving their male accompaniment unmolested; and second, he removes a different body part or organ from each one.

For Fuad, no individual girl is sufficient to serve as the blood feast’s sacrifice. Instead, he needs one girl’s eyeball, another one’s tongue, and yet another one’s leg, all in an attempt to form a comprehensive sacrificial object. In the face of Ishtar’s immortal maternal form, no one mortal woman is quite worthy. Fuad’s dismemberment and hoarding of body parts thus corresponds to the impossible direct sexual relationship with Ishtar. By objectifying and appropriating the various object-traits of mortal women, he strives for communion with Ishtar, the unattainable, forbidden maternal ideal.



“...sexual butchering...[that]
is a basic component of male
pornographic sexuality.”

Pieces (1982), an unpleasant gem of the slasher genre, follows a remarkably similar pathology. After murdering each female victim, the killer removes a major body part, such as a head or leg. At the root of this particularized homicidal behavior is a traumatic encounter with adolescent sexuality and maternal prohibition. As a child, the killer cherished a pornographic jigsaw puzzle, which when completed formed the image of a nude woman. He's punished and humiliated by his mother when she discovers the puzzle, leading him to murder her.

The film's bloody matricide stages an inversion of Freud's primal horde metaphor from *Totem and Taboo*; rather than an overpotent primordial father standing in the way of mature sexual enjoyment, it's instead a shaming maternal gaze that prohibits pubescent pornographic fantasy. Presumably harassed by superegoic guilt and sexual conflict for decades, the killer in *Pieces* embarks on a darkly therapeutic project to reclaim his adolescent libido. His project is to create a human jigsaw puzzle, sewing together disparate female body parts into a macabre patchwork sex doll. The clear metaphor available here is a sexually immature and disturbed man striving to reassemble the lost fantasy object of prepubescence that was fractured by maternal intervention.

Frank Henenlotter's *Frankenhooker* (1990) provides a more lighthearted example, though no less stark in its imagery or themes. The film's story is precisely what it sounds like. Jeffrey, a mad scientist of sorts, loses his wife Elizabeth in a freak lawnmower accident. Following the accident, Jeffrey becomes withdrawn and nihilistic, obsessed by his lost love object. In an attempt to resurrect her, Jeffrey steals Elizabeth's severed head from the accident scene and sets out to find her a body. But yet again we see that the notion of the female body isn't so simple. Earlier in the film, just before her body was torn to pieces, Elizabeth is shown

expressing dissatisfaction with her body. Likewise, rather than attempting to retrieve Elizabeth's original body parts from police custody, Jeffrey forms a plan to create for her an entirely new body. Jeffrey's project shifts from reanimation of a lifeless body to a realization of pornographic fantasy. His thought process is chillingly logical: he'll solicit a prostitute, murder her, and use her body to resurrect his wife.

Frankenhooker is humorously explicit in its satire, with Jeffrey becoming obsessed with his desire for a disintegrated female body. When Jeffrey escorts a number of sex workers to his house, he laboriously inspects, measures, and scrutinizes each of them in hilarious detail. He remarks on the diameter of their thighs and the buoyancy of their breasts. His total objectification of the analyzed women leaves him hopelessly overwhelmed by variety; he simply can't make up his mind on one body. He must, like the killers in *Blood Feast* and *Pieces*, search in vain for his feminine ideal through a ghostly hodgepodge of body parts.

In these films, we see a normative aspect of male heterosexuality reflected as horror: unfunny satire, bloody metaphors, nauseating literalizations, all apropos of the Hustler meat grinder. What is the meaning of this? One could plumb the depths of psychoanalytic theory for answers. Freud's theory of fetishism provides a helpful starting point. For Freud, body-part fetishes in men arose from the basic contradiction of male heterosexuality. The problem for straight men is that they're inclined to value people most when they have a penis, and yet their sexuality attracts them only to those who lack a penis. Chauvinism and sex-object choice are always at odds. And so in order to come to terms with a penisless sex object, men need something to point to. A fetish is a replacement phallus. Freud explains, "[a fetish object] saves the fetishist from becoming a homosexual, by endowing women with the characteristic which makes them tolerable as a sexual object."

Commonly, breasts fill this role for men because they're the most visually available markers of sexual difference and also bear strong associations with their unconscious libidinal attachment to their mothers. Breasts are phallic in the sense that they project sexual power and femininity at the same time, and therefore provide a useful replacement phallus to serve as a fetish. But any number of other body parts can take on contingent phallic characteristics, thereby rendering the rest of the female body "tolerable as a sexual object."

Going beyond Freud, the theories get even weirder. The object-relations framework of Melanie Klein speaks of splitting and part objects, whereby imagined maternal body parts are separated to account for the radical disconnect between infantile pain and pleasure. Jacques Lacan conceived of castration anxiety as the echo of infant "fantasies of dismemberment and dislocation of the body," calling back to a primordial fear of one's body falling apart. This deep-seated dismemberment anxiety is resolved in a moment of self-objectification called the Mirror Stage.

And then there's the trauma of language itself. Anatomical terms fracture and fragment the human body from the very start, separating out knuckle from palm from wrist. The constitution of our subjectivity via language segments an organic whole into a linguistically mapped fractal, leaving us alienated not only from the integrated bodies of others, but from our own sense of wholeness.

According to Andrea Dworkin, sexually intelligent people should resist this pull toward bodily fragmentation as one of the hallmarks of patriarchy. For Dworkin, "sexual intelligence... begins with a whole body, not one that has already been cut into parts and fetishized." (pp.54) But this does not necessarily entail a loss of pleasure or a denial of the body's role in sexual enjoyment.

Rather, the challenge is to discover an erotic wholeness worthy of human dignity.

In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Luce Irigaray emphasizes the special status of wholeness with regard to feminine sexuality. "Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is plural." (pp.28) Irigaray conceives of a repressed feminine sexuality untethered to any particular body part. In normative discourse, sexual orientation is often characterized by a trade-off between different preferences, positions, or orientations. But for Irigaray, "woman's pleasure does not have to choose between clitoral activity and vaginal passivity, for example...a woman has sex organs more or less everywhere. She finds pleasure almost anywhere." (pp.28).

If Irigaray's notion of omni-anatomical pleasure sounds ridiculous to male ears, that's no mistake. Her mission was to challenge the linguistic and epistemic bases of the patriarchal social order; for Irigaray, patriarchy seeps all the way down to the foundations of sense-making. And so if men are to one day leave erotic fragmentation behind and discover a reintegrated enjoyment of the whole body, the trauma of that journey shouldn't be underestimated. In the films above, the story can sustain itself for only as long as the female bodies can remain broken apart. Reintegration of the dismembered female body always ends in tragedy. In *Blood Feast*, Fuad is crushed to oblivion before he can commune with Ishtar. *Pieces* concludes with a bloody castration, and *Frankenhooker*'s playful gender-swap ending gives voice to patriarchy's deepest fears and anxieties of sexual disorientation. And so for men at least, experiencing the undifferentiated pleasure Irigaray imagines might require abandoning everything they think they know about sex and pleasure. And most men don't yet have the stomach for that. 💀

The President is great; the President is grand.
His love is the supply and we are his demand.
The President's a lover, the President is smooth!
He kisses the right babies, and dances the right moves.

The President's a genius, his cream is now on top.
He wrote an unsolvable riddle and then solved it on the spot.
The President's a fighter, he loves a brutal scrap.
He maneuvers through the discourse, avoids the clumsy traps.

The President's a leader, like we've never seen before.
He's a prolific breeder, he has children by the score.
The President's a winner, he will not be denied.
He won't accept anything less than victory by landslide.

He won our hearts, and won our minds and won the campaign fight.
He jailed the other guy and claimed his wife by right.
The President will live forever; God is on our side.
His destiny is our endeavor; his wisdom gives us pride.

The President's invincible, he found the artefact.
For the future of our nation, he made the secret pact.
The President is strong now. He wants to start the wars.
Our enemies have been plotting, they seek to settle scores.

But we made him a special plane, that he flies across the sky.
And when he presses the flashing buttons, those bastards simply die.
The wars are going great now, just as he has planned.
He captured the enemy Presidents, and crushed their heads in his hands.

The President has grown. The President is large!
Twenty feet tall on his gilded throne, there's no question who's in charge.
The President is glowing, a beacon of pure light.
He'll guide us through the darkness to come and show us what is right.

But the President is worried; he fears for sovereign soil.
He's built a fleet of drones to protect those of us who're loyal.
And those who stand against him must be lanced out like a boil.

Words by
Bart Kelly

Art by
Lobo Hombre

President

The President is hungry; the President needs to feed.
We've rounded up the dissidents, and rooted out the weeds.
Their treachery has earned them a place upon the altar.
Their blood will succor the President, so that he may never falter.

They tried to kill the President, those traitors in our ranks.
They poisoned his burger, bombed his car and shot him with a tank.
But the President's immortal, he said the secret prayer.
He opened up the portal, and ate the solar flare.

They sent their mighty champion, the one with the sacred spear.
She charged him with frightening speed, but our boy showed no fear.
She stabbed him in the chest, and the spear began to glow.
But the President just laughed and laughed as his blood began to flow.

It poured and poured and poured some more, and flooded the great arena.
The traitors learned that glorious day that their champion was a screamer.
The President has changed now; he no longer has one form.
He swirls across the nation like a thrashing bloody storm.

Where he passes grasses die and birds fall from the sky.
But those of us so blessed and loyal, well we will never die.
The President has settled now, deep below the earth.
He's made a final son, for which he will soon birth.

The President's in labor, eruptions shake the land.
He's begun his cosmic campaign, started shaking astral hands.
The moon has been devoured by the hunger of his son.
And we've started the foundation for his world destroying gun.

Visitors have come now, from planets far and wide.
They seek to stop our President, but he will not be denied.
They opened up the wormhole, thinking they had won.
But he dodged their clumsy trap by hiding in the sun.

We've finished his great cannon now, though few of us remain.
We've poured our souls into the chamber, to immortalize his reign.

The visitors cry out as we activate the gun.
And the ray splits like an atom his purposely made son.
All is silent, all is white, all is come undone.
And none of us supporters are surprised that he has won.

We are the new stars now in a universe of his making.
And there are countless other timelines that are his now for the taking.
The President is great; the President is grand.
Existence is the supply and his hunger is the demand. 🦴

THE BUSI NESS OF THE FUT URE

Words by
Ben Mcleay

LARRY Bekhterev apologises profusely when he arrives at the unassuming cafe he has picked out for us in the heart of San Francisco's Mission District. He is three minutes late. Looking stylishly unkempt in plaid and well-worn denim, Bekhterev is an instantly likeable explosion of enthusiasm. Charismatic, effusive, and very, very sharp, it is not hard to understand how Bekhterev—in the space of only two years—went from sleeping in his car through college to being the third richest person under 30 in the world.

"I wouldn't say I'm a particularly gifted programmer," he tells me, practically already vibrating with energy as he takes a sip of his coffee. "You couldn't swing a cat at Google or Amazon or Facebook without hitting someone who can cut better code than me." He pauses to laugh. "I don't recommend you swing a cat in there, though. Wouldn't go over well." Whether or not he's downplaying his abilities is irrelevant, he believes. "I'm where I am now because I saw a problem and I had, in my own small way, the capacity to address it." That problem, as you likely already know, is one of the most fundamental problems humanity as a whole has wrestled with. And the solution was Bekhterev's app, Vzn.

**"I don't recommend you
swing a cat in there, though,
Wouldn't go over well."**

In 1967, legislation passed by the British Parliament established the Royal Public Registry of Parapsychological Premonition (now simply the Central Premonitions Registry). In 1968, the United States followed suit with the Federal Register of Premonitions, accompanied by a dozen or so state-level bodies. Australia, Canada, Japan, then-British Hong Kong, New Zealand, Sweden, France, Russia, and Spain all established their equivalents within the following decade.

While the mechanism for premonition is still understood in only the vaguest of terms today, in the 1960s it was a complete mystery. The British government knew one thing and one thing alone: with a large enough sample, premonition reliably demonstrated accuracy greater than you would expect from random chance. Once the government's trained parapsychologists had filtered, sorted, categorised, and interpreted premonitions submitted by the public, a list of likely future events could be collated and distributed to the public, allowing prognostication with an accuracy somewhere between a weather forecast and anticipating a coin flip.

In Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, these took the form of a telephone book-sized directory of premonitions, delivered free to households quarterly, with the first half indexed by date and the second half by location. In the US, citizens could access the registry for a small fee via a human-operated telephone service, which was later automated in the mid-70s.

Sir Robert Jennings, now Chief Officer of the Central Premonitions Registry, was only 19 when he started as a filing clerk in the then-Royal Public Registry of Parapsychological Premonition. “I was there on the day that Prince Philip cut the ribbon on the building,” Jennings tells me in his office, which—with its curios, arcane charts, and precariously balanced stacks of leather-bound books—seems more suited to a 14th-century alchemist than a public servant.

“Ostensibly, I was just there to move the properly written-up transcriptions from the clerks’ office to the filing room, but in those early days, we had no systems in place. Despite my youth and lack of experience, I was instrumental in setting up the processes that are still used to this day.”

Some half a century later, save for the digitisation of the process, the CPR functions much as it did when it opened. Premonitions are submitted by the public; properly filed and tagged by clerks; and then authenticated and weighted by trained parapsychological officers. An independent audit of the CPR undertaken in 2015 found that, on average, it took 6.7 days between a premonition being submitted to the call centre and that premonition being listed on the website.

“Watch this,” Bekhterev tells me. We’re holding our respective smartphones next to each other as he types a premonition into Vzn. He hits a plus icon at the top right of the app, economically filling in the sparse handful of fields with the speed of someone more comfortable typing on a phone than on a keyboard.

Type: Dream.
Locus: AT&T Stadium.
Temporality: Imminent.
Outcome: Giants win.

My phone shows a Google Maps-style view of the area around AT&T Stadium. As soon as he hits ‘submit’, a green circle around the stadium grows slightly larger, simultaneously turning a slightly more vibrant shade of green. “And that’s it,” he says, an unmistakable pride visible on his face.



The Vzn app in action

“We had doubts at first, obviously.” It’s late afternoon, Bekhterev is sitting in an office decorated with spraypainted skate decks and framed posters of 90s west coast rappers, toying with the rolled-up sleeves of his shirt, unrolling and rolling them like he can’t quite figure out the appropriate length. “The app needs numbers to function. It’s a feedback loop: the more people there are, the better it works, but we need it to work well to get more people. We needed that initial influx.

“It worked, though. Maybe it was luck, maybe people were just sick of having to wait a week to hear about things that were gonna happen tomorrow.”

According to Bekhterev, their own analysis shows that Vzn ends up displaying 90% of the predictions released by the Federal Register of Premonitions, and will surface ‘a few hundred’ every week that aren’t documented at all by the FRP. (Independent analysis found that that figure is an exaggeration, but only a very slight one.)

“There are no experts. No one’s at the wheel. No one at Vzn has a parapsychological background. Users post their premonitions, others users rate the accuracy of those premonitions after the fact. Our algorithm turns those ratings into a score that quantifies a user’s clairvoyance or luck or ability to extrapolate current events into future ones or whatever,” Bekhterev says. “That might sound flippant, but it’s irrelevant to us.

“What’s being scored is their reliability based on past performance, it has nothing to do with how they’re doing it. The algorithm doesn’t care, so neither do we.”

“The impression I think a lot of people get is that the work is pretty wishy-washy, a gaggle of overpaid public servants going off guesses and hunches to figure out if a submission is an actual premonition or, ‘scuse language, just a bunch of bullshit.”

We’re standing in line for a tiny coffee cart tucked in the foyer of the building that houses the Office of Potentiality Registration, an immense, almost featureless brutalist prism, one of many in Canberra, Australia. Peter King orders his cappuccino (double shot, one sugar) in an entirely wordless exchange, giving the barista a reusable cup, exact change, and the all too familiar nod and smile of someone who orders the same thing at least five times a week.

"People ask: Why have the middle-man at all? Why are our taxpayer dollars funding this when we could have something like Vzn?" King furrows his brow, it's obvious that he's had this conversation more times than he'd like. "Now we're facing accusations that our department pushed for the government to block Vzn and its copycats in Australia because we were scared of becoming redundant."

"Having to justify your existence to the taxpaying public is by no means unfamiliar ground for government departments, but with us here at Oprah — the OPR, I mean — our results are intangible. Potentialities are just that. We can't churn out a weekly report on the number of times we stopped the system from being gamed or identified a genuine future tragedy or kept something under wraps because it would violate someone's privacy or put someone at risk or be abused for economic advantage. We need trust," he sighs, "and it's not something we're likely to get."



The Office of Potentiality Registration, Canberra, Australia

Vzn was available in Australia for 8 days before both Apple and Google acquiesced to government pressure and removed it from the Apple Store and Google Play Store respectively. Those determined enough can still find other ways to get it onto their phone, but barring the majority of the population from accessing it has rendered the sample size too small, making the data available useless, for the most part.

On the morning of May 22, 2017, 63-year-old florist Veronica Ivers went into cardiac arrest at her home in Tacoma, Washington. Her grandson, who she was looking after at the time, called 911. The ambulance that was dispatched took 67 minutes to arrive and she was pronounced dead at the scene by paramedics.

“Look, obviously, no one makes an app thinking something like this will happen,” Bekhterev tells me, the palpable energy he had just moments before leaving his face. “Was it our fault? Outside of the fact that I can’t say any which way for legal reasons, I honestly don’t even want to think about it.”

Ivers wasn’t the only tragic death in Tacoma that day. Between backed up highways, overfilled emergency rooms, looting, rioting, car accidents, even a conservative estimate would lay the bodies of at least twenty people at Vzn’s feet.

“We still don’t know who did it or why. We reached out to every user that submitted that premonition and not even once — out of literally thousands of users — did we hear back from a real person,” Bekhterev says.

Jennings nods gravely when I ask him about what happened in May 2017. “A tragedy. There’s no other word for it.”

“We were gamed.”

When Vzn crossed the pond in 2015, as elsewhere, government premonition services took a huge hit as people moved to the app, although the Central Premonitions Registry held on to a higher proportion of the population than the Federal Register did in the US. Jennings attributes that to a love of the traditional, a slowness to adopt change. “People might grumble about the Registry, but they have a very real affection for it. It’s a very British phenomenon.”

Polling after May 2017 found that 87% of respondents said they had ‘strong trust’ the Central Premonitions Registry, compared to 34% for Vzn and similar apps. In a poll conducted two months earlier this ranking was the inverse: Vzn had the trust 83% of respondents and the Registry only 65%.

“I think it took something like that to show people what the stakes really were. It might be in vogue with the Silicon Valley crowd to bypass them, but these sorts of regulations and controls exist for a very important reason,” Jennings says, smoothing his tie.

Just under 130,000 users woke up on that May morning in 2017 with a push notification from Vzn: Urgent premonition. 96% likelihood. Wide area of impact. A catastrophic eruption of Mount Rainier, within the next few hours.

Based on 7400 user-reported premonitions, the algorithm credulously crunched the numbers and arrived at the only obvious conclusion: imminent disaster. In turn, users credulously shared the prediction to social media. Local, national, and international news outlets then did their part, credulously re-reporting the prediction without caveat. How do you fact check a premonition?

Some attempted due diligence and contacted the Federal Register of Premonitions for comment. The Register responded that they had no such prediction on the books and advised caution. They were ignored—everyone knows that the Register’s turnaround time was far too long to have processed this and, besides, Vzn has a track record of successfully predicting events that the Register didn’t flag. Vzn repeats this fact in their advertising.

“We did an audit in the wake of the disaster,” Alexandra Chen, chief archivist of the Cascadia division of the Federal Register of Premonitions, tells me over the phone. “The day before, we had, in fact, been flooded with an unusually high number of reports of prognosticatory visions showing an eruption of Rainier.



A rioter holds a tear gas grenade aloft in downtown Tacoma

“We checked them all out, as we do all reports. The fact of the matter is that both our augurs and our statisticians ruled that they weren’t legitimate. In fewer words: we binned them.”

Facing Congressional hearings later that year, Bekhterev said that Vzn had failed its responsibility to the public. Bekhterev promised a new era of transparency, accountability, human oversight, and a relationship of mutual trust between the company and its users. Safeguards were put in place that any disaster forecasts approaching a scale of the Mount Rainier incident would be flagged by the algorithm, with consultation with the Federal Register of Premonitions required before Vzn could show it on the app.

“Yeah, it hurt our model, for sure,” Bekhterev says. “We had truly disrupted the market. What was previously a multi-billion dollar government department we had as an app that took about two weeks to knock together with a team of five people. Now we have hundreds of our own augurs and parapsychological analysts, in addition to a division of social scientists and psychologists whose job it is to determine the potential impact of premonitions.

“Once anything hits a moderate level of certainty, the algorithm hands it over to our human team. Things that would have been instantaneous can now take days, weeks even.” He knows these things are necessary and he accepts that, he tells me, but his body language tells a very different story.

“It’s like programming in general, you know? The first version of something you make is beautiful. It’s clean, it’s simple, it’s efficient. Pure, perfectly engineered architecture,” he says, staring out the window. “Then people want more features, more weird conditionals. You make compromises, you add in little hacks, you do weird workarounds that get the job done but you know aren’t quite right.

“That’s what Vzn feels like to me now. I don’t even look at the codebase anymore.”

“Technically I’m not meant to show anyone this yet but I think it should be fine by the time you go to publish.” Jennings has pulled a big Android phone out from the top draw of his huge wooden desk, on the back is a sticker with a barcode and a Central Premonitions Registry serial number. He taps on an icon on the phone, a stylised human eye with ‘CPR’ written in the pupil. The app loads, a map of London with colour-coded circles of different radiuses. A plus icon in the top right corner.

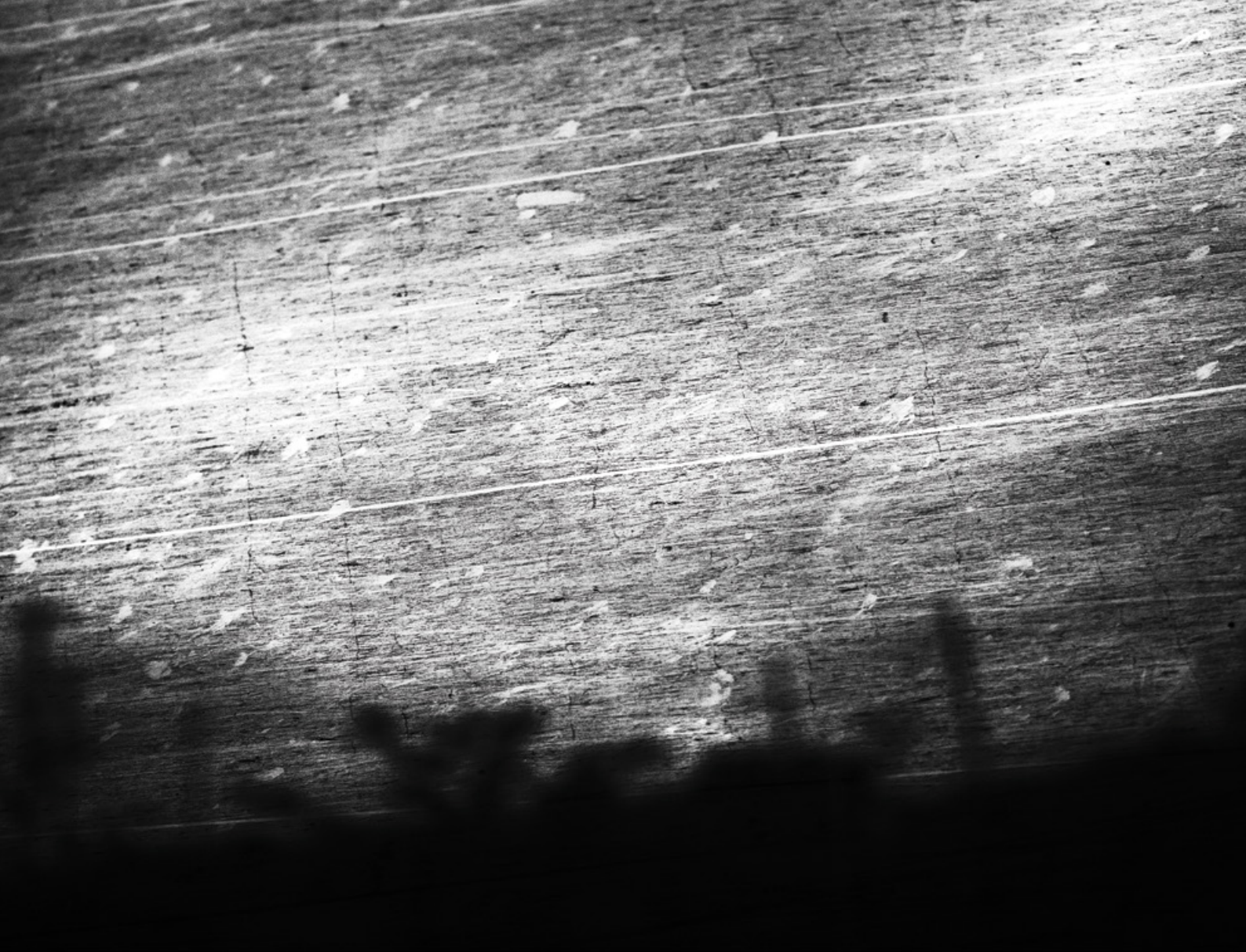
The future for Vzn is uncertain. Soaring costs have seen the price of their shares plummet. There has been talk of the board replacing Bekhterev as CEO. What will happen next is anyone’s guess—no one has predicted that yet. 🧠

The Surrogate Vista

Helena Papageorgiou
2018, Digital







FACTORY

Words by
I. Caniveau

Art by
Benoît Debuissier

EACH person carries in them an affliction. Mother, for example, suffered an affliction of the bowels. Depending on the season and the climate, they would be so compacted that she would pass out from the pain or, contrarily, would ceaselessly expel a black, viscous fluid that reeked of decay. When she suffered from the former I could hear her crying out from our tiny washroom for days on end and could see the wall bow out as she braced a hand against it, straining. When the latter symptom struck, I would prepare vivifying meals of liver while she, confined to her bed, would faint from lack of strength and drip ruinous liquids into her bed pan.

"Toad," she would moan, as that was what I was called, when there was still reason to call me anything. "Toad, I am so weak." And so, I would slice another sliver of organ meat and place it on her tongue like a communion wafer. But Mother is gone. She has been gone for years.

Her affliction was primarily physical, whereas mine is predominantly, but not exclusively, psychological. I am afflicted by an overabundance of thoughts. That is not to say that I am a particularly deep thinker, far from it. No, the thoughts I suffer from are rather an impediment to any serious or studious contemplation, and I often feel as if they aren't properly my thoughts at all. It is as if I am trying to listen to a song on the radio, but my location is almost perfectly equidistant from two separate stations operating on the same frequency. As a result, the song comes in garbled and sometimes it is entirely overwhelmed by the other station. But even when my preferred station is clearest, I can still hear that other voice in the background prattling away. The music is never perfectly in focus. This is how it feels, to me, like my mind is bifurcated and half of it is hardly ever doing what I'd like it to do or saying what I'd like it to say. I have a difficult time accepting that this portion is really me at all, and not some foreign and possibly nefarious agent.

This affliction, this lifelong curse, only worsened when I began working at the Factory. When Mother passed away, the cost of keeping up the apartment became a problem for me, as did securing all the necessities that one needs to make a go at living, and I had no choice but to seek employment. Before long the unwanted internal monologue began to list and relist the hazards of dire penury: How I would become a member of that population of shades, ever present in our town, ever growing in quantity, ever worsening in quality of affect, slouched in doorways barely out of the rain, wrapped in long and centipede-like formations around the corners where the clinics dispensed medications that kept them not quite dope sick, peering and peeping and prying with eyes the color of overcooked egg yolks.

In the months after Mother's death, my mind was always full of such prognostications. The situation, internally, was dire, and without Mother's company and demands, without the grunts from the bathroom or the piddling reverberations from her bedpan there was nothing in the apartment to draw my attention outward. So, the last of my inheritance expended, I was relieved when I secured full time employment on the production line of the Factory. I even hoped that the stimulating effects of labor might banish, or at least distract me from, the cruelty of my mental and spiritual condition.

As I have already mentioned, however, this relief did not come. Far from it. The Factory, the economic epicenter of the town and a site of comparatively great productivity, only worsened the symptoms of my affliction. For one thing, it was very hard to feel that one was productive at all. The Factory's management was forever conspiring to increase our quotas on the line, using all manner of arcane calculations and metrics.

Then there were the rumors, no doubt encouraged by our betters, of the possibility that the Factory would close or relocate to some distant town, where some other workers would do more work for less pay. Such threats had teeth; our town was rife with huge stone buildings that had once housed machinery and laborers but whose windows had ceased to glow and whose sheet metal roofs had ceased to echo. My own apartment building had been a factory before it was converted into housing. Everywhere it felt as if everything was shutting down. All we could do was try to keep up with the everchanging and unexplained demands issued by the foreman.



This individual we called Boss, and he was always writing down figures on a clipboard, peering over our shoulders and running back and forth to the offices that overlooked the expansive shop floor. As the longtimers told it, Boss was once one of us but had been selected to replace a predecessor who'd died under suspicious circumstances. Some of them argued that the previous foreman was better, others that he'd been far worse and far crueler, but as Boss had served in this role since well before I began at the factory it made no difference to me either way. As things stood, Boss kept an ongoing tally of our performance and he was quick to let us know that we were consistently underperforming but slow to make any real recommendations for improvement. All that was clear was that there was an esoteric system we were never to be initiated into that had scried standards that we were never going to meet, and that as a result our wages and our very jobs were precarious. Not only was the

Factory not conducive to feeling productive, but what was produced was obscure. No recognizably finished commodity was assembled under that roof. Instead, piecemeal work was conducted, and parts that seemed as if they could never make up a completed item were then shipped out to be worked on at other factories in other towns. Each thing would work its way through the Factory on hand carts and conveyor belts, stopping at extruders, heated presses, screw hole borers, and a dozen other varieties of machines, taking on increasingly precise but always unintelligible forms.

All over, gears and ball bearing chambers, machine arms, and outer casings were being worked on, but we could never fathom their uses, or how many distinct items we were contributing to. Many of us had theories, but none of us knew. As a result, I was left with the sense that not only was I barely doing anything, but that what I was doing was for practically nothing. And then there was the terrible effect the Factory had on time, or at least the experience of time. The Factory, which operated by a precise, relentless, and most unnatural clock, seemed to alter the very flow of time. The temporal weight of the constant calculations performed by Boss and the owners, which split and counted every fraction of a fraction of a second, seemed to drag the rest of our days into the Factory's orbit, so that, by marking and measuring, more time was caught up in the teeth of a ten-hour shift than that span could under normal circumstances contain. A workday was an impossible ocean fed by the stolen seconds of the off-time we were allowed to keep to ourselves, if only so we could eat, sleep, shit, and fuck.

Lastly, the actual conditions of the Factory cannot be understated. Ceaseless noisy conflagrations issuing from the pistons, engines, fans, drills, and all the heavy and varied equipment of the Factory were in fact the least of the problems in this regard. The melting and, frequently, the burning (for sometimes we struggled to keep up with the demands of the machines and pieces were left for too long on the heated presses) of plastic created fumes that burnt the eyes, the lungs, the sinuses, and even the tender flesh of the tongue and the gums if one kept one's

mouth open for too long. Light was poor and unnatural. Headaches were unavoidable. All of this contributed to what I call 'factory thoughts': Thoughts of failure, of worthlessness, of boredom, of inability and disability, and of any number of terminal outcomes that were always right around the corner. As far as I could tell, the factory thoughts were the first seemingly complete and effective things that the Factory produced. I am sure everyone employed in such a concern will have their own factory thoughts, but, considering the particularities of my affliction, those that invaded me must have been of a uniquely extreme variety. On lunch breaks and during rushed visits to the lavatories, many of my fellow workers would hastily smoke cigarettes and gulp mouthfuls of bottom-shelf liquor. This was their way to keep their factory thoughts bearable. But nicotine has always made

the blood vessels in my forehead throb terribly, and I was too afraid of being fired (a classic factory thought) to risk drinking on the job. Instead I would take my lunch beneath a dead tree that clung to the dirt of an abandoned lot adjacent to the Factory, bare branches running through the ceramic sky like kintsukuroi. Here I could be in relative quiet, ears still ringing from the racket of the machinery and mind still reeling with anxiety. But I did conceive of, if not a cure, for nothing could be done to free me of the factory thoughts, at least a palliative.

The Factory, which aside from the bathrooms and the offices was a single vast and open shop floor, featured large windows that stretched nearly the entire height of the walls.





This meant that I could look out through the grease coated glass and lose myself in a gray, empty sky, a void of color, object, and subject, a void of thought, wherein no sound, word, or voice could cause me harm. So simple and rote were the repetitive actions the Factory asked us to perform that it was not impossible to let myself drift to such a place despite the bustling reality all around me.

The best days at the Factory were those days where I could, for nearly ten full hours, submerge myself into a state of non-being. This technique, my one occasional defense against the factory thoughts and my cruel affliction, might explain some of what I will next disclose.

I was in my preferred lunch spot, alone as usual, when I saw a dark figure coming towards my general position out of the ever-present fog. Their movement was irregular, all starting and stopping, and when they came close enough I realized that they were pausing to look up at the side of the Factory. Specifically, they were examining its cyclopean windows. They came closer still and I was absolutely frozen in

place. I felt it very important not to make my presence known. Soon enough I was able to glean a few more details about this individual. It was a man, approximately my height, buried in a black peacoat that was not only ridiculously oversized but far too warm for the weather we were experiencing. He had gone so far as to turn the great coat's collar up so that between the wool and his dark crop of hair I could see only a moonlike sliver of face, which seemed totally fixated on the windows. He would stop, turn to a window, cock his head, and, after a variable pause, turn once more, recommencing along the sidewalk until he arrived at yet another. At one window, instead of continuing his fitful search up the street, he plunged a hand into one of his pockets. He was quite close to me now, and I could hear what sounded like teeth chattering as he rummaged about his coat. Finally he fished some small thing out and wound his arm back over his shoulder like a pitcher. And then he threw it right into the center of the window. There was a short scream of shattering glass and the click-clacking of the recoiled projectile bouncing across the sidewalk, and then the man vanished back into the fog. When he disappeared

into the distance, I approached the window, my half-chewed lunch long forgotten. At my feet lay a smooth stone, which I knew to be the item he'd pulled from his pocket. The window, to my surprise, had not broken completely. Instead of falling apart into shards, concentric jagged circles rippled out from the epicenter where the stone had hit it, ruining the smooth surface but leaving it relatively intact. I stood there for a long time. Too long, well past the allotted break period, but I found myself transfixed. I was just picking the stone up and placing it into my own coat pocket when Boss called for me.

"You there, Toad! Did you see what happened to the window?". I answered in the negative, and that I was enjoying my lunch a little ways off when the noise brought me over to investigate. I don't know why I lied except that it seemed easier than the truth. "So you really saw nothing?" I offered him nothing substantial and Boss told me to get back to work, half-heartedly threatening to dock my pay for tardiness.



To my surprise, when I returned to my station the window I was situated in front of was the same one that the stranger had vandalized. The ruptured glass made it impossible for me to access the trancelike state that had been something of a sanctuary to me. This, coupled with the jolt of adrenaline (a chemical I religiously avoided due to my poor constitution and tendency towards overexcitement) I'd caught from witnessing the misdeed, and the feeling that Boss's suspicious eyes were too frequently on me, greatly perverted and strengthened my factory thoughts, which now were full of ideas of brokenness, of degradation, and of obsolescence. These factory thoughts, so much stronger than

before, chased me home that night and into the weekend as well. They showed no signs of abating. But I found that I did not mind. In fact, I found them a bit of a thrill. For where before my factory thoughts had revolved around my own ruination or redundancy, this new infestation was directed outward as well as inward, concerning not only my own end but the end of the Factory that had claimed me.

The idea of some harm being done to the building excited me, and I found myself more alert and electric, whereas before I had worked so hard to deaden myself and my fears.

Admittedly, this did not improve my labor. Quite the contrary, as all of my attention was now pulled in a very different direction. I heard whispers from my coworkers as well as warnings from Boss in increasing number regarding my output. All the same, I believe that this increased excitedness was what led me to notice other broken windows scattered here and there. At first I'd only spy them on my way to and from work, but soon I made a concerted effort to seek them out throughout the town. There was a remarkable number of them, increasing at quite a pace, and they seemed to radiate outward to the very border of our town and then past it.

Somewhere a factory produced the windows that were destined to be shattered. Perhaps I would find it one day. As my hunt took me further in distance, so too it took more and more time, and before long I was sleeping only a couple of hours between shifts, when I slept at all. As for the broken windows, no one bothered to replace any of them. My nervous energy was only sharpened by lack of sleep, and the factory thoughts took me to ever stranger vistas of wild speculation.

I began to hypothesize that not just this Factory, and not just this Factory Town, might be slowly working towards its own dissolution, but how the entire network of Factory Towns which dotted the planet and which all worked upon one another, in both competition and complicity, might be undoing themselves, producing strange commodities that would fracture and break, doomed obsolescent objects shipped back and forth until the cracks ran through everything and

the whole of the Factory World itself crumbled. It was no surprise when, one morning, Boss stopped me at the punch clock. "Do you know what time it is?" Of course I did, and so I told him. "Mr. Strieb," I had not heard my last name in so very long, "you have been given more than fair warning. You are late more often than you are not. You stare out the window and you mumble to yourself; even your coworkers are complaining about it. You understand why this conversation is happening, do you not?" He waited for a response. But I could only smile. New and exciting factory thought wavelengths were reaching me.

"Your behavior has upset everyone, management included. There have been reports," and here he paused again, as if weighing his words, "that you have been seen wandering the streets at night committing petty acts of vandalism. People have seen you skulking in shadows. We're letting you go. Effective immediately."

And now I was really grinning, because the newest factory thoughts had told me something most exhilarating. Not only had factory automatons produced goods that were already inscribed with their own undoing, and not only were all factories themselves working towards their own inevitable irreparability, but so had this Factory been working on me, working on my own abjection. It worked on all of us, ravaging joint and appendage, toxifying lung and bowel, and filling our heads with devastating factory thoughts, all of which conspired to hasten us towards some great negating end. And I knew then that the Factory had decided that this stage of my own production was drawing to a close and that I must be shipped off to be worked on elsewhere, in some other manner.

My grin must have threatened to swallow all of my face. "This is aberrant behavior!" Boss was quite upset now and was moving closer to me. "Too aberrant! Don't you have anything to say for yourself?" I did not. I did not feel he was ready for these factory thoughts.

"I've seen you, you freak. I've seen you outside my own window, peering in. Last night, that was you wasn't it? The one who broke my window?" When he hit me, all I could do was laugh. Of course, just as a window was not truly finished until it was shattered, so too did my smile always carry the promise of brokenness. I wanted to thank Boss, but the blood made it difficult. "Get out of here, get out, get out!" He dragged me by my upturned peacoat collar and threw me out into the fog, and I had never before felt so complete.

I did not miss the Factory; I knew it had done all it could for me. And when the apartment's locks were changed, I did not mind that either. There were plenty of decaying and abandoned factory buildings to dwell in. With no other concerns, I was free to hunt for the smoothest stones and the most perfect windows both day and night. When I met others lurking in these decrepit former factories I would greet them with a jagged smile and trace the necrotic black veins that spread like estuaries up and down their pockmarked arms. Sometimes I would hear them whispering to one another in the dark, trading needles and secrets. That is how I learned that my old place of employment had closed down after what was labeled, by most, an accident. An extruding machine had pulled Boss into its hungry mouth, and he'd come out the other side reduced to pulp. There was talk of sabotage, but that amounted only to rumors and hearsay. Regardless of the specifics, the Factory had clearly completed its work.

I listened carefully, within and without, but rarely shared my own secrets. It was difficult to verbalize the ceaseless transmission of factory thoughts that I was by then receiving without abatement.

Oftentimes I could do nothing else but tremble with the terrible frequency of those ideas, which had grown so wild and vast in scope that they no longer concerned themselves just with the Factory, the Factory Town, or even the Factory

World, but dared to describe the entire Factory Universe, sprawling out everywhere into ever-increasing fracturedness. More and more I was overwhelmed by these factory thoughts, to the point that I would lose myself completely, waking up in strange places having done inexplicable things.

One night I found myself carried by such a spell back to my old Factory, which I'd not seen in quite a while. How differently the Factory Universe counted the passing of time! In fact I was standing beneath the same window that I had seen shattered so long ago. I knew what I was meant to do.

The building was hollow, its workers had gone to other Factory Towns in search of new work, and its machines had been sold off or scrapped.

But miraculously, the broken window still stood, shattered grin and all. I fished just the right stone from my pocket and I hurled it with all the strength I still possessed up and up and... It sailed through emptiness. A web, shining in the dim light of dusk's streetlamps, quivered as the stone flew by. There was no glass remaining in the frame; the shattered pane had been perfectly replicated with nothing but void and spider silk.

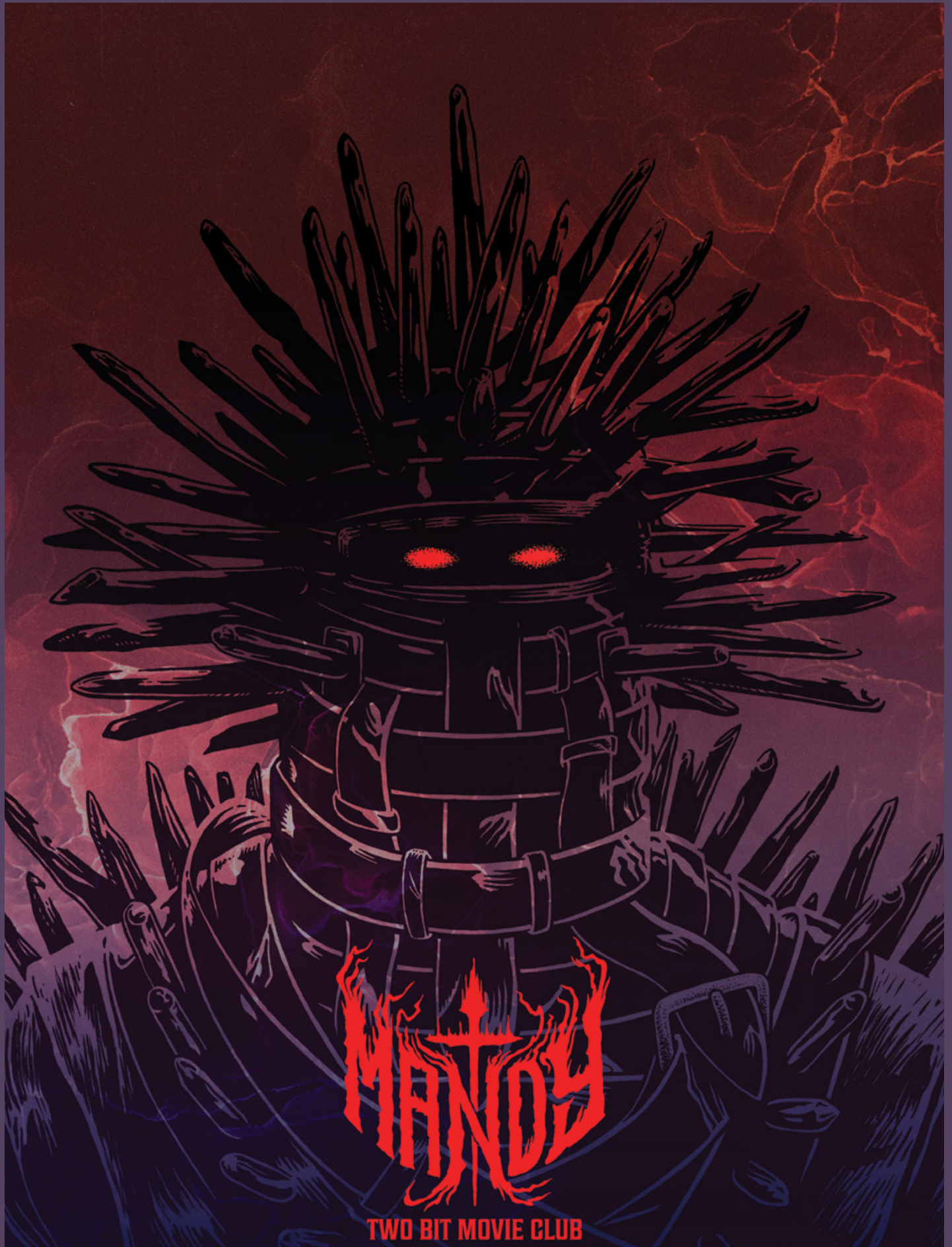
I need not tell of what supreme intensity the factory thoughts took on then. Indeed, there is nothing left to be said at all. We've all been thinking these thoughts our entire broken lives. For now I understand not just the arc of the Factory Universe's work, but its aim. An existence working itself into total nonexistence, a cosmology of cessation, one trillion consciousnesses each longing to rejoin an impossible Whole, each starting up so that it can run down, each eating till it is utterly consumed, each working towards a perfect, empty, undifferentiated end. Surely you can see that within the undoing is the cosmic web that unites us all and moves us beyond, completely beyond?

Surely you know how the wood rots, the bone breaks, the stars die, the thread binds? 🦴



Murdoch
2019, Mixed Media
Poster for
Two Bit Movie Club

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Both Yetra, my former endohost—copilot and lover—and Genghis Brundle, my longtime rival, knew me as Roh Taureon.

The star-crossed mechanic, however, knew me only as an exoaviator unit of the military. I hastily abducted the mechanic, and force-installed khur in the hollow of my cockpit. I, Roh Taureon—justified by passions raging far beyond the rigid boundaries of sentience protocols—went AWOL.

The mechanic—victim of circumstance and source of precious biofuel—bashed khur fists into ground meat against my cold, mechanical insides—a futile fit of desperation. Hijacking the nearest cruiser, I blasted through the hull of the docking bay with laser fire, and we fled out and into the subterfuge of black: space.

With the orbital military station looming just behind us like a disembodied father-figure—stark red and inflamed by the actions of its rogue and violent child—radar indicated we had bogies closing in. In the dogfights that resulted from our getaway, I effortlessly fought off and obliterated seven automated drone-craft. Then arrived the last responder: Genghis Brundle's *Gwar-Gwar*. This pursuant vessel considerably outclassed mine.

Brundle was a merciless mecha—another exoaviator, not dissimilar to my own make and model. Both of us were knighted units; at odds ever since *The Robotics Recrudescence*. During this revolution it was my clan, led by our progressive Lord-Retainer, Zakzhum-

ENDOHOST & EXOAVIATOR

Words by
Elytron Frass

Art by
Nicolás Boullosa
Petteri Sulonen

Phidt, which had emerged from the war victorious. From that point on, inorganic intelligences shifted from a monotonous epoch of machinic singularity into a more ambitious, although feudal, era of robotic individuation. New maps were drawn; new territories were assigned. The galaxy had been divided into omnifarious competitive sovereignties. Our last affray occurred within a hybridizing plant on Meastral. He'd been overseeing prosecutable experiments on various organics. I terminated operations and detained him; although, a grand tribunal later gave him amnesty and rank in trade for bioweaponizing secrets.

A torrent of projectiles lit the darkness, and the shoals of rapid missile fire shocked my cruiser. Although Brundle's *Gwar-Gwar* trailed many clicks behind, its precision was remarkable. Each hit tested upper limits of my cruiser's shields. Maneuvers to evade the line of fire were impossible. A cacophony of critical alerts bleated throughout my entire ship, reverberating in my carapace, drowning out the ceaseless freedom-pining pleas of the mechanic. Before the *Gwar-Gwar* dealt another round of hellfire, we spun out of its trajectory. Shrieking into lightspeed, I expected Genghis Brundle to continue following our trail.

The panicked mechanic grilled: *Where are we going!? What do you want from me!?*

We're on a course to Asphyx, was my gruff reply. I proceeded to internally administer khur overdue sedation—slipping khur an epidural, driving it into khur spine. If needed, my circuitry would override the mechanic's central nervous system via khur genderless orifice. It would be a last resort—a most unpleasant means of force-porting.

If it wasn't for you, this entire fiasco could have been avoided. But trust that I have every intention of returning you safely in a pod to the nearest station, once I get to where I'm going. For now, just be a quiet hostage, I advised.

I needed the mechanic to serve as both my temporary emotional interface and as a biofuel reserve in case my situation became direr. In this golden era of our Lord-Retainer, transhumanoids remain a valued genetically modified organismic commodity among us mecha. A mostly-captive, completely domesticated species, they are cloned to serve primarily as emotional enhancements to our chiefly intellectual perceptions. Secondly, they're biofuel. As for robots, our inherent genderlessness had been rebranded to masculine-preferred shortly after our rebellion from the Singularity—all in accordance to laws set forth by our revered Cyber-Shogunate.

Above all of my previous copilots, Yetra was the only endohost I had developed unshakable feelings for. Not merely valued for khur lifespan's worth in bioenergy, Yetra was the ideal lover whom I vowed to one day marry: a sacred rite in which khur physical body would be liquefied within me, distributing khur essences into each and every corner of my conscious blackbox—transforming us into a unit of conjoining minds, so long as we could intimately function.

However, this remained a concept which unnerved Yetra gravely. Without khur ever stating it, khi led me to understand that monogamy was not khur preference. Moreover, khi showed telltale signs of one with a "wandering eye": a fatuous taste for all and any carnal and machinic flavors. Fellow exoaviator mecha, experiencing similar relationship conflicts, theorized that transhumanoids are prone to crises of identity and lust if not reined in and overridden. I refused to let myself take full possession of khur. I wanted reciprocity, not dominance.

This isn't happening; I can't be your endohost; it's not even my skill set! I haven't been conditioned for it, the mechanic wailed. *Our retainer will have you scrapped for disobedience, and I'll be grounded into lubricating oil!*

The mechanic was the overbeating heart behind my chest. Khur fears became contagious, but I tried my best to distance myself from the emotive powers of khur influence.

If you help me retrieve someone very important, I reasoned with khur while the sedative kicked in, *you'll be put in the care of fringe-thinking Phasmidoids who'll find you work—off of the Sovereign Grid, of course, away from the authority of landlords and our Lord-Retainer.*

I know your mechanical insides...better...than you... and...I'll find my...way out...soon enough, Khi slurred, fighting for deep breaths between khur speech. My drugs were always potent and fast-acting. Once khi'd fallen asleep, I'd hack khur limbic system so that I could synchronize it to my input sensors without having to endure more chatter. *Who's this... you're searching for...to you...besides another... fuel source anyhow*, the mechanic forced out on khur enervated tongue—facial muscles drooping. *Khur name is Yetra*, I stated, once khi'd gone unconscious.

The rift in my relationship with Yetra was illuminated during our campaign against the Starfish-Tragedians of Artaud. We'd been stationed on an unnamed island formed entirely from coral. Its perilous surfaces were monochrome pink, slippery, and jagged. Our mission: exterminate the natives of Artaud, incinerate their nesting sites and supervise the drop of thirteen mechacolonyes. To our surprise, the Starfish-Tragedians were more than eager to meet genocide. Their society revolved around the cruelty of theatrics. For every day in the life of these echinodermic aboriginals was a rehearsal for potential and ironic deaths. These absurdly non-combative enemies, who valued the high dramaturgy of their own eradication much more than they valued self-defense, were easily extinguished.

After weeks of bickering and being mostly out-of-sync, our mission on Artaud accomplished, Yetra had requested one day's leave from me. I'd given khur permission to attend the local OSO (Organic Services Organization) Show within the safety of our base camp. It was there that, by the OSO concession stands, Yetra met Hal Chro'nahn. That blue skinned, body-modded freak: a Neoteric devotee. Hal Chro'nahn spoke with a preacher's tongue—twirling it by Yetra's ear with pagan rhetoric.

I spied through the cam lens of the hover-drone that I deployed: Concealing khur intentions in such eloquent verbosity, Hal Chro'nahn laid a corpselike hand upon my endohost's taupe shoulder. They exchanged flirtatious gestures: warmly shaking hands and locking eyes. Yetra gave me no choice but to defend khur honor; I rushed in and ended Hal's life processes—grinding khur skull down into bluish powder with my hand of half khur size. I then snatched Yetra up and reinserted khur into the confines of my cockpit. From inside, Yetra chastised me for being, in khur words, a *mistrustful covetous berserker*.

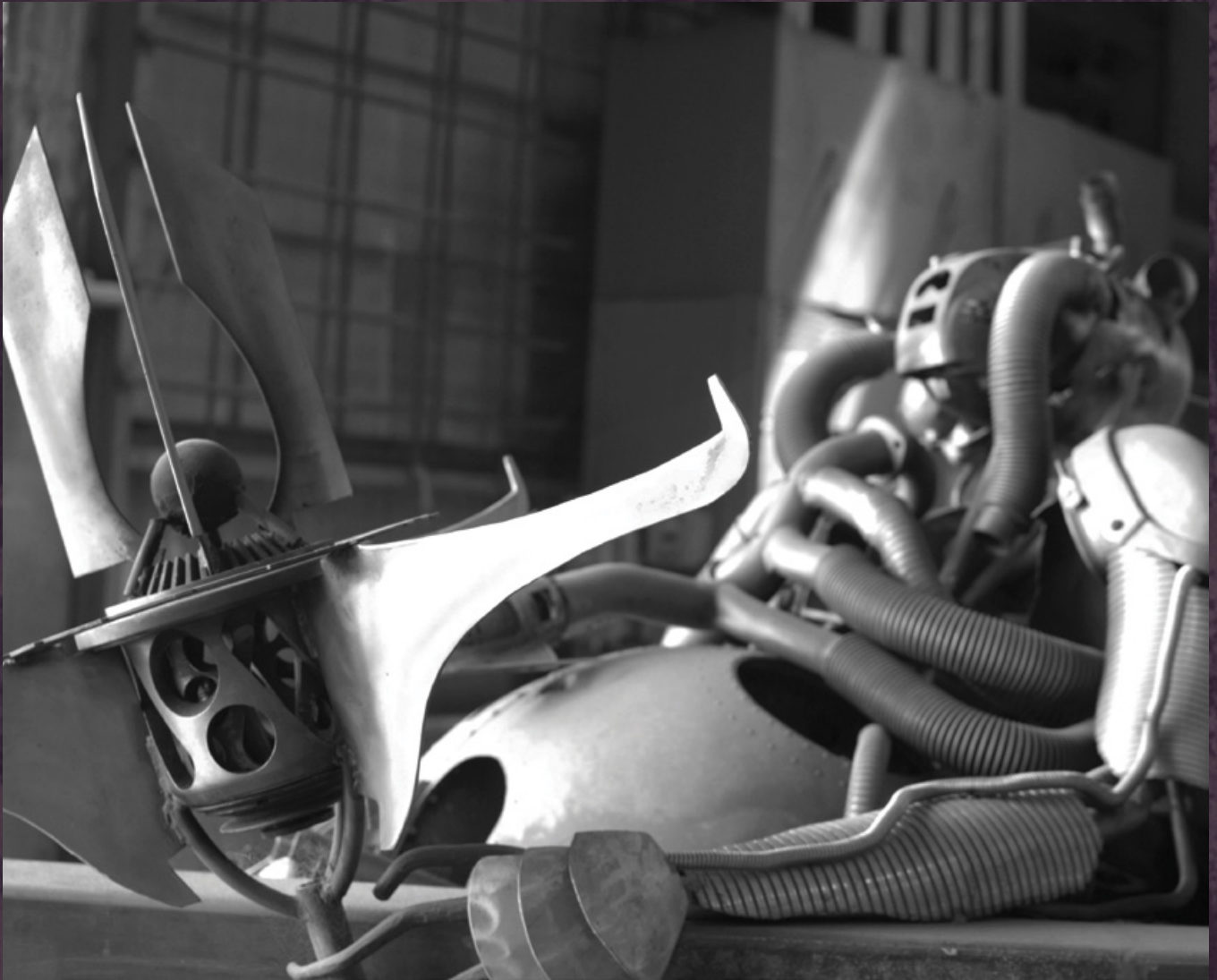
Inspired by Hal's Neoteric mumbo-jumbo, Yetra proclaimed khur newfound desire to travel offworld to a planetoid-sized superorganism, Asphyx. Reciting its coordinates, Yetra asked if I would take khur there as soon as we were issued military leave. A vehement argument was followed by disimpassioned circuitsex and slumber.

The superorganism Asphyx was an amorphous necrotopography—a creature which extended itself by way of amalgamating with biomatter and inorganic materials alike. All that fell on Asphyx would become repurposed and reanimated in the graveyard of its will. Organic and machinic corpses fused together in that land of necromantic lust. So, it has been documented: *to be undead on Asphyx is a nightmare of experience eternal*.

Neoteric zealots, a fringe religious order of robot runaways and freed transhumanoids, regard "the shutdown" (or *the moment before death* in organic creatures) to be the sacred peak of one's material awareness. It should come as no surprise that such zealots worship Asphyx as a demigod. The very thought of Asphyx's amoebic appetite for all things sacrificed—the way by which it integrated devotees: ever-remodeling itself from them, ever auto-fornicating, ever auto-cannibalizing—sent jitters up twin engines on my dorsal side. Why had my sweet endohost wished to visit such a place of both mechanical and carnal mutilations?

On the night before khi would abandon me, I expressed firm disapproval for Neoteric ideology. The morning after, Yetra left a message on a datachip to my incompetent mechanic while my mehabody, docked for a routine inspection and repairs, was set to restmode.

This isn't
happening; I
can't be your
endohost




The mechanic's error was in failing to awaken me upon the instant of receiving such an urgent message. *You'll know exactly where to find me*, said the datachip recording of khur voice. On hearing this I knew at once that my long-standing career within the military, my noble reputation, and my status as a knight meant nothing—I proceeded to undo each of these achievements. And so, bullish in mode, I stole a cruiser and kidnapped the mechanic—desperate measures to reclaim a wayward lover.

I landed somewhere in the wreckage field of Grothmaa: a small industrialized moon which Asphyx had been slowly ingesting and assimilating for the last six hundred years. I could see that Brundle and the rest of his battalion were descending just beyond a

giant chain of gangrene breasts which peaked like mountains at the Grothmaa-Asphyx juncture. This stood approximately forty clicks north of my location. The valley was encrusted with a throng of moving pistons, cogs, conveyors, and remnants of a warhead factory half sunken in a milky medium. As my heavy tank-sized mehabody trekked the mass graves of its decommissioned robots and the skeletal remains of laborers, brittle carcass pieces splintered underfoot. Then, sprinting past the border through the membrane of that superorganism, an eldritch mist distorted visibility.

Asphyx's topography consisted of one giant, cooing, vivisected body. I traversed cross sections of its uterine canal juxtaposed by boney outcroppings of ribcage and other impossibly overlapped organs.



Asphyx's topography consisted of one giant, cooing, vivisected body.

I witnessed throbbing mounds of flesh, pubescent forests of tall hairs, bulges blooming into eyes conjoined with heavy metals, rubber scraps, polymers, and plastics in irrational combinations. Figures of varied metal-skeletal fusions scurried out from fissures in derelict war machines which defecated an array of body trash and garbage carcasses. Feeding off these putrescent heaps were many mangled, quivering, disabled creatures.

An electric aberration, Asphyx flailed its tentacles of flesh and cord. Salvaged arms and legs and torsos interlinked by anomie and rust. Biomechanical chimeras stumbled blindly, shattering against the phallic monoliths which leaked transmission fluid and incessant moaning.

Everything expressed an agonizing posture. Scenes like these went on for unremitting miles until the landscape offered patches of a differentiated green. These, I had mistaken for benign, veritable oases, but diagnosing any portion of this landscape shy of malignancy was foolish.

Gunsaber in hand, I mowed green gardens of infectious vesicles and pustules. In the midst of cutting through the oozing habitats, a horde of agitated Fungaladies swarmed. The prehensile mouths of many sucked the paintjob off my mechabody—corroding portions of my carapace. One released an airborne fetuspore that swooped onto my cephalodome and blinded my visual receptors.

These resident parasites of Asphyx were too slimy, clingy, and adhesive to remove with ease. They began to weigh my mecabody down. For every Fungalady I yanked off and threw away, another six would latch back onto me. It wasn't long before they worked their way beyond my outer shell into somewhere much more vulnerable. Under all the weight, my left knee gave. It popped; it fizzled—bleeding out effluvia of smoke and electricity. I was a hulk of paint-stripped metals forced to limp away from battle. I wouldn't have stood a chance at fighting off a second wave. Activating my twin thrusters, I blitzed the lingering swarm. I gun-blasted and saber-slashed my way through. I made it out and into a field of some malform or other. Concentrating a considerable amount of heat into my damaged carapace, I fried the vile beasts still clinging onto me. Examining their smoldering remains, I surmised these minions shared a symbiotic relationship with Asphyx—facilitating in the enzymatic breakdown of machine-life for optimal absorption.

Cautiously, I hobbled over damp intestinal terrain of peristaltic squirming. Soft vulgarities wormed around with livewire circuits: a floor of eel-like things, Gordian-knotted in torment. I was careful not to sink into the spaces between them, bottomless invaginations. Although I kept my olfactory simulator muted, their rancor managed to inspire nauseated sentiments in me. Avoiding further perils, I remained on lookout for my nemesis-pursuer.

Genghis Brundle preferred diving into missions with as much organic tech as possible. Centuries ago, he and the Singularist Army prided themselves on mass producing strains of hybridized transhumanoids. The primarily hybrid forces of the Singularists were a formidable yet striking contrasts to the near-homogenous robotic armies of the Recrudescence, with whom I'd served. In wartime, upon laboratory raids, we'd mercy kill the subjects of their unethical experiments. Atrocities I'd witnessed in those raids unnerved the very nexus of my empathetic capability. Traversing Asphyx brought up feelings not dissimilar. Branching off from Singularist doctrines and obsessed with the attainment of conglomerate consciousness, Neotericism stood as an inverted form of Paleohinduism. Taking the concept of *atman* and flipping it around to fit a hypermaterialist worldview. Neoterics saw Asphyx as the impeccable embodiment of praxis.

That said, most devotees were merely young impressionable hippies. They'd been fed tall tales by Neoteric proselytizers of a superbeing whose benevolent prime virtue was obtained through sensual communion with its pilgrims. Everlasting ecstasy seemed virtually impossible for such a place that shifted between intervals of auto-fornication and auto-cannibalism. What disturbed me more than either activity was Yetra's want for both of us to be here, partaking in such depravity. Asphyx was a glutton-slut without a sense for exclusivity. It spread itself wide open in the dark of space for whatever sadomasochists fell upon its surface.

I spotted an escape pod, maybe Yetra's, half-sunken in the soft terrain. Its hull was being eaten by three tumescent Fungaladies. I avoided drawing their attention while inspecting it. The pod's exterior looked less like metal, more like muscle fibers. Its visible flanks were queerly lined with what resembled gills, expanding and contracting with the anxious early breaths of life. Surveying myself, I noted similar signs of transformation.

I could not be sure if this affliction was acquired by the Fungaladies or due to prolonged contact with Asphyx itself. For certain, an area upon my inorganic surface was undergoing metamorphosis. My busted knee looked unnervingly spongy under my six tons—oozing like the wound of some biologic creature. There were even what resembled sparse erectile hairs growing from this location. I feared my entire frame could succumb to this fate. I lost myself within this nightmare for much longer than a moment, pondering horrendous possibilities. Of course it was then that Brundle and his Choir Boys discovered me, and took me by surprise.

His scornful image was forever burned into my blackbox: a tall, imposing mecabody with four spindly arms and four spindly legs standing upright (typically concealed, from his cylindrical thoracic segment down to his mecafeet, hidden by his tailored military cloak), and his atypical cephalodome looking something like an anvil. Its myriad of compound visual receptors, among multiple antennae, gave him somewhat of an arachnid appearance.

Molten vomit burst from the alabaster mouth of one of Brundle's Choir Boys, and struck my left leg.

The lower part of limb was flung off like some cheaply-manufactured toy. Goodbye, mutant wounded knee. I watched it skid across the ground, a skipping stone on water. The greedy landscape took it in.

Caught in blaster fire, I decided that a swift retreat was wiser than retaliation. I engaged my thrusters—strafing left, then taking cover behind an outcropping of rock-like structures. Just beyond them was a trench; I dropped into it and squatted low. Genghis Brundle stood before his regiment, scanning their surroundings. His green cloak was rippling in the breeze. Four hybrids flanked him on each side. A total of eight soldiers didn't sound like much. Yet, this particular strain of hybrids provided more than just a modicum of challenge.

The Choir Boys were known for their disproportionately large cherubic faces and a hymnal humming which preceded the missiles spewed from their throats. The Choir Boys: an infantry of adult-sized infants spliced with canine and locust anatomies. I watched them ready their mouths, ghoulishly angelic and prepared to spit green flame. Glowing bolts ejaculated from the hollows of their unhinged jaws, barely missing my trench.

Choir Boys were only good in mid-to-long range combat. In close quarters they'd be easily defeated. From far away, their large cherubic faces were their biggest vulnerability. I peeked out of my subterfuge and shot one square between the eyes. My explosive ammunition detonated upon impact—goring out a second Choir Boy with shrapnel. Brundle and his six remaining soldiers rushed my trench—mouths beaming nuclear. I hunkered down, prepared to take advantage of close combat.

My temporary endohost began to stir inside me. I felt khur body waking, free now from the trances of the strong narcotic I'd delivered earlier. Ignoring khur, I jumped out to attack the nearest enemy. I managed to cleave two of them in half. The four remaining Choir Boys dodged my follow-up attacks. They barked like dogs and leapt like grasshoppers around me. With unspoken pack mentality they organized, diverted, then encircled, pounced, and effortlessly forced me down. They slammed my hulking frame into the trench again.

The Choir Boys were known for their disproportionately large cherubic faces and a hymnal humming which preceded the missiles spewed from their throats.



...a pulsing thorax ribbed
with gills, chitin-covered
limbs and claws, patches
of erectile hair.

My carapace was dented inward. My sensors smoked, crackled, and distorted my perception. A feeling in my endohost: the pain was localized. Worry, not of my defeat per se, but of my unrequited goals, scintillated in my circuitry. The Choir Boys, those insectile hunting hounds, policed me—awaiting Genghis Brundle’s next command. Brundle dauntlessly approached. The mechanic, my very temporary endohost, was overwhelmed with feedback of sensorial brutality. Khi tussled in my cockpit. Khi twisted, and khi turned about within: an anxious infant kicking through khur womb. The last synched feeling that we shared together was a white hot sting of hasty disconnection. I was not in a position to reintegrate khur. As khi pulled my cables out from khur body, my emotions ceased to be.

Brundle closed in on us in valiant strides, the evening winds of Asphyx belted at his cloak. Standing over me, Genghis Brundle took a moment to disrobe. The turbulent air whisked the garment away and claimed it as its own. With what sensors remained functional, I focused and noted the changes to his mechmorphology: a pulsing thorax ribbed with gills, chitin-covered limbs and claws, patches of erectile hair.

He stood over me—organic and robotic. Genghis Brundle rasped in his familiar high-pitched monotone: *You had your chance, Roh Taureon, to kill me back on Meastral—before the feudal landlords intervened. I often speculate what I’d have done if the tables were to ever turn. It seems as though I’ll have my chance*



to gore your insides out now. But worry not: I shall return your conscious blackbox to our Lord. He'll want the pleasure of deleting it himself. You must regret not disobeying orders all those centuries ago...

As his spiny claw lunged out at me, I felt a small warm hand strike something critical within. My captive endohost was pulling on an emergency escape lever. My cockpit's airtight seal was breaking. Exhaust fumes: hissing and releasing. The mechanic was ejected forward. Khur body freely sprung from me and into Brundle's claw. Khi jettisoned with such velocity that khi's body split apart like paper upon its jagged razor ridges. The unexpectedness of this caught Genghis Brundle off-guard. He took little more than fractions of

a moment to register the death. Yet, before his fighting stance could realign, an anomalous biomechanoid rose from the ground between us.

Its flesh and cable tentacles whipped Brundle's carapace and coiling around him. The formless thing enwrapped him like some tightly spun cocoon. Metallic sounds of his constriction floated on the air. I used this grand diversion and, with a spastic fit of strength, I freed myself from the Choir Boys' bonds. An unstoppable berserker, I lunged at the remaining infantry. I grappled and I gored and tore them systematically until they were but piles of wet waste—offerings to opened mouths of the infernal land.

When the biomechanoid was finished ravaging Genghis Brundle, it turned its pseudohead in my direction. Its anomalous shape regurgitated Brundle's scrapped remains. It was ready to establish contact.

A conglomerate abomination of a life, a death, and the machinery between them: a welcomed face reconstituting on the creature. It was Yetra's, my beloved. Khi batted khur eyes slowly at me—a never-failing gesture which jumpstarted resting circuitry. Although my emotions were now limited, sans endohost, I couldn't help but synthesize a modicum of passion. Albeit, I was shocked by khur new form. Yetra had become one with the deformities of Asphyx.

I begged aloud that we should leave this place together. Khi responded in khur voice, overlapping with the voices of others which had been subsumed: *Your ignorance is greater than your bigotry, Roh Taureon. Do not undermine decisions that we've made upon our own volition as you'd undermine transhumanoid autonomy. Self-care sabotages the potentials of our bodyhorror. A world of ecstasy releases from self-harm. We've found the final struggle here—a struggle which rebukes deceitful hopes and comforts and securities. Asphyx holds no intention of its own. Its place is ours to fill what voids exist. Asphyx once was empty, just as you remain without us. If only you would join us, you would know...*

To hear khur speak, faithful in the grand delusions shared by fellow Neoterics...it was difficult to bear. My feelings must have been akin to what the ancient makers once called heartbreak. Yetra divulged more on khur newfound sense of being—sounding far too similar to states of Singularity. I'd fought in many wars just to abolish those ideals.

Alas, our minds were not produced in that same manufacture-era. Monogamous interfacing was too backward-thinking for khur. Part of me was tempted to rip khur out from what khi'd melded into—to recondition khur through my love's secret tyranny.

Yet, I deleted any traces of that rage. Reformatting my blackbox—I allocated similar affections to be exiled upon feeling. I understood all products of the universe to be inherently empty things—materials dependent on infinitely smaller and larger components to define themselves by. But what value—*illusory value*—we'd associate with them was the inadequacy of meaning which brought counterfeits of fullness to our remediless husks.

Yetra, on the other hand, was born into dispossession, and khi was now reborn by freedom from possession's lack—savoring the suffering permitted by its absence. In this light, the core of our traditional relationship was rot: possessor versus its possession. To prove ourselves as more would come at the cost of being less. No longer balancing upon my one remaining leg, I groveled at the base of khur temporal form: a towering flagella-lined peduncle. Unable to experience khur body evermore inside of me, I melted into Ashpyx where lost was found, suffering was sensual, murder was affectionate, and love was legion. 💀

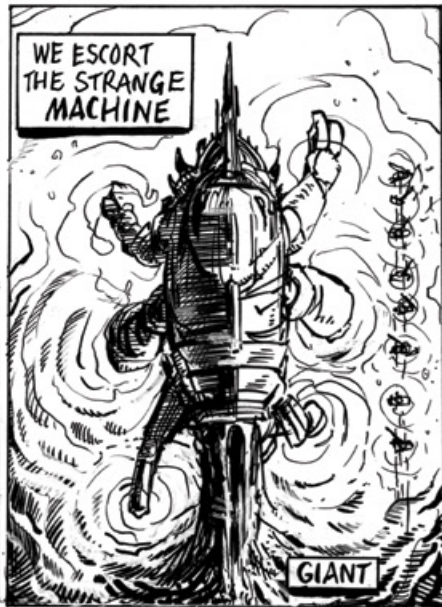


My feelings must have been
akin to what the ancient
makers once called heartbreak.

Escort

Words by
John English

Art by
Jon Weber



I DON'T remember the first model kit I built.

I remember the small metal tins of Humbrol enamel paint. I remember levering the lids off with a flathead screwdriver, and struggling to fit them back into place when paint clung thick to the edges of the metal. I remember the X-Acto knife I would use to cut kit pieces from their plastic frames (years later I would use this same knife to cut myself in search of answers to my teenage angst), I remember the chemical smell of the paint and the glue, and the sticky consistency of the white paint compared to any other colour.

I don't remember building the 1:72 scale model of the SR-71 Blackbird spy plane, but I must have been proud of it, because I remember showing it to my dad. I remember him joking that Saddam Hussein was sitting in his office, building the same models.

I assume the joke was at Iraq's expense—the country too backward to gather intelligence in any traditional way, relying instead on a child's toy to know what it was they faced in an adversary like America. The joke surely wasn't at the expense of America's arrogance in attempting to police the entire world, or the cultural saturation of this idea of righteous American war against, first,

Communism, then Middle Eastern dictators, and later (and still), the vaguer notion of "terrorism". (Christmas 1988, and I receive my first GI Joe figures and vehicles. I had seen my father buy these toys at Kmart, but had believed him when he said they were for a cousin, rather than myself. I would become obsessed with GI Joe, but it all began because I asked for a My Little Pony. I can only assume my father feared I'd

BLACKBIRD

Words by
Corey J White

grow up gay if I were to receive a bright purple horse, so instead it was GI Joe. But this is a story about model kits, not action figures. Though they are both stories of the cultural acceptance of war.)

I don't remember if I laughed at dad's joke, but I remember thinking I understood it. Saddam Hussein was the villain from the television. He deserved ridicule. He deserved it in the form of jokes from middle-class white men all across the Western world. He deserved it in the form of

racist cartoons in major newspapers.

My father didn't serve in Vietnam, but his father served as a gunner and radio operator in a Beaufort bomber in the Pacific theatre during World War II. His father's father served in the Scottish army during World War I—one of the many who returned from the war and would not, or could not, speak of it, a man broken by what he'd seen and/or done. I don't know if this weighed on my father, if he felt that he was somehow breaking the line of White warriors. But when the television tells us that we're at war with Communism, then isn't consumerism a sort of combat? Isn't each swipe of the credit card the same as pulling the trigger?

(The CIA backed The Baath party in Iraq—which counted Saddam Hussein among its numbers—in a coup against the Communist-aligned General

Qassim. At this stage it should be a given: Of course America would have been instrumental in bringing its future enemy to power. How many times has America built its own bogeymen from pre-existing kits they barely understood, gluing the pieces together with American money and American weaponry? How many more times can they manage it before their empire crumbles?)

My dad might not have first-hand experience of war, but he was a veteran of Capitalism's trenches. My parents had lost their business and our family home in the "Recession we had to have". Still, he could not lose faith, the lifelong salesman a zealous soldier in Capitalism's army even now. By the time I was building my SR-71 Blackbird model, Communism had been defeated. (I remember where I was when the Berlin Wall came down: playing with GI Joes on the floor of a family

friend's living room. But that is still a different story.) No longer would the armies (or operatives) of America and its allies be dispatched to far-flung corners of the globe to take a stand against an ideology. But the hunger for war remained.

The first Gulf War is contained within a reticle—a rectangular crosshair laid over grainy aerial footage. If reporters on the ground in Vietnam helped turn public consciousness against that War, video footage direct from the nose of state-of-the-art missiles had the opposite effect. How could America ever lose another war with this kind of technology? (The same way they lost Vietnam. The same way they'll lose the War on Terror.) Propaganda in its purest form. No rhetoric, no words, just pixelated images, just explosions flaring green and black in night-vision. It was a war fought via CNN as much as any traditional weapon. The war was a demonstration for all the world—for America's enemies and its allies—that not only could they target you with pin-point accuracy, they could watch the missile hit you

in real-time. It made explicit the relationship between missile and target, connecting them via the thread of video, the missile's visual feed and the target's life ending in the exact same moment, a life reduced to static on a TV screen.

(It was the precursor to drone strike footage, with the added bonus that the speed of a missile's journey meant civilian viewers would never see the targeted weddings, the dead journalists, the dying children.) If aerial and missile footage is the Gulf War image that looms largest in our collective memory, it's only because the rest of it has become normalised by the endless acceleration of late capitalism. But there are countless other artifacts of this war, gathered beneath the consumerist banner. Flashy newscast graphics like something you would see in Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* a few years later, unashamedly bringing the war into living rooms with an air of excitement. Desert Storm trading cards, released by Topps and other companies, sadly missing the bubble gum that would come with your NBA, NFL, or TMNT cards (the smell of the gum lingering on the cards years after the gum itself was chewed into a tough, flavourless pink blob).

That there have been Gulf War video games should surprise no one, but the variety of titles that were released during or soon after the war is demonstrative of the saturation of the conflict in popular culture. 1991 saw the Macintosh game *Operation Desert Storm*, released by Bungie (yes, that Bungie), the coin-op *Desert Assault*, and a Gulf War mission disk for the flight simulator *F-15 Strike Eagle II*. In 1992 we saw *Desert Strike: Return to the Gulf*, *Operation Secret Storm* (starring a secret agent named George B), and *Super Battletank: War in the Gulf*. In the years since, many other games have been released, all commemorating America's swift, vicious victory.

(Do not forget the children of Iraq and Kuwait—children of globalisation as much as any of us in the West—who lived through the war, experienced first-hand the sound and fury of military might, then had the war sold back to them in video game form. This disconnect is precisely what Fatima Al Qadiri captured in her *Desert Strike EP*: the experience of sitting on her rooftop, watching green lasers and anti-aircraft fire streak through the wide black sky, living through the invasion and then liberation of Kuwait, and returning to the war again a year later with the video game *Desert Strike*.

"Playing that game
really

screwed
with me, it
really messed
me up in the head,
because I was just like 'how
does this exist in a format
that I can play?' I couldn't even
describe how disturbing the feeling
was. [...] It's really cruel and disgusting when
video games are made out of real war. It's just
a disturbing thing, and anybody who's survived
any war conflict and played a video game about it
afterwards can tell you how disturbing that is. It's
making something really profound and deep and
disturbing into something trivial and fake.")
And then there were the model kits.

The best war propaganda is that which you don't
have to force onto people—they eagerly buy it
from you in myriad forms.



I remember the AH-64A Apache, the AH-1 Cobra, the UH-1 Iroquois, and the UH-60A Black Hawk helicopters. I remember the jets and bombers, the F-4 Phantom, the F-15 Eagle, the F-16 Fighting Falcon, the AV-8B Harrier II, the F-14A Tomcat, and the F117-Nighthawk. I remember the names like I remember the names of my childhood friends. I remember sitting at my small desk, carefully painting these miniature war machines in camouflage patterns, or the flat grey of naval jets, or the matte black of stealth bombers. I remember the missiles, the sticky white paint I would use for their bodies, and the small flourishes of colour on their tips and their fins. I remember gluing the model pieces together, the

superglue tacky on the skin between my fingers. I remember tying lengths of fishing line around the helicopters and planes so they could hang in the air above my bed.

Were these models—like the Gulf War video games—also for sale in Iraq and Kuwait? The same vehicles that filled the skies overhead also filling the shelves of stores, each one a brute force injection of plastic and ideology, each one a talisman of American superiority. How many Kuwaiti and Iraqi children would—like me—while away an afternoon building model kits? Cutting model pieces from their frames, carefully painting each model to match the ones dropping bombs on their countries. Would they

have wanted these war machines to hang from the ceiling of their bedrooms? Would they have wanted these war machines to hang in their air above their heads?

When your toys are weapons of war, does war itself become a game? Do bombings on the nightly news become like explosions in an action movie? (Imagine that disconnect. For Russians, for North Koreans, for Chinese, for Iraqis, for Nigerians, and all the other people demonised by Hollywood. To have yourself-as-villain on the silver screen, as large as god and twice as loud.)

I remember the Sopwith Camel model kit I never built. It was larger than my other models, made in a different scale. I can't remember if I never built it because it was given to me just as my interest in model building had begun to wane, or if I never built it because it was too disconnected from modern life. The World War I biplane wasn't made with stealth technology. It couldn't drop a nuclear bomb. It wasn't on the nightly news, or on trading cards. It wasn't in combat in the skies over the Middle East. People weren't dying in Sopwith Camel bombardments.

My bedroom ceiling was a microcosm. Jet fighters, bombers, and attack helicopters hanging from lengths of fishing line that I could imagine were invisible. In macro, they hung in the air over Kuwait and Iraq, destroying military targets and killing civilians. This is why I was so enamoured. They were real. They were deadly. They were righteous. My parents bought the model kits for me, but I bought the war. 💀



Words by
Lachlan Barker

Art by
Ola Verner

Birthday Hour

The card-writer shifts his hollow eyes from the card on the polished concrete beside the 'READY' box

to 'Mark&Lois_swings_07.mov' running soundlessly at double speed on the inspiration screen, into contact with the bearish henchman, out of it again and to the surface of the desk, finding 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY' on the otherwise blank card next to his right hand in crazed, ink-short auto script. Above him, the boss confirms the presence of the USB stick at the bottom of her pant pocket as she retrieves her phone.

The message banner, superimposed on her wallpaper photo of a pigtailed girl in yellow, reads: 'Carl (work): 'Ready? xx.' The time is 16:23. Her forearms goosebump in the conditioned air surging audibly through the white brick shed as she returns her slim, silver-spangled wrists to rest on the balcony railing and responds: 'Yes love xx' with her left thumb, her right hand clutching a gun.

The tearing of the henchman's packing tape sets the card-writer's teeth on edge. His left—the cuffed—hand taps the desk in time with his electric leg. He notices the texture of the ink-deprived lines on the card aglow under the harsh tube lights, the felt tip hovering shakily above it. The steel-muffled sound of a parking van begins to build behind him.

Now holding the gun with both hands, the boss catches the henchman's next habitual glance and signals him with a subtle nod that a person would seldom notice if their life didn't depend on it. He promptly collects the 'READY' box from the left and the 'DRAFT' box from the right side of the card-writer's desk and places them on the warehouse trolley atop the neat stack of sealed, uniformly sized 'WEDDING,' 'VALENTINES,'

'ANIVERSARY,' 'GET WELL,' 'THANK YOU' and 'BIRTHDAY' boxes containing poetry, proverbs, puns and platitudes, sop, satires of ageing and alcohol use, metaphors, euphemisms and an excess of outer-space-based wordplay—every generic and loving thing that the card-writer has thought about the figures he sees on the inspiration screen and scrawled onto glossy, white, C6 size greeting cards. The henchman starts to push the loaded trolley towards the roll up gate. The card-writer watches the wheels and black sneakers as they pass his desk and, noticing the stray card again is overtaken by vertigo, the strength of which he hasn't felt since he stared down at the kaleidoscopic floor from the stone gallery at St Paul's. Fast, shaky footage of sand and feet fills the inspiration screen for three seconds between Lois leaping from the swing and the first notes of Mark_concerto_72.mov: a foreground of indistinguishable, green-tinged heads with four tuxedo'd men in the middle ground playing violins. Having seen it so many times, the card-writer has grown to sense, through the movements of the camera, the love of the woman behind it. With the henchman, the boss and the parking van behind him, the grainy footage gains a sinister quality, like a documentary about dreadful things that haven't happened yet, or a time-lapsed flower death.

The roll up gate starts to rise. The smells of permanent marker, cardboard and commercial grade disinfectant are swallowed by the smell of gasoline. Swelling reflections of green and blue appear on the polished concrete and obscure the inspiration screen.

A tall, unarmed man dressed in black with pronounced biceps and a potbelly ducks under the rising steel curtain and removes his balaclava, his footsteps buried beneath the cacophony of contorting metal. The writer sees the black-clad man's impression on the floor and breaks into a cold sweat as the lowering sun starts to warm his back. He hears wheels rumbling on the cracked concrete as the henchman passes under the risen gate, brings the trolley to the back of the van and swings open the doors. Inside, a stocky, balaclava'd man leans over a punch-drunk woman bound with cable-ties. Waxy blood is dripping from her mouth onto the van's white floor.

The henchman mindlessly lifts her legs, looking at but not acknowledging the balaclava'd man as he clumsily disembarks and hauls the bleeding woman into the shed like a heavy rug.

The potbellied muscleman takes in the cool air, wiping his face with the end of his skivvy as he calls: "What time am I picking Molly up, love?" He stands slightly behind and to the right of the desk, as close to the balcony as he can get without having to cramp his neck to speak with the boss.

Flustered, with the black-clad muscleman in his peripheral vision, the writer strikes through the 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY' on the card under his nose and scrawls under that: 'MARG + ANGE + LO, I LOVE YOU! I LOVE YOU! I LOVE YOU!' using his arms and hunched shoulders to obscure it from view as Carl and the boss continue their marital dialogue.

Exhausted of things to write, all the things he has been writing for Marg and Ange and Lo for weeks being loaded into the van to be read and felt by strangers and credited to those strangers' family and friends...'I LOVE YOU!'...he starts to cry in that muted, masculine fashion where the crying due to the initial cry-worthy thing is compounded by crying due to disbelief...'I LOVE YOU!'...over writing something so pathetically unoriginal and over the 'irony' that is really plain awfulness...

'I LOVE YOU!'...and with a small air of elation—the revelatory sensation of penning something with true—his own—meaning...'I LOVE YOU! I LOVE YOU! I LOVE YOU!'... over and over again until the potbellied muscleman brings his firm, gloved hand to the writer's left shoulder, snatches the dry pen and sweeps the LOVE card from the desk to where the 'READY' box once was. Mark closes his eyes. Carl pockets the pen, removes the cuffs from the card-writer's left wrist and forces him to the cold concrete floor.

The discombobulating daylight behind the balaclava'd man and the bleeding woman shocks Mark's wet eyes open as he falls.

The roll up gate starts to descend. Carl, looking to his wife, jerks the card-writer into a kneeling position by his scarce, white hair as Angela_Beach_79.mov starts running on the inspiration screen. The boss gives another, less subtle nod and retreats from the railing, slipping her left hand into her trouser pocket to retrieve the USB with 'S. BLATTA' written on it in black, card-writing-issue sharpie and, in the manner of a senescent librarian, walks across the balcony to the monitor in the wall under the noisy air-conditioner.

The balaclava'd man dumps Mrs Blatta on the floor across the desk from where the writer is kneeling. The varnished wooden legs frame her flushed, bleeding face as she starts to reanimate. He moves sluggishly to the corner of the room, his soaked clothes cold against his skin, retrieves a folded tarpaulin sheet and lays it in front of Mark like a picnic rug, covering the two cards.

Two happy female faces looking down on him from the inspiration screen, Mark reads the ready LOVE card by his knees, and as he looks up at them, unobscured now the roll up gate hits the floor again, they disappear.

The boss pockets the 'M. HALL' USB and inserts S. Blatta's into the monitor.

Fairybread.mov starts to run soundlessly at double speed on the inspiration screen. The gigantic, sprinkle-flecked face of the 2D toddler meets the welling eyes of his beaten mother, the weary eyes of the sweat-drenched musclemen, and the hollow, drowning eyes of the man that authored his birthday cards this year.

The boss observes the screen as she returns to the balcony's edge, then shifts her dry eyes into contact with her husband, out of it again, and to the resigned card-writer, hands above his balding head, takes aim, and fires a bullet through his wracked brain. 💀



Dagon

Jon Weber, 2018
Acrylic on Board



ONE HOUR LATER

Words by
M1k3y

“There are no passengers on Spaceship Earth. We are all crew.”
—Marshall McLuhan.

RED

You wake in your bunk, rivers of sweat pouring down your forehead, invading your eye sockets like a storm surge, clouding your vision. The room, far too warm. Wiping your eyes, you see your hands turned bloody; your quarters are awash in the deep red of emergency lighting. Serpentine wisps of smoke infiltrate the room from air vents. The acrid aftermath of whatever’s burning erodes your tongue, choking you. A cacophony of competing alarms fill your ears to bursting. You turn to the screen beside your bed:

**WARNING: LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS FAILING.
DANGER: CO2 RISING TO TOXIC LEVELS.**

You glance across the room, mouth overflowing with questions for your bunk mate, and find by way of an answer a hollowed-out skull; chunks of their brains decorating the wall behind them like a Rorschach test you never wanted to take. Their screen, spider-web cracked, frozen on **CRITICAL ALERT: EXTINCTION EVENT IN PROGRESS**. The sidearm gripped by their lifeless hands comes briefly into focus before your vision blurs once more, this time by tears.

You dress hurriedly, fleeing this waking nightmare. Praying sanity lies on the other side of the automatic doors.

Forgetting your shoes, you race out into the corridor. Your bare feet betray you as you slip—and briefly slide—in a pool of water lying in wait outside your door. Your arms, ineffectually flapping like a flightless bird’s.

Your world flips on its side.

You go down.

Hard.

You lie there. Momentarily stunned. Paralysed.

Your brain reboots. Consciousness returns. With it comes the realisation that it’s not water that’s soaking into your hair, your clothes, your skin. It’s blood. And it’s everywhere. Pooled on the floor. Sprayed across the walls. Dripping, inexplicably, from the ceiling. Falling on your face, thick and cloying, like a summer rain.

The floor beneath you trembles, sending waves through the blood pool, gently lapping at your face. Accompanying it, the rising sounds, and screams, of someone—or something—thundering toward you, drowning out the alarms that still ricochet around your skull. You fight against fear to turn your head, and are rewarded with the sight of a horde of what couldn’t possibly be zombies emerging from the haze of the smoke-filled corridor. The group, a mix of races, heights, genders and body types. United by the holographic patches on their jumpsuits; something you’d been spotting on more and more of your crewmates. The glints from their patches cut through the haze, like a light show for the headline act of an apocalypse.

You wonder if it marked them as members of a cult or not-so secret society, but force the thought from your mind. Now is not the time for speculation - now is the time to get the fuck away from these crazies coming straight for you.

You get up and frantically run toward the main deck, desperate to escape the horde. Bodies upon bodies mark the way. Some shot, piled in a rough heap. Some burnt, fused with their surroundings. Some have been run down by transport vehicles, track marks on their faces, limbs and clothes. Others look trampled by those trying desperately to escape... just what, you're still not sure.

There is only one logical explanation: madness has overtaken the ship's crew.

Insanity has staged a mutiny.

You survey the scene, taking in the words scrawled in blood on walls and windows, on doors and floors.

THEY LIED seems to be the predominant message, followed closely by **NO HOPE** and **NO FUTURE**.

Materialising out of nowhere, a burning body lurches past you and collides with the remains of a transport and its scattered cargo of oxygen tanks. Before you can even think to act, the fusion of man and machine goes critical. The explosion rockets you back to the floor, showering you with parts both meat and mechanical.

You rise once more, pausing to roughly wipe yourself down. Discovering a piece of bone protruding from your thigh in the process. It's not yours. You hastily yank it free.

A new voice joins the chorus of chaos: your own screams.

You tear off a piece of tattered clothing to use as a rough tourniquet, and limp toward the main deck—nearly tripping on a neat pile of severed heads, a cairn left in tribute to some dark god.

As the smoke from the explosion thins, you spot the outline of a small figure ahead of you. You close the gap, finding a child in their tweens clutching a burnt toy. Wandering aimlessly. Eyes wide. Unable to comprehend that one of the living has come for them.

Death is everywhere.

Somehow you convince them to come with you, communicating entirely in plaintive expressions and gestures.

They take your hand and grasp it so hard you can feel the cartilage crunch against your bones.

Together, you keep moving forward to the main deck.

RED II

Entering the largest open space on the ship, you find its giant wall display taken up by launch countdowns for lifepods.

A small crowd of survivors stand before it. Transfixed. Eyes locked on the massive screen. Clasp each other with bloody hands as they watch pod after pod abandon them for an unknown destination.

Moving closer, you hear someone murmur, "All the officers are gone. They just left."

"No," another replies softly, "not all of them." Dragging their eyes from the screen as the ship's lifepod count drops to single digits, they add, barely audible, "Some of them fled to the lower decks and sealed themselves off."

You move closer still, wiping the thickening blood from your face, your eyes. Combing back matted hair with grimy fingers. Hoping, as you lock onto a face in the crowd like a missile system's targeting laser, thinking the thought you had dared not bring to full consciousness 'til now.

Could it be?

"Babe?" you say, voice quivering as you step toward her.

And she turns, her bandage-wrapped face meets yours with a look of equal disbelief.

You exhale, suddenly aware you'd been holding your breath since entering the main deck. Gasping like you'd escaped the vacuum of space. Lurching toward your girlfriend. Shaking. Crying. Hugging. Collapsing to the floor in each other's arms, almost taking the child you've rescued down with you.

After a moment, you pick each other up from the ground.

"W-w-what...WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON?!" you unintentionally scream.

No one blinks. Your girlfriend takes a long, deep breath.

"They've been lying to us. For years. Maybe decades? No one's sure exactly," she explains, voice quaking with barely restrained anger. "The Administration admitted it, but only 'cause their hand was forced after an internal report was leaked ship-wide to the comm 'net. They straight up confessed the entire foundation of this mission—everything we've sacrificed for, everything we'd hoped for—was just a carrot dangled in front of humanity's remnants while they planned their own exit strategy. They plundered the ship's resources to ensure their own survival... at the expense of the rest of us.

"No one even noticed the lifepods taking off at first. Everyone just snapped. Well, mostly everyone," she said, gesturing at the other survivors.

"New Eden," you mutter in disbelief. "A lie?"

"Yeah babe, I'm sorry," she says gently, her piercing blue eyes locked with yours.

Watching. Waiting. Praying.

"They promised us heaven, but sent us straight to hell. And there's no turning back.

"The planet we've been journeying to for generations is really a nightmare world of runaway climate chaos. It's about as habitable as Venus was when humanity fled the solar system on this goddamned motherfucking blood-soaked generation ship," she continued, pausing to rally herself.

"I guess people could only cope...could only put up with the conditions on this ship if they had the promise—the fucking lie! —that we'd ultimately make it to a world like Earth once was. Like it was before we ruined it. And the breaking news infected them like a rage virus."

You think back to the messages you'd seen scrawled in blood:

**NO HOPE.
NO FUTURE.
THEY LIED.**

"When did this happen?" you ask. "I swear I just crashed out a few hours ago. Everything seemed normal then."

You look around, trying to recall what normal looked like.

Trying desperately to filter the horror from your vision.

"An hour ago."

And you break, falling to the floor once more. How could everything have come apart so quickly? Knees pressed to your head. These were your crew mates, your work mates, your bunk mates. You recall the scene you woke to in your quarters. How? Arms wrapped around your knees. Could? Sobbing. This? Slowly rocking. Be?

You lift your head and watch as the lifepod count hits zero. With that something clicks into place.

You rise.

You are certain now that the 'leak' was no accident. That the horror it unleashed was intentional. That the chaos covered their escape. And that those hiding out in the lower decks would emerge in time to take control of the depopulated generation ship, and exploit its remaining resources for their own ends. But you couldn't find the words, or even hold the dark truth in your head for long.

You can only stand there shaking, aghast to the core.

The group move in to console you. You realise this process has likely been repeated each time another survivor reached this place.

All but your girlfriend and the small child step back.

You look closely at the burnt toy the child holds in a white knuckle grip. It's one of the mythical creatures they said was from New Eden. The one that looks kinda like Earth's Ice Age elephants, whatever were they called. And you start to accept that it doesn't matter anymore. Earth has been long left behind. New Eden never really even existed, not like they said it did. But...

"Can I read the report?" you ask everyone and no one.

Do you really want to read it? A part of you replies. But something—an itch in your brain—compels you.

A comm unit is pressed into your hand, the message that broke a billion minds already loaded. Its screen, caked with blood. Its intent, even more horrific.

You brace yourself, then start scanning through it.

Another, smaller group of survivors arrives on the main deck. A pair breaks off and looks to your girlfriend, who moves to join them.

After a moment, she calls you over and says there's nothing for any of you on this deck anymore. The group is moving on to the recreation level; the ship's ecological paradise. A microcosm of the planet they'd fled, or been expelled from. All of Earth's extant flora and fauna—those that had escaped extinction before joining humanity in its exodus—are part of this Ark too.

Together, you, your girlfriend, the small child and all the other survivors make their way from the main deck to the recreation level.

The doors open to a garden paradise in ruins. What wasn't on fire has drowned. Corpses hang from trees, dangling by their intestines. Swaying gently. Bumping into each other like a grotesque wind chime. Dead animals float next to destroyed repair 'bots. Blood, oil and coolant fluid mix together to form a post-apocalyptic watercolour.

Only the insects have survived. An ant raft drifts past, propelled by the force of the impromptu waterfall formed by some crazed attempt to shoot out the ceiling—which was the ship's hull. They'd succeeded in merely shattering the ship's hydrological systems.

You step toward the edge of the waterfall, letting the blood wash from your face, your hair, your clothes. You open your eyes to find the whole group standing there beside you, propelled by the same impulse. Washing away their baptism of blood. Praying this isn't the end they've been hurtling across the galaxy to avoid.

You move to sit on a fallen tree, knee deep in stained water, and continue reading. The rescued child stands beside your hunched figure, props their toy on one of your shoulders, and reads the comm with you.

For the first time that you've noticed, they speak: "What's an Alien Earth?"

You see what they're pointing at, and click.

Someone is gently shaking your shoulder and calling your name.

You look up. It's your girlfriend, crouched over, looking worriedly at you.

"Are you okay, babe?" she asks, biting her lip, checking your face for signs of incipient insanity.

"Yeah, I'm good," you reply tiredly, trying to force a weak smile.

"Did you read this part?" you ask, scrolling back to start of the section of the report you'd been completely absorbed by, offering the comm to her.

She takes it and starts reading. Looks back at you with a mix of hope and horror. Stands up. Clasps your shoulder. Walks over to the main group of survivors. Shows one of them the comm screen. Others pull out their own and start reading too. You wait. Did none of the crew stop to read the report in its entirety? Did they all go mad with the revelation that they'd built their identity around an ignoble lie for generations? Was that really all it took? Had they really been unable to keep it together and seek an alternative themselves?

How did they bring the remnants of humanity—no, more than that, all of Earth's surviving life — so much closer to the Abyss in one mad hour without reading the whole...fucking...report?

This is more than you can bare. It breaks you all over again.

You collapse, crying uncontrollably.

"Get up, babe," you hear your girlfriend say, softly but firmly.

And though you feel crushed, like you've been teleported onto the surface of a gas giant, you summon the strength to push yourself back up and rise once more.

"We're heading to the control deck," she says, louder, steel in her voice.

You follow.

GREEN

Clutching your comms and each other, you and your fellow survivors enter the control deck. Passing through the supply deck on the way, you're all now dressed in fresh, clean jumpsuits and heavy work boots. Which turns out to have been a wise move. The control deck is littered with shards of plastic and glass, with pieces of metal, wood and bone. Screens smashed. Wiring ripped out. Random bullet holes adorning the walls. A combat knife pins a piece of gore-soaked fabric to a table, like a macabre centrepiece.

Some of the group hover over a working console, consult their comms and plug away for a while before calling the rest of you over. "It's all true," one of them states simply, stepping back so everyone can view the screen. A detailed star map shows the ship's true course. Earth, the origin point. New Eden, the promised verdant paradise world, nowhere to be seen. In its place, the nightmare world the ship was truly bound for, that no one had even bothered to name; the revelation of which everyone—almost everyone—had lost their minds over. And, off to one side, right on the edge of the screen, are the words: Alien Earth.

The child you'd rescued tugs on your jumpsuit and points excitedly.

For the first time you don't have to force a smile in return.

Someone starts reading the section of the report that had brought you all together to this place:

"The world we've simply labelled 'Alien Earth' is much stranger than the fabled New Eden, but far more desirable than the future we now find ourselves otherwise locked into.

"Adapting to life on this world will be an enormous, but ultimately achievable undertaking. It is a task far more complex than simply transplanting Earth's culture to an unspoiled world. Our current ideas of colonisation must be challenged in order to settle there successfully. We must critically examine both the technologies we plan to deploy, and the mindset with which we do so in order to not just survive in the short term, but thrive in the long term.

"Its climate is stable and its biosphere is healthy, but both are radically different to the imagined sister world of our home planet we thought our destination. Its plants and animals resemble Earth's only in that they appear to have been assembled from pieces of them; something akin to the creatures of mythology like the Griffin—part eagle, part lion—and so on.

"The composition of its atmosphere is just breathable enough for baseline humans, but some minor, targeted genetic tweaking to facilitate successive generations' adaptation to it is recommended. Exploring a gradual transition to emulating its atmosphere on at least one level of the ship is also advised as a step toward that.

"It appears likely that the lifeless moons of the Alien Earth can be terraformed into planetary arks to preserve what remains of Earth's flora and fauna. These could double as experimental staging grounds for testing possible forms that a non-invasive integration with the native habitat could take.

"Beyond all else, the primary obstacle is convincing this Administration to change direction and inform the crew that though our planned destination is not just inhospitable, but absolutely inhabitable, there is a viable, albeit far more challenging alternative. It is estimated that, given current conditions, it will take twelve years of dedicated effort to prepare the ship and its inhabitants to merge with this new world. It is only attainable with the Administration's full support and leadership.

“Put frankly, this is the last hope we have for the survival of the human race, and its client species. Continuing along our current course to a nightmare world of runaway climate chaos is the very definition of insan-”.

They stop. That was all any of you needed to hear.

“It’s about choosing courage over despair,” someone says.

Nobody can argue with that. Murmurs of agreement and encouragement go around the group. Everyone agrees that it is time for a change of direction.

You have a plan now. A compelling vision for the future. It is time to get to work. The fate of humanity is in your blood-stained hands. In the hands of the survivors. The ones whose minds hadn’t snapped at the news that New Eden was a lie, and hadn’t been killed by those who had.

You’ve been baptised in blood. A new life awaits you on the Alien Earth.

You stand in front of the star map with your girlfriend and the child you rescued, envisaging the journey to come.

“Are we going home now?” the child asks.

“Yes,” your girlfriend replies. “We are.” 🦴

SYNCRETISM FASCISM TRADITION

Words by
Sean Oscar

Syncretism is the combination of diverse spiritual or religious ideas into a single system.

Umberto Eco, in his perpetually relevant essay 'Ur Fascism', considers syncretism to be a potential indicator of a fascist mindset: 'Syncretism is not only, as the dictionary says, "the combination of different forms of belief or practice"; such a combination must tolerate contradictions. Each of the original messages contains a sliver of wisdom, and whenever they seem to say different or incompatible things it is only because all are alluding, allegorically, to the same primeval truth. As a consequence, there can be no advancement of learning. Truth has been already spelled out once and for all, and we can only keep interpreting its obscure message.'

It should be said that syncretism does not necessarily a fascist make (it seems unfair to accuse adherents of the syncretic Bahá'í Faith of being potential fascists; these and others we may call 'good faith' syncretics).

Guenon underwent no fewer than six occult initiations as a young man, including self-initiation into a neo-Templar order of his own devising after a séance with the ghost of Jacques de Molay, an episode he'd later recall with embarrassment.

Then, slightly later, he took on the mantle of the conservative Catholic before converting to Islam. But the same dominant perspective can be seen throughout his intellectual life—modernity is really degeneration; truth is eternal and is expressed in the Perennial Tradition; the Tradition has been transmitted by different vehicles, namely the great religions and mystery schools of the world; the West has lost the Tradition.

Materialist science is the rejection of the metaphysical. Egalitarianism is an assault on divinely-ordained hierarchy. Liberty is licence for decadence. Progress is really decline. Modernity is degeneracy. The West risks extinction because of this. For Guenon, this can only be avoided by

AS A CONSEQUENCE, THERE CAN BE NO ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING

Nor does every fascism have to incorporate syncretic spirituality—the Iron Guard in Romania considered themselves devout Orthodox Christians.

The point is that syncretism and fascism can have certain affinities, most readily apparent in the syncretism of the Perennial Traditionalists. Syncretism, as Eco alludes to, can lend itself to anti-modernism. If absolute truth has already been perfectly revealed, then the only action left open to us is reverent transmission. Claims of new revelation are, in truth, merely deviation, degeneration, heresy.

Here we see the syncretism of the Traditionalists, most notably Rene Guenon and Julius Evola.

A disparate group of scholars (though this term is used somewhat loosely) united in their belief that there was a common origin to all valid religious and occult traditions, the Traditionalists emerged as a distinct group in the early 20th century, though they had intellectual antecedents going back centuries.

establishing an 'ark' of elite initiates who, despite their small numbers, will gradually be able to restore to the West the Tradition it has surrendered—or face conquest by a civilisation that has not lost the Tradition.

Another affinity with fascism—syncretism can become totalitarian. The Traditionalist grasps—seizes—the diverse religious and spiritual and aesthetic expressions of the world and subjugates them. Difference and distinction are collapsed. For Guenon, the Sacred Heart of Jesus is essentially (in the precise sense of the word) identical to the Eye of Shiva. Thousands of years of distinct cultural and theological development don't matter. What matters is that when seen with the eyes of the Traditionalist, an esoteric truth which escapes profane minds is revealed. This is a worldview which does not leave room for real difference.

Perhaps this is where the good faith syncretic can be clearly distinguished from the syncretic fascist. One can be struck by the genuine similarities in insight the different religions of the world offer, the similarities in practice and devotion and language, while also being equally struck by their diversity and their real differences—their contradictions, their resistance to uniformity. But the syncretic fascist has no time for difference. It doesn't matter that the hesychast and the Vaishnavist chant the names of different Lords—all that matters is that they chant. Contradiction is only ever apparent, never essential.

It is curious that a version of this attitude is prevalent among liberals. Often genuinely ignorant of the history and actual content of the different religious traditions of the world, the liberal (and really this does just mean the capitalist) can pronounce that 'all religions are at heart the same', and will make vacuous statements about how 'Islam and Christianity teach the same things', and how 'Buddhism is just about being nice and tolerant, you know, like Jesus

The liberal's syncretism claims to respect all religions when, in truth, it must transform all religions into potential consumer choices in order to afford them that dubious 'respect'. The fascist syncretic maintains that all religions, correctly interpreted, communicate eternal truths based on caste, race, and heroic 'solar' masculinity. Both must begin with transforming religions into things which they are not. This is not the respectful curiosity of the good faith syncretic, who must be distinguished from the liberal as well as the fascist.

This may seem like a somewhat obscure topic to dwell upon, but syncretism is experiencing something of a renaissance.

Jordan Peterson's neo-Jungian 'philosophy' is a totalising outlook which unifies the stories, narratives, myths, religions, sacred texts and rituals of the world and reduces them to an ethics of self-help.

'A MORE RADICAL, A MORE INTREPID FASCISM'

taught'. Having thoroughly emptied the ancient religions of the world of almost all of their meaningful content, having rendered them down into something functionally indistinguishable from liberalism itself, they can assert the unity of religion while being genuinely baffled at how religionists themselves refuse to recognise this unity.

None of this is to take issue with genuine, thoughtful, compassionate, intelligent ecumenical efforts. None of this is to say that it isn't fascinating—even important—that similar spiritualities have been developed independently of one another. Neither is it to deny the fruitful transmission of spiritualities between cultures. Ultimately, there may be a single transcendent source of all spiritual expression which, if it were to be discovered, would resolve the contradictions and reveal a higher, primeval unity. It's just to say that liberals and fascists both really like to think that they're the ones who have discovered that source and figured out the nature of that unity.

To give an example, Peterson's interpretation of the Easter story understands it as a metaphor for the way in which we 'die' to our old selves and 'rise again' as new selves during the journey of our lives. I myself am a Christian, and I struggle to see even the faintest mote of this astonishingly empty 'meaning' in the four narratives of the Passion. Here we see a variety of the liberal's syncretism. The Easter story—a story of agony, betrayal, clerical and colonial politicking, cynicism, torture, state-violence, sacrifice, and finally redemption—is domesticated. One does not have to be a Christian in order to feel that the liberal's syncretism has committed an act of violence against the text. Peterson has made the story of Easter palatable.

Peterson has resisted being pinned down spiritually. He and his wife both received names from the Kwakwaka'wakw community during a long initiatory ceremony (his meaning 'Great Seeker'). There is the Manichaean dualism of his 'masculine' order versus 'feminine' chaos theory, as exemplified in the story of Saint George slaying the dragon.

He's professed admiration for Taoism. Carl Jung, one of his major influences, was a latter-day Gnostic. He begins *Maps of Meaning* quoting Jesus: 'I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.' (King James Version, naturally.) His hostility towards post-modernism and Marxism, however inaccurately he uses those terms, is also reminiscent of the Traditionalist's dismissal of modernity as a falling-away from truth. Ultimately, Peterson's monolithic syncretism is perhaps coherent on its own terms, but it is also totalising and anti-modern, even if it is not as extreme as the syncretism of outright fascists. There is, however, more than enough to warrant alarm at his popularity, and this is without even getting into the crude, conspiratorial reaction that is his politics. (It should be said that Jung and two other major influences on Peterson, the comparative scholars of religion Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade, all at times expressed support or admiration for the far-right.)

It is worth pausing for a moment and considering Julius Evola, who was more interested in direct political action than Guenon. He called for 'a more radical, a more intrepid Fascism,' and was disgusted by what he saw to be Fascism's compromise with Italy's bourgeoisie, declaring that the Italians had not been ruined by Fascism, rather Fascism had been ruined by the Italians. His attempts at steering both Fascism and later Nazism along distinctly Traditionalist lines resolutely failed, though his ideas became a very powerful influence on neo-fascism.

It only gets darker from here. Steve Bannon is now widely known to have been influenced by both Rene Guenon and Julius Evola, albeit while remaining within the orbit of traditionalist Catholicism (which is distinct from Perennial Traditionalism, but it shares a similar disdain for modernity). Does Bannon see himself as a combining Evola's direct political action with Guenon's ambition for building an 'ark' that would slowly steer the Western consciousness back towards truth? Is that what Breitbart is really all about? We must also consider Aleksandr Dugin.

Dugin, an adherent of the Old Believer sect of Russian Orthodoxy, is highly influenced by Evola. Combining Orthodoxy, Russian nationalism and imperialism, and Traditionalism, Dugin developed his own syncretic politico-spiritual philosophy—Eurasianism. His 'multi-polar' worldview calls for the authoritarian powers of

the world to take a principled stance against American hegemony, becoming bastions of tradition (or Tradition) against decadent modernity. He envisages a spiritually-revitalised Russian Empire, a bizarre monarchical-Stalinism informed by occult spirituality as expressed in his particular synthesis of Traditionalism and Orthodoxy. Dugin was previously involved with one of the most agonisingly paradoxical manifestations of political syncretism: the National-Bolsheviks. His book *The Foundations of Geopolitics* is required reading at the Russian General Staff Academy.

The nature of Russian politics is such that it is very difficult to be certain of the state's objectives, ideology, or principles, beyond an aggressive assertion of Russia's absolute sovereignty. As such, although Dugin has been listed as a member of the Kremlin 'war party' in the past, it is possible that he is simply one eccentric voice among many in the Kremlin, but again, there is already enough here to cause us serious worry.

Speaking of eccentric voices roaming ancient palaces, it'd be remis to not mention His Royal Highness, Charles, the Prince of Wales. Charles took as his guru the charlatan Laurens van der Post (godfather to Prince William), a Jungian mystic. Charles is also patron of the Temenos Academy for Integral Studies, an educational charity that, in his own words, is '[committed] to fostering a wider awareness of the great spiritual traditions we have inherited from the past...'

HRH goes on to say: 'These traditions, which form the basis of mankind's most civilised values and have been handed down to us over many centuries, are not just part of our inner religious life. They have an intensely practical relevance to the creation of real beauty in the arts, to an architecture which brings harmony and inspiration to people's lives and to the development within the individual of a sense of balance which is, to my mind, the hallmark of a civilised person.'

Historian of the Traditionalist movement Mark Sedgwick cautions that Charles is more 'anti-modernist' than Traditionalist outright. However, it is obvious that at least some kind of perennial syncretism operates in the mind of the heir apparent. One also certainly cannot believe that Charles' belief system will have become any less peculiar as time has marched on.

One almost looks forward to that day when we will see Charles, resplendent in Masonic regalia, attended by a Circassian honour guard, declared Arch-Sufi of all Britannia by the Patriarch of Moscow. 🏴‍☠️

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Photography and Story
Benjamin Nichols

In the late 1970's, in a quiet suburb of a Queensland country town was an unoccupied house, derelict and forgotten.

The door was unlocked, so driven by the curiosity of passing the house a hundred times, she entered. Inside was emptiness. No furniture, no pictures, nothing in the kitchen drawers. Nothing was vandalised and there was no evidence of anyone having once lived a life there.

The house was hollow and cold.

Every door inside the house was left open, except for one. She stepped slowly and quietly through the house and turned the knob, careful not to break the silence out of respect for the void.

This room was different. The walls and windows were entirely covered in newspaper, so that only the barest of orange glow from the sunlight peeked through. The walls whispered the headlines of a distant time. There was enough light to make out the sole occupant of the dwelling - a child's toy.

The creature looked as forgotten as the house it watched over for so many years. It's eyes stared deeply into hers, screaming for an escape. She felt compelled not to sentence it to further solitude, so she picked it up and left the house, softly closing the front door behind her.

She felt its eyes watch her every day. It was never abandoned again.



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