

# Jester

By Matter

## Captain's Log

### The Vesta

#### Orbiting Titan, Moon of Saturn

Where does one begin when reality unfurls as a flower? Clockwork perpetuation of a malleable existence. I have consumed the ancient flame and emerged unscathed. How to paint the mind of a god? Can it be understood by the uninitiated? Does it matter? I must try either way.

Time ago this mission began, I to be its grand leader. Glorious purpose. Long the Great Titan's daughter had gone unsoiled. Her seas untouched. Her blood unboiled. Yet, change sustains.

What we were to seek is irrelevant now. What we found, found us. Of the twelve, only I remain. Those murky depths hide more than anticipated. More than can be imagined.

I had a wife once. Unmatched in her poise and intellectualism. Control of her ego. I revered her. My mind was of this as we descended. Pressure loomed, compressing our bodies and minds as we slid deeper. Dark waters all around. Illuminated marine snow. Sound of body breath. Marine snow implies life.

What's this? Cnidarians. Radiant dancing alien forms. Tentacles flutter in thermal vents. Dancing lights. Luminous blues, soft greens. All around us, soft clicking, buzzing. Lights swirling. Scale-plated rays unburrow from beneath sand as we touch down.

Sea floor bruises my heel as I land. A quick brush away reveals an onyx pathway buried beneath. Where does it lead? Doom for my crew. Rebirth for I. An ancient temple of onyx and saturated violet amidst bathymetric haze.

Fish scatter at our approach. Large cnidarians yet hover. Textural design work of fractal patterns. Pillars emulating spiraling waves or growing vines along their spines. Cultivated coral leads the way. Deep into the temple we go.

Past alien sculptures of alien onyx. . Merfolk kin. Leaders and lawmakers of a bygone age. A lure draws us ever forward. The sanctuary is a masterwork; a monument to mathematics. Color and form creased and folded into aesthetics undeveloped by the human mind.

When I reached the central chamber, I was alone. The fate of my crew is beyond me, was behind me. On a central pedestal burned a flame. It's color: aquamarine. It gave off no heat. The water around it churned and bubbled.

I was struck by fear. I killed her. If only I had been faster to react. If only I believed her when she said she was feeling dizzy. Always crying wolf, I hated her for it. Now there's nothing

I wouldn't give to have her guilt me into another chore. Another late night snack run, back massage, night on the town. I never listened and it got her killed.

Where was my crew? Had I gotten them killed? Panic set in. A pair of cephalopods swam out from behind the flaming monument. They flashed mesmerizing zebra patterns of maroon and white, a warning. As they approached, they morphed, becoming like unto a nautilus with a logarithmic spiral, pulsing hypnotically multitudinous designs. Gelatinous ink seeped through the water around me and I was swiftly subdued.

My consciousness tore asunder as I rocketed towards the heavens. A comet blistering through an infinite fractal framework of organic elements in recurrent rotation. For all time I furthered upwards, but when I arrived it had been no time at all. Swirling in the void it approached me. Or I approached it. Who's to say?

It was everything in front of me. My whole field of vision and sound. It felt what I felt, knew what I knew, had lived what I'd lived. It couldn't talk, but it spoke nonetheless. I was imbued with visions, vibrant and complete, encompassing my whole range of senses. They washed over me in waves as dictated by the entity, pressing on my emotions as much as my form.

I was engrossed in flashes of other worlds. Entire realities created and destroyed in an instant as a means of transferring wisdom. A Logos of light and experience. Wholly more comprehensive and precise than any human language could ever hope to achieve.

At first it welcomed me. People waving. Creatures embracing. My mother as she looked when I was a child. It wanted to make me feel safe, feel seen. I accepted.

It was transformed. The patterns, themselves a wall of cyclical texture some distance away, began to fold and shift. The wall became a fabric that was still a wall. From the center of my view, no matter where I turned my gaze, a figure began to form from behind the textile facade as from behind a sheet. The effervescent velvet tapestry stretched and strained as the being moved closer, determined to retain solid form. Eventually it stretched so thin that the villain burst forth from the placenta-wall. The fabric leisurely melted back into wall.

Before me stood a jester. Tall in stature, with a long face and fingers. It seemed at once both male and female. It donned a gold and white checkered blouse with a thick lace collar and matching, frilled, pants. It had dark wood shoes with bronze bells topping curled points and a four pronged hat to match. It wore the most genuine smile.

I felt inclined to ask it something. It knew I felt this way. It probably knew what I wanted to ask, but it wanted me to ask anyway. It gestured to me strangely, swooping its head and shoulders to the side in a snakelike manner. Its face was inquisitive and knowing, like a sibling's. It pulled its hands towards itself repeatedly, undulating the fingers on each in waves.

I asked why my wife had died. Why, in this age of wonders, does illness still claim those we love? Can we beat death? Can we become as gods?

The jester folded its hands, stood upright. It looked at me as one looks at a child. With patience and pride. These questions had been posed before. The jester began to speak, gesturing with a finger and taking a large, comical step. Sound came from all around in accordance with its lips. It was not language. It was music and fury. Some ideas were gentle

harps and pan-pipes, others rought the sound of thunder and cicadas. The fractal projections that made up the space we occupied reciprocated with ever-fading collages of butterflies and cherubs, rain clouds and centipedes. A banner unrolled like a music staff next to its mouth. Words it spoke appeared as runes along the barlines, of varying styles and depths, each foreign to me. They remained there on the banner, shimmering amidst a rainbow mist, a cosmic saga I couldn't read. Occasionally a rune would manifest itself, morphing into a snake and sliding off the bar-staff, slithering up another rune solidifying as a mountain in the distance, leaving empty spaces in the runic timeline.

I told it I didn't understand, but I found it all very beautiful. It wanted me to try. It came across to me that it wanted me to speak runes as it did. I tried, but all that came out was sound. Normal, boring sound. It struck a thinking pose, hand to its chin as it floated in a lotus. After a moment it raised its eyebrows at me, held up one boney finger, and clocks popped up all around me.

I waited as the jester and his spectral saga dissipated and folded back into the geometric middle distance. For a being of nigh omnipotence, the loading period was a bit droll. After a moment of spiraled spatial slush, I emerged in a forest glade.

Around me were many tiny eggheaded woodland sprites. They had empty eye sockets and mouths, no nose. They were grey and stone; garden sculptures come to life. They were still the jester.

My guides led me out of the safety of the clearing into a whispering wood. Doors upon doors of all sorts of designs lined the forest. Screen doors, car doors, pod bay doors. Doors to grand cathedrals and speakeasy pubs. A hundred million doors in a thousand acre wood.

The fairy creatures led me from door to door. We'd poke our head in each for a bit, then return and digest what we learned. When I needed a break, the sprites brought me fresh spring water. When I wept, they comforted me. Their giggles amplified my laughter. Their level headedness cooled my rage. It was always dawn.

I spent eons in the door forest. I explored a hundred worlds from a thousand angles. When I was a tree, warmth woke me up green. I drank the earth and sky. When I was a tree, flesh came to worship at my roots. Flesh came to preserve my voice. When I was flesh, scents lulled memories from the depths of my skin. I hungered and loved and lost. Dreams became realities became dreams.

This malleable space which I and the jester shared seemed to me infinitely more real than the base reality of daily observance. I knew mine was but one amongst that vast sea of doors. When I knew nothing, rivers were rivers. When I knew something, rivers were doors. Now I know fully, and rivers are again rivers.

I was at an altar in a clearing with my spirit guides around me. They sat me in a throne of driftwood and burning incense. Dozens of the squat stones, each unique in face and function, gathered around the altar and began to sing, throwing flowers. Their song emerged as light and congealed into a dodecahedron mass floating above the bronze slab. The fairies themselves were pulled through their song into the pulsating geometry until it solidified as a being of light. It stepped down out of itself and into the clearing in front of me.

A mantis loomed over me, pale and pink. Its eyes were bulging and alien, yet somehow endearing. It was ready to answer my questions and to teach me its ways. All it wanted was for me to learn to make rune-speak manifest as it did. It was desperate for me to grow.

I already had. All questions pale in comparison to the actualization of a transito-material existence. In the back of my mind I always had an inkling I was small. Here was proof. Towering over me, a great mantis invocation with sensorial control on a universal scale. I was near transitory; on the lip of nirvana, but one lingering thought remained...

And there she was. In all her glory. Her sharp cheeks, pink lips, brown eyes. My Emily. In front of me. After all these years... Tears stream down my cheeks as we embrace each other. I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry. 'I know,' she says. 'It's ok.'

The mantis appeared over her shoulder, began spouting runes in a panic. It cycled through forms: the jester, the fairies, a hundred others. Something was wrong. Flashes. Bubbles popping. Clouds in timelapse. A deep breath.

I awoke in the chamber of the flame, inks and their cephalopods nowhere to be found. My O2 meter was nearly at zero. I made my way back out of the temple, but had barely made it outside when my breaths started getting harder. I was going to drown. As I began to fade, lights appeared. Mystical, methodical lights. Dozens of the cephalopods from earlier emerged from the depths and supported me. They propelled me towards the surface with urgency, alas I passed out along the way.

I awoke to a massive burnt sphere and its astral blanket. Saturn and his rings stood watch over this ancient treasure. Ever stalwart guardian of a primordial flame.

My crew was nowhere to be found, and I regret to report I returned to *The Vesta* alone. Though devastating to hear, I would argue that what we have discovered is worth the loss. The ruins of a lost people. The light of eternity. Maybe, with practice, humanity can truly learn to bend reality to our whim. Tomorrow, I shall return to that temple and try again to understand this ancestral being. Though, it may be the death of me.