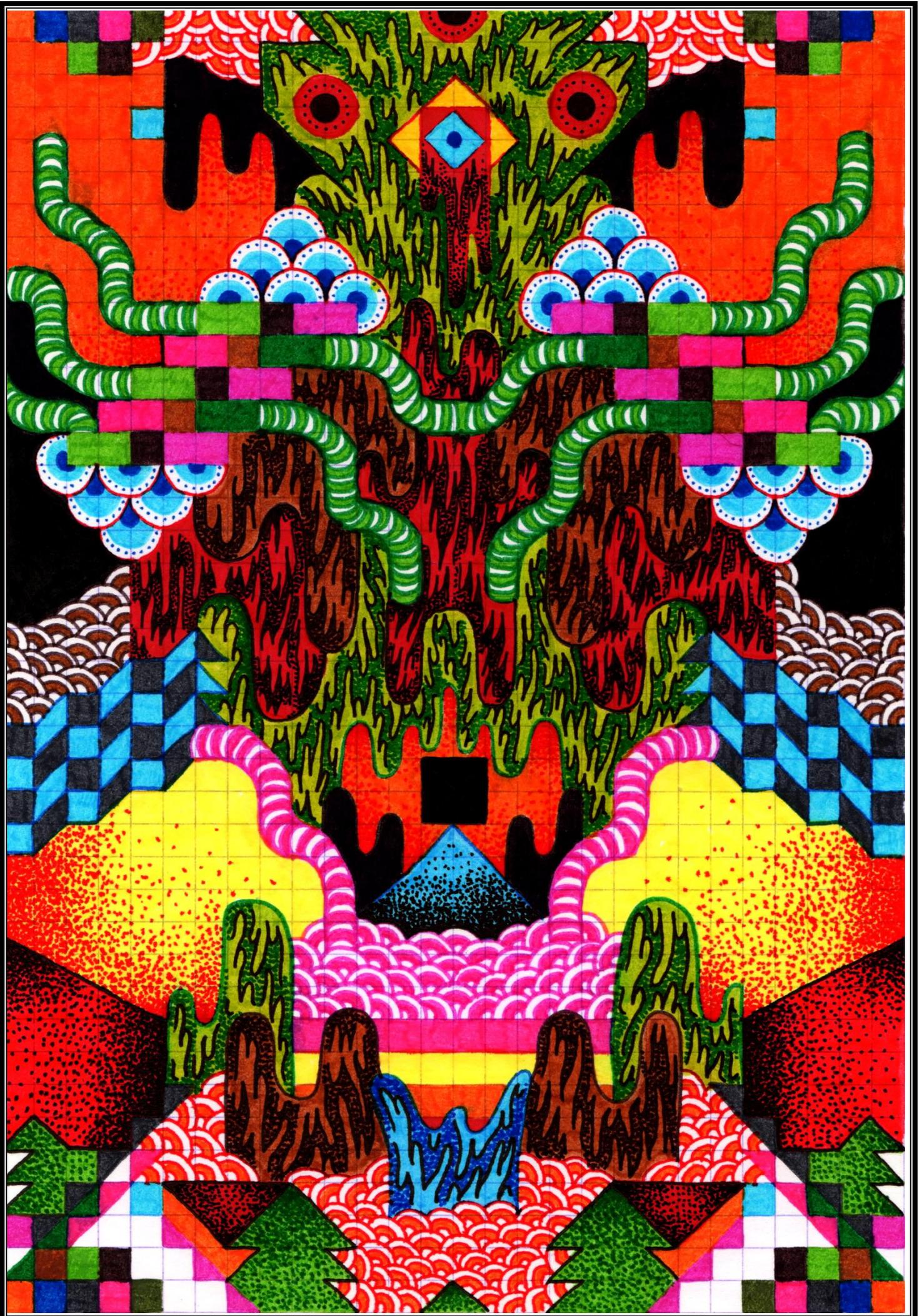


PARAPHILIA IV





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## Submissions

This a free magazine distributed in the interests of giving culture back to the people instead of the industry. We cannot pay for contributions to this publication. However, please see our website for details of our other publishing ventures.

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# EDITORIAL

When analyzing and evaluating, the vast majority of human beings rely almost entirely upon the perceptible, often leading to reductive, and at times, erroneous judgments. Whether it can be attributed to social and environmental influences, innatism, or a combination of the two is debatable, but unconscious self-induced confinement is the inevitable byproduct.

Others possess the ability to see beyond the superficial, enabling them to make thorough, accurate assessments, which afford both free will and extrication from the seemingly preordained. Their eyes are truly *open*, thus rendering the universe panoptic, and the possibilities limitless. Unfortunately, these people are faced with the arduous task of trying to harmonize in a contrasting, dissonant world that revolves at a breakneck speed as the floor drops away. They are, in essence, trapped on an uncontrollable Gravitron that continues to spin, regardless of how many riders are thrown off. Ironically, the only way

to endure is to succumb – to tighten the safety belt and cling to the handgrips.

Of course, the instant this happens, pragmatism takes over, often obliterating the intrinsic “idealism” that every human being possesses at birth.

What’s most absurd is that the rigid, mechanical nature of “normal” society in fact conflicts with *Homo sapiens*’ true inherent nature, which has been willingly suppressed via life-sustaining ossification. Acclimation – while necessary for survival – equals compliance, which often serves as an obstacle to self-realization.

Now the question is: What would happen if human beings were granted consummate freedom? *Liberated* – not from the indispensable laws, but from the prescribed restrictions, regulations, and everyday stresses that have forced them to adapt in order to subsist in a society that often breeds discontent?

## COLUMN

### THE LAST DREGS OF POVERTY:

#### A HOPSCOTCH BALLAD

Text and Images By Jim Lopez

The night started with a friend who wrung out his paint brush to be a regional manager for a Cable-TV Service Provider, in New York. Now he can't get off the sofa except to hit, shit and fumble his BlackBerry. I had to fly all the way from Los Angeles to Queens to smash an empty bottle of whisky, labeled, "Paddy," over his head, as he tried to mash my face in a pile of coke, which I rolled out of and got into a cab, alone; but not before he tossed \$160 at me, and shouted, "Have a good time. Casino will be waiting to tickle your balls when you get home." His dog, Casino, was staring at me, panting, with a horny look in his eyes and I had the scratch marks on my arm to prove that the little devil was in the mood.

The Holiday Cocktail Lounge was closed so I walked into Banjo Jim's. The band had packed up and gone home. I was one of five left in the place: Doc Boggs, Freddie King, Lightning Hopkins, myself and a tired barmaid, wearing a red dress under her jeans and T-shirt. Her smile was hidden by a slight, faint scent of hope. We didn't recognize each other as anything more than a drink and a money transaction. Maybe I saw more in her than she saw

in me, or maybe she didn't give a shit, as she broke a bag of ice loose on the cooler making a kissing sound.

The cold echo of a bar-well didn't say much of anything except, "There's a hollow sweetness in loneliness." Her hair was weaved in a braid, and her down-cast gaze darkened her eyelids. Her small, firm breasts begged for mother's milk. She pressed her lips revealing the depth of her thoughts and the tightness of her heart. Rusted, antique tears dripped through her veins, watering seeds of...seeds of...

Awe Fuck! I can't even smoke a cigarette in this place!

New York: a city populated with cultivated loogie-hockers; where a trio sings, "If you need us, call us, or maybe we'll just come over and spit in your face."

The barmaid's rusted tears stained an indefinite seed of another vanished love that took too long. I asked for another drink as my arms burned from holding the fresh wonder of what it meant to be treated as I believed I wanted to be, only I had no idea what that felt like.

She informed me that she would be closing at 3:00 a.m., but she was closed long before that. At least that's what I told myself, since I wasn't clever enough to offer her what she wanted.

Need is easy to figure out and accomplish. Want takes a delicate charm that has no want of its own.

How is it possible to listen to Doc Boggs without having my own bottle of whisky in front of me, a knife in pocket and a lit cigarette hanging from my mouth?



You could hold a cigarette in your mouth in New York, but you better not light it, or you'll be arrested by the

municipal chorus singing, "You make me feel like a disease I never asked for." But who the fuck ever directly asked for a disease?

New York is inhabited with a bunch of slow-walking kids trying to rule the world, and they think that they do. Whereas, Los Angeles is populated with exhaust-hungry werewolves, practicing yoga, believing they're a star. New Yorkers are too unimpressed with the stars because they're too preoccupied with the dimming lights of culture. But it's still the York of New and there is so much damn concrete that one can't help but be breath taken, especially when the pollution will rip your lungs out whether you like it or not.

So what difference does it make whether I smoke in an empty space with a lovely barmaid fifteen feet away and a jukebox, which is the only thing alive in this place?

This might be Banjo Jim's but it sure as hell isn't Jim's Banjo. But it is the nicest surprise I've had in a long time, so I'll just hold my cigarette and have another drink.

I swallowed like a graduate maudlin who auctioned off his degree on E-Bay and made my way to an "Irish Pub."

The Spartans should have done the world a favor and cast us all down as blemished children.

New York makes me want to wear a Dodger's cap and make love to a cripple

because she would be more honest than the rest of us.

A corner church with wrought-iron bars was closed, as was the bar next door named "Company," so a drunk has no alternative but to piss in the shadows of the sanctuary.

There's a "Thirsty Scholar" popping up in every New England metropolis, because an Irish drunk sold the name and moved to Chico, California. He was smart enough to bet a wide-point spread and cash in for a South American barmaid who gave him everything that he had been looking for in the basement while the music resounded bad taste.

I found an "Irish Pub" a couple-a-few blocks away and sat at the end of the bar, listening to a punk song that screamed the romance is dead so give it to me anyway.

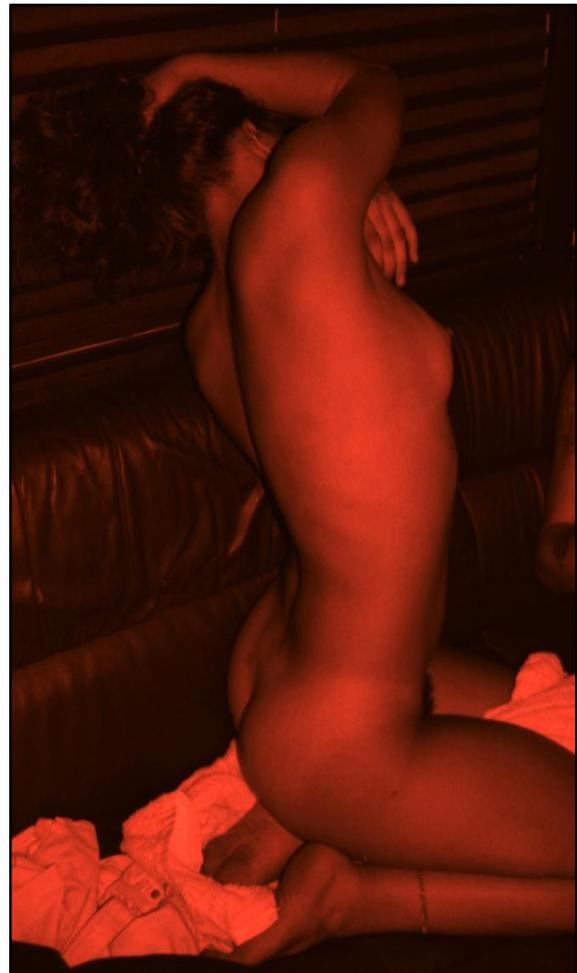
A girl sat next to me, looking like the girl I feigned my virginity to. She wore skin-tight, plaid shorts and a baby t-shirt that hugged her tits and tummy. Not ordering a drink, she merely sat like a memory that could never go far until her mobile phone lit up and hustled her adorable Irish-Italian ass away. Her effigy pounded the ponder of how it was that the Irish and Italians could have fucked each other so intensely that they spawned drunken children of loneliness who experience too much shame to whore themselves to the Kings and Queens in us all?

The goblins perched high above the city as a darling girl slid over, smiling into

my boots, mouthing close into my ear, "I'll be you're Rock-N-Roll dream and cream your jeans into the gutter of my hopscotch court, you goddamn square."

I choked, wondering if this would take five years or five seconds and then answered my own question, "I'm playing with myself." She looked confused, which I took as a compliment. She asked me if I'd ever write about her.

"I already have," I answered.



She reached down between my legs, pondering, "Hmmm," which flattered me, but I ignored her because I wasn't dumb enough to give her what she needed, which merely meant that I was

an idiot, because I could have gone to bed with this hot, young woman who probably wouldn't mind squatting against the wrought iron bars of the Church and pissing on its black, steel rods. But I couldn't bring myself to be swirled and twirled by a pup. Just as I thought she was done pounding her own ponders she said, "I'm looking for a healthier slob," which I had heard before from the gods, only they never closed out my tab, fearing the shadow of the cross that loomed over the coliseum in my grey beard.

I missed the late train and Casino was anxiously waiting to tickle my balls. As I traveled through the midtown tunnel with the window down, all I wanted was my cabbie, who looked like Ernest Borgnine in the movie *Escape From New York*, to look over his shoulder at me, with a broken enthusiastic smile, and excitedly announce, "Hey! I got Snake Plisken in my cab."

**"A Hopscotch Ballad"** by Jim Lopez first appeared in [www.corpse.org](http://www.corpse.org) in 2008.



# ELEVEN LETTERS

1.

**Dear PM,**

You are K; his story takes place in the bed of K.

K does not move because he is sleeping, dreaming.

**For and of The Building,**

**Luther Blissett**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther  
Blissett\\_\(nom\\_de\\_plume\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther_Blissett_(nom_de_plume))

2.

**Dear PM,**

K is not conscious that he is dreaming, and therefore, cannot actively make decisions in his dreams.

You are K; everything you desire is already yours.

**For and of The Building,**

**Furst Jaglen**

[http://www.compsoc.man.ac.uk/~cow/  
klf/building/1999\\_07\\_23/www.xdolla  
rx.com/e1/jag\\_index.html](http://www.compsoc.man.ac.uk/~cow/klf/building/1999_07_23/www.xdollars.com/e1/jag_index.html)

3.

**Dear PM,**

The order is that his desires are fulfilled before he knows of them, not that he desires and then desire becomes reality.

In our awake state, we can make decisions that affect reality.

K, however, only dreams but never realizes those dreams. His paranoia is a direct result.

K is a dreamer. The Building is his state of dream.

**For and of The Building,**

**Stewart Home**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stewart  
Home](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stewart_Home)

4.

**Dear PM,**

K writes that, there are no tables beside the bed, or shelves, or stands to hold, say, a glass, an ashtray, a telephone.

The Building is his dream state. By dreaming he negates the real world around him.

The Building is the body of K.

**For and of The Building,**

**Díre McCain**

<http://www.diremccain.com>

5.

**Dear PM,**

His dreaming is contained in himself,  
which is also The Building.

Nothing happens in The Building unless  
K has some part in it, active or passive.

Thus, K is the K of his dream, in that he  
is the focal point and omniscient being.

**For and of The Building,**

**Dave Kelso-Mitchell**

<http://stewarthomesociety.org/blog/?p=670>

6.

**Dear PM,**

By dreaming, K stops time. Just like in  
myth and poetry time ceases to have  
consequence to K; his desires have  
already been met. K suggests that time  
is only useful in measuring the waiting  
period to realize desire. Faulkner writes  
in *The Sound and the Fury* that, time is  
dead as long as it is being clicked off by

little wheels; only when the clock stops  
does time come to life.

K does not have a watch; it is assumed  
that it is K who governs the flow of  
time; submission to the rules of a  
mechanical device would be  
incompatible with regal majesty.

**For and of The Building,**

**Monty Cantsin**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monty\\_Cantsin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monty_Cantsin)

7.

**Dear PM,**

At zero longitude, on June 23rd 2000, for  
K, dream becomes reality.

The Building is a clock. K shows how  
time has become the gauge for reality.

K emphasizes that not only does dream  
not conform to time, but dream creates a  
new clock for itself.

**For and of The Building,**

**Karen Eliot**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karen\\_Eliot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karen_Eliot)

8.

**Dear PM,**

K captures the essence of paranoia when he shows how K's imagination produces it. K further reveals that imagination has another dimension of effect. It also enhances, and perhaps is the essence of, dream. K's imagination both makes him paranoid and creates an elaborate building around him. His imagination creates everything K hears; you want absolute proof that what you hear comes from within you, not from outside?

The ultimate proof that K's imagination in his dream state creates his K Space of noises comes when K writes that, *"you have had walls and floors soundproofed, and have sheathed this hall with draperies ...You need not bother covering your ears with your hands: you will go on hearing them all the same."*

K's Building is contained in his head, in his dream state.

**For and of The Building,**

**Kingboy D**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_KL\\_F\\_films](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_KL_F_films)

9.

**Dear PM,**

K is a rat who must build the labyrinth from which he proposes to escape.

**For and of The Building,**

**Jerry Cornelius**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry\\_Cornelius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Cornelius)

10.

**Dear PM,**

K proposes that every person is K, a sovereign who exists entirely in our heads.

**For and of The Building,**

**Robin Banks**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banksy>

11.

**Dear PM,**

The Building is our own special reality. We are K because we do its perceiving.

**For and of The Building,**

**Justin Kase**

[http://www.thedjlist.com/djs/JUSTIN\\_KASE/](http://www.thedjlist.com/djs/JUSTIN_KASE/)



## MENACING DAZE

By Michael Roth

Images © Chris Brandrick

Public bathrooms are for fucking, shitting and fighting, in that order. David Michael K. knew the score very well, being an experienced cruiser and street fighter. Walking past the Firkin Pub, he could hear the din of voices and Lee Perry music pouring out the front door.

The fucking Firkin, he thought, running his hand over his cropped scalp. Should be able to pull a bird there. That's if nothing's changed. He shoved his hands into the pockets of his sta-pres and counted the coins with his fingers. Should be enough for a pint or two, he thought. Let's give this a go.

He stepped in and headed to the bar. There was a raucous roar from a dark corner. He turned towards the loud shouting and saw a table of skinheads slamming their fists onto the table and laughing. Against the bar, waiting for a pint, he spotted an attractive woman with cropped black hair. She turned and he recognized her from his youth - they used to meet up at punk gigs years ago. While he had never fucked her, he always wished he had. From the look in her eyes, he knew that he had been recognized as well.

"David?" she said, "That you?"

"Glory, yeah, been awhile."

They exchanged a few more pleasantries, then he excused himself.

"Going so soon?"

"Just to the loo. Want to come along?"

"Of course!"

The bathroom floor was covered with piss and had that familiar odor of shit and anti-septic cleaner. They headed straight to the single stall, closing and latching the door. She lost no time in taking down his trousers and falling to her knees, swallowing his hardening member with a single gulp. Her technique was expert and she worked him like a vacuum cleaner. He wanted to get at her pussy. He sat onto the cold, stained toilet, lifted her short skirt and pulled off her cottons. She leaned back against the metal door, legs spread. She had a hammer and sickle tattooed across

her pubic mound. David Michael nodded silent approval, no wonder she tasted so good. He hated fucking Nazis and refused to participate in giving them pleasure. Here was a group of people who wanted to control who he could or could not fuck. Besides, most were rampant coprophiliacs, a practice too messy for every day shagging. He dove into her shaved pussy, tongue swiping across her hard clit. She shrieked in pleasure, banging her hands against the metal walls. After a couple minutes of receiving oral, she pushed David back onto the toilet and straddled his hips. She lowered herself onto his throbbing member, sliding in easily from the wetness of her hole. She gyrated vigorously, grunting and growling, pushing his body back into the damp plumbing.

He felt a twisting in his bowels. He held back the shit poking out of his asshole. The million year old DNA codes were unraveling in his brain and within seconds his genetic wealth was exploding into her cunt while at the same time he released his anus, sending the shit into the toilet with a splash and a loud fart. She fell forward, muscles tensing then relaxing as waves of multiple orgasms went through her body.

"That's what I needed." She said, standing up and stepping back into her panties. David gestured with his eyebrows, giving a surprised look. "Oh, I love the feel of hot spunk in my underwear." she said with a wink before leaving the stall. "Stop by our table, my friends will definitely want to

meet you." She called as she left the room.

K. cleaned up, congratulating himself on the bit of luck and looking forward to some more prolonged shagging later that night. Hopefully, a group session with Glory and her friends. He heard the door open and the click of boots on the tile.

"Back so soon. Hope you brought a friend." David Michael K. said stepping out of the stall.

"What the fuck you looking at?" the large skin said with a sneer. "Fucking pansy."

On his right arm was a tattoo of a deer jumping across a swastika. On his other arm, 'White Pride' was tattooed in a gothic style. The skin was looking for a fight. David Michael had seen yobs like this before. Guys who think they're tough because of their size without realizing that at least half of fighting is a mental game. I'll dispatch with this one quickly, he thought, and then it will be on to a brilliant all-night fuck session.

Stepping forward, arms raised slightly in a surrender position, David hoped to get in a quick head butt. The skin clenched his fists, ready to strike. So, it was not going to be that easy, he thought. He feinted with his right and shot out a quick left hook. A classic move and if executed properly could bust a jaw or at least stun the opponent so a further beating could be meted out. David Michael loved this move because if he missed with his fist he could follow

through with his elbow. But now he would have to rethink this tactic. The skinhead ducked to the left, not taken in by the feint and punished David's ribs with a couple of hard upper cuts. Quickly followed by a leg sweep. David Michael, already stunned and breathless, hit the floor hard, head bouncing against the wet tile. As an experienced fighter, David knew how to take a fall, but this attack caught him off guard. Instinctively, he threw out his legs for an ankle sweep but there was nothing but air. Arms up David was waiting for the inevitable kick in the ribs as he snaked his way along the floor on his back. Instead came a stomp to the stomach by a size twelve Doc Martin followed by a stomp to his face, which fortunately glanced off his arm. Otherwise, his face would have been driven to the other side of his head.

The door to the bathroom opened.

"What the fuck!" came a man's voice.

"I'll do you next if you don't fuck off!" the skinhead retorted.

This distraction was all he needed. He thrust both his legs, heels first, into the skinhead's groin. The skinhead was pushed two feet into the air, howling, clutching his swelling balls. David Michael got up, one arm holding his ribs, and drove a knee into the opponent's face. He could feel the nose collapse and twist, splattering blood across his pants. The skinhead, obviously an experienced hooligan and one tough customer to boot, pushed David back against the washroom stall

with his shoulder. David knew he had to end this soon before the Nazi's friends showed up to stomp him into a pulp. He extended his thumb and drove it into the skinhead's eye. He could feel this digit burrowing into soft flesh and warm liquid. The skinhead collapsed to the piss-covered floor of the washroom stall.

K. grabbed a wad of paper towels and walked past the stunned observer. Next time none of this fancy stuff, he thought sneaking out the back door, I'll just ram my fist into his throat. I'll have to let that shag session go for now. I don't want to be around when the other skinheads find their friend. Of course, he enjoyed the fight game and rarely turned down the opportunity for some ultra violence. But there were other matters at hand.

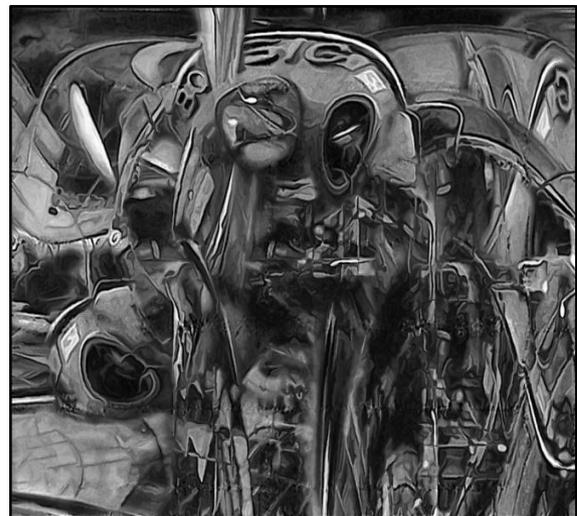
David Michael stepped out into the alley. Thinking of the fight brought back fond memories of his time with the Dumb Fucks, a firm dedicated to street fighting and poststructuralist theory. He formed the Dumb Fucks after reading *Anti Oedipus* by Deleuze and Guattari. His enthusiasm for the book, and his ultimate disappointment with the follow-up *Thousand Plateaus*, led him to take the work directly to the people with violence. Punch ups with anyone, academics and soccer fans alike, followed. But those times had passed. He turned the corner out of the alley and walked up the street with confidence.

Cracking his knuckles, he felt good after the fight and fuck. He could feel the

energy around him, as he was in tune with his surroundings. Things slowed down and he could navigate the chaotic flow of the streets. People were out of touch with their realities. They were alienated by capitalism, not to mention other forms of simian governing structures. And they had lost the desire to transcend these illusionary surroundings and explore deep surrealities.

K.'s attention was drawn to the Tesco. Overhead, he noticed two pink saucers, just floating in the sky. They shimmered in the sun and had an almost translucent but metallic quality. No one else seemed to be aware of their presence.

"Fuck me." He said. "Not again."



K. decided to contemplate the return of the pink saucers over a fry up and a pint. The first time he saw them was during some intense experimentation with mushrooms. He was using them as he worked with the Enochian calls as well as some higher circuit work he picked up from Robert Anton Wilson's

*Prometheus Rising*. In his downtime, he was reading *Simulacra and Simulation* by Baudrillard, *Book of Pleasure* by Spare and *Eden, Eden, Eden* by Guyotat. He discovered that by pushing his mind with magickal practice and drugs, he was able to contact alien entities. At the time, these entities did say that they would return ...

"Mr. K."

A distinguished gentleman, probably in his mid-50's and dressed in a designer blue suit, looked at K. while holding the back of the chair.

"Can I have a seat?"

K. looked at him stone faced. It wasn't the first time that he'd been cruised by a geezer. He nodded to the chair and resumed stuffing the eggs and ham into his mouth. See what this geezer has to offer, he thought, taking a sip of his pint of bitter to wash down the grease.

"Mr. K., yes I know who you are? We've been watching you, and think you would be a suitable candidate for a job opening we have with the Company. It's certainly a promotion from what you have now."

"Look mate," K. gestured with his fork, "Number one, I'm not a rent boy. Number two, who the fuck are you?"

"Sorry for not introducing myself, but I'm sure we may have met before. I'm the Doctor. And, I'm afraid that you misunderstand me." The Doctor placed a manila folder onto the table. "We are conducting an ongoing work, an

experiment if you will. It's centered around the transmission of memes, the use of morphic resonance and morphic fields for their transmission and the utilization of waking dream-states or altered states of consciousness to tap into these transmissions. I can't go into details right now. It's all here in this folder."

K. picked the blood sausage from his teeth with his tongue as he eyed the folder. He became interested in magick at a young age. He loved the idea of psychic attacks and peppered his workbooks with sigils that would charge when viewed or read. Later, he realized that most politicians and academics were essentially conservative, close-minded ideologues, no matter how radical their beliefs may be. He could take them out of their element by incorporating magickal theory in his discussions of Marx or Deleuze. Not one for just talk, he took action and dove into full experimentation of Austin Spare's sigils, the Enochian calls and the Abremelin working. He wanted to be well versed in all elements of combat, and these magickal weapons came in handy when he couldn't use his size twelve boots.

"Okay." This has State asset all over it, he thought.

"Any questions?"

"Will I be paid for this?"

"Of course, nothing comes free after all." The Doctor said with a chuckle, although there was no laughter in his

eyes. "Don't worry, just come by my office. We'll discuss things further. All the information is right there in the folder." The Doctor stood up, ready to leave.

"And what if I'm not interested?" K. said, staring at the Doctor, arms crossed.

"You will be." He turned to leave. "Just read the file."

And he left the restaurant.



David Michael K. stood outside a closed curry take-out. Glancing up the street he noticed a pudgy man in hip clothes walking up the sidewalk towards him. A person K. recognized.

"That bastard!" K. hissed. It was Don Draper, an ex-comrade from Trotsky's Hammer. Draper had not clocked him yet and he took the opportunity to slide into the doorway. Draper was an elitist, a sexist, and an asshole. These qualities have taken him far up Trotsky's

Hammer hierarchy. K. was a member in his youth, before forming the Dumb Fucks, when he believed groups like this could lead the way for a revolutionary transformation of society. But their priority was the weekly paper sales they forced their members to do. Selling the party rag was considered a revolutionary act, and at each party meeting there would be a detailed account of the week's sales with each comrade describing who they sold to, who they almost sold to, who they would have liked to have sold to, and who they did not sell to. The women fulfilled their roles by serving coffee and taking notes. The meeting would draw to a close with an accounting of the money taken in from the paper sales and a red star pin presented to the person who sold the most. The comrades would then withdraw to a local pub where they would argue the finer points of Trotsky, the Left Opposition and the Fourth International, while the female members stayed behind and took care of the children.

K. refused to participate in the paper sales and this made him a pariah among the party functionaries. He remembered an incident well.

"Where were you yesterday? There was a paper sale on Commercial?" Draper accused him in a loud voice, drawing the attention of other members in the room.

"Getting my new boots..." he said. Draper let out a whistle.

"Nice." He said sarcastically. "How much did they cost you?"

"Forty quid."

"That much for boots? A bit extravagant, don't you think?" he commented, gesturing with his cup of designer coffee. "You can spend forty dollars on boots, but you can't spare a couple of dollars for the dues box or bother to show up to the weekly sale. These are important activities. You will have to re-examine your life and determine your priorities."

A wave of disgust swept through K. as he resisted the urge to ram his fist into Draper's face. He was still young and intimidated by those in authority.

"I hear what you're saying," he said, deliberately, fixing a hard stare. "By the way, that Sawbucks coffee you have there. Isn't that a bourgeois luxury?"

He raised his eyebrows slightly, not understanding the accusation.

"Well, by buying a coffee from Sawbucks aren't you supporting a multinational company listed on the stock exchange and well known for its aggressive capitalist tendencies. A company that routinely exploits its workers, that pushes any local independent ventures out of a community to dominate unquestionably. Not to mention the issue of perpetuating the squalor of the Third World by forcing them to produce cash crops like coffee for the privileged Western world instead of food for their

own people. So Don, how much did you pay for that coffee?"

Don shrugged his shoulders. "It's just coffee."

K. left the meeting and never returned. Now here was the fat fuck walking towards him, a cup of Sawbucks in hand. He stepped out to face him. Draper's face lightened with recognition as he saw K.

"David," he said smugly, lip curling into a sneer. "Dropped out of the struggle, I see."

K. answered by thrusting his size twelve Doc Martin boot hard into Draper's groin. The fat cunt lurched forward, face red, fingers crushing the paper cup, soaking his hand with hot coffee. A gurgled croak came from his throat as the air left his lungs. Grabbing his hair, K. slammed his knee into his face. He felt the nose collapse. As Don fell to the ground, K. took the opportunity to put the boots hard into the comrade's ribs, each kick landing with a satisfying thud. Standing back, he observed the twitching body of the ideologue, panting heavily, gurgling from the blood in his mouth and throat.

"Scum like you create power structures that mirror those of the dominant culture. You wield control in the name of the oppressed against the oppressed. Remember, the Bourgeoisie produces its own grave-diggers."

As if his body and mind were operating in automatic, he raised his leg up to near

vertical as he executed a perfect ax kick down onto the back of the aging hack's neck, snapping it instantly. Satisfied, he nudged the lump of flesh on the sidewalk with his foot. However, what was the body of Don Draper now appeared to be the body of a large monkey with sunglasses. Looking closer, he recoiled as he saw the lump was actually Bingo from the Banana Splits. It was not a person in costume. The character bleeding out before him was real.

David Michael K. shoved his hands into his sta-pres and quickly walked up the street. He did not look back. He was afraid that thing would still be there if he did.



David Michael K. felt disoriented. First, the pink flying saucers, then the Doctor, and now the gorilla. This was unusual for him. His practice had given him nerves of steel, but everything that had transpired over the last few days had

caused a visceral reaction. If he had not carried out such intense experiments with psychedelics and occult ritual practice in his youth, he might have thought he was going crazy. Instead, he knew that he has entered a shamanic space as this feeling felt similar to DMT experiences from years ago. At that time, the entities he encountered under the influence informed him that they would come back to visit him periodically at unspecified times. He had no idea that they would manifest in this way. He navigated the streets by pure instinct, eyes closed, until he fell through the door of his flat.

"I just killed one of the Banana Splits" he spat, lying on the couch.

"You what?!" Cassie said, laughing. "Which one?"

"Bingo."

"Good, he probably deserved it."

"I thought it was Don Draper."

"Either way. He had it coming." Cassie laughed even harder. She hated Draper from the old activist days. He resented her membership in S.C.U.M., because he knew that he had no chance to molest her on party retreats. She joined it to take the piss out of other so-called activists, especially men, even though the organization's gender prejudice grated against her class consciousness. She tossed K. a warm Boddingtons.

"Guess what happened? That old cunt fired me!" Cassie spat. "Said it was

'cause I stole some money. That slapper has money up the asshole. She gave me the toss 'cause I wouldn't wipe her dry, wrinkled cunt. That's abuse, that is. Pure exploitation."

"Yeah." K. said, distracted. He put the Scotland vs. England Six Nations match on the TV and melted back into the couch, Cassie's voice fading into the background.

"You got to see this!" she shouted, giving K. a kick as she pointed out the window.

Outside, the street was filled with a mob of clowns. More precisely, they were skinheads with clown makeup. Years ago, a number of gangs came together in their enthusiasm for the film *The Warriors*. Factions took up the looks of their fictional movie counterparts. Outside were the Turnbull Furies - an alliance between the Baseball Furies and the Turnbull ACs. Everyone else just called them the Clowns. He knew that the Clowns were controlling the drug trade throughout the North. He did not realize that they had made their way this far south.

"Did you buy anything from these freaks?" K. said to Cassie, surveying the street below.

Cassie shrugged. "Yeah, some hash. I needed some quick as I was doing some workings with Crowley and I wanted the right vibe." She muttered.

"They don't look too happy. Did you stiff them?"

"No! I just had to get physical with one of the blokes who wanted to take a bit more than my money."

"Fuck me." K. said. He never dealt with gangs when it came to drugs. Too dangerous. Hippies were easier because they were all money and business, without the violence. That way, he could bring the violence if necessary.

K. cracked his fingers, gearing for the inevitable punch up. He nodded to Cassie, who was now holding a collapsible baton. She grinned. He knew she was ready for some violence.

There was a knock at the door. K. turned to Cassie. "Let's do this." He said, the excitement of an impending fight rising in every muscle. Cassie hurled open the door and swung her baton hard, anticipating a Clown's head. The pleasant thud was the answer she was looking for.

"Take that, childfucker!"

As their eyes came into focus, K. and Cassie noticed that instead of a gang of Clowns standing in their doorway, there was an attractive blond woman in a dark dress suit and her partner, a burly man who was now crumpled on the hall floor, blood pumping from his face.

"Don't you people look first before you hit somebody over the head." The woman said with a sneer.

"Fuck me." Cassie said, bewildered. "Who the fuck are you, then?"

"Yeah, what's a posh bird like you hanging around this part of town." K. laughed, eyeing the fit bird, imaging a round of sexual athletics with her, Cassie and himself.

"I'm Ms. Davenport. I'm an associate of the Doctor." She said. "He didn't want any distractions for you, so he arranged to pay off your drug debt. The clowns want to assert a sense of authority and control. But, don't worry, it's just theatre."

"Oh, we weren't worried at all." K. said. "How did you know about Cassie's situation?"

"We know things, Mr. K. It's our job. And before you feel the need to indulge, think twice about who you associate with." She said with a sideways glance to Cassie.

"We'll be seeing you, Mr. K." Ms. Davenport kicked the man, who was stumbling to stand. He held a now blood-soaked handkerchief over his face. "Walk it off." She said dismissively. The two disappeared down the hallway and into the staircase.

"That was fucking odd."

"Well, they're gone." Cassie said, looking back out the window. "But they've left a calling card."

On the sidewalk was a very large set of balloons twisted to resemble a hand with two fingers raised.

"Yeah, up yours, too."



The ringing phone jerked K. awake. He rolled over in his bed, letting it ring. No one worth talking to would ever call in the morning. The phone continued to ring. Fuck me, he thought and, stretching across to the table, yanked the phone out of the wall. That takes care of that, he muttered, curling back into his sheets.

Suddenly, the phone began to ring again. K. sat up and stared at the phone. I pulled it out of the wall, or was I dreaming, he thought, inspecting the cord. He looked at the damaged outlet on the wall and back to the cord dangling in his hand. Slowly, he picked up the phone and held the receiver to his ear, not saying a word.

"Mr. K." said the male voice at the other end. "We have been expecting you. Do you plan on gracing us with your presence?"

"Who the fuck is this?" He said, trying to comprehend how he could be talking into a disconnected phone.

"It's the Doctor, Mr. K. I'm calling about the experiment. I thought we could have a face-to-face before we get things underway."

"Fuck me, do you know what time it is?"

"It's 11o'clock in the morning, Mr. K."

"It's earlier than I thought." He flopped back on the bed. "So how can I talk to you with my phone disconnected?"

"Our technology goes beyond this simple hardwiring. New developments in cloud computing and such but that's really peripheral to matters at hand ..."

"Sounds like the another step to a complete surveillance society." K. interrupted.

"That's not for me to say, one way or another but..."

"...Fucking 1984 and all that ..."

" ... I want to remind you that the experiment will proceed on time whether..."

"I'm still getting paid for this inconvenience, right?"

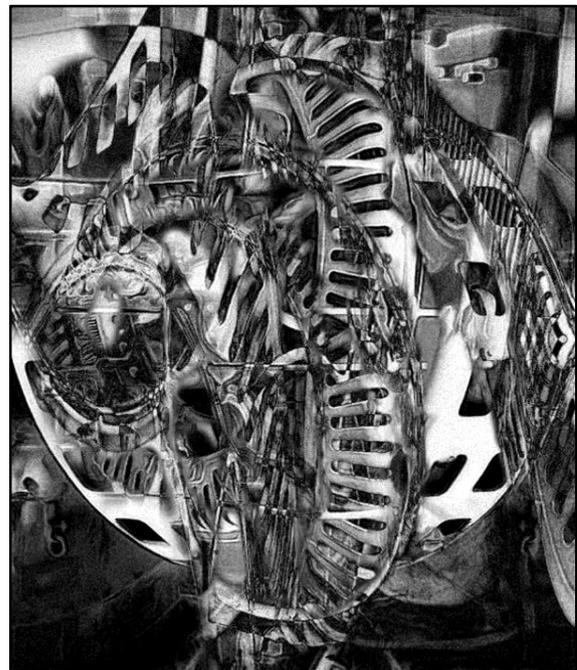
"Well, if by inconvenience, you mean your job, then of course but ..."

"All right. Now fuck off so I can get my beauty sleep."

"It's time to wake up, David Michael K..."

K. smashed the phone onto the floor, pieces skidded into various corners of the room. He sat back and admired his mural on the opposite wall. A Mark Bradford inspired work, it was an abstract collage incorporating various gig flyers and radical newspapers covered with brushed paint. Underneath were the words "I didn't go to work today, I don't think I'll go tomorrow."

K. pulled the sheets over his head and fell back into a slumber.



K. stared out the window of the Marine Pub, a quiet place where he could go, have a pint and think. The more he thought about the Doctor, the more believed that he was being groomed as a

State asset. The psycho-dynamics and the magickal nature of the work were interesting, but there was something a bit dodgy about the whole thing. As if there was something more to it all. Something he was not being told.

Also, the strange visions he had been having lately had him unnerved. He had read somewhere that being held in captivity can sometimes induce hallucinations. That's what he felt like. There was something definitely claustrophobic about the city now, he thought. Also, he could not shake an intense feeling of déjà vu ...

"Mind if I join you?" David Michael's train of thought was interrupted by a well-dressed woman, probably late forties, long black hair. He gestured with a nod to the chair opposite him. She sat down still looking at him. "I've been in this country for a couple of days but I haven't had any excitement yet."

"Oh, really?"

"My husband is over here for business. It's just meetings and more meetings, not that it matters. He just cares about the Company."

David Michael looked the woman over. Attractive and stylish, she resembled an upper class version of Leila Waddell in an odd sort of way. He was not normally attracted to posh birds but he was intrigued.

"That's too bad, a woman like you left all alone. What's your name?" He felt something between his legs. He looked

down and saw her shoeless foot. Her toes massaged his groin through his pants.

"Let's not complicate things." She said, smiling. "I'm staying close by, in the Boleskine Hotel."

David Michael K. surveyed the posh suite. The woman closed and locked the door. Turning around, she had a fiery look in her eye.

"No one to bother us here for a while." the woman said, walking over to the bed. David Michael, reading her mind, began to take off his sta-pres, exposing his red underwear. His passion for red underwear was an old habit from when he was younger, and fell into a life-stylist mode of political expression. After years of street fighting and hardcore politics, he realized the fetishising of material symbols placed one into a dogmatic box. While this can be used tactically to bring dominant culture symbols into disrepute, he now expressed his beliefs through action, which he was going to do now by getting a good blowjob. The posh bird understood what he wanted as he leaned back slightly. Pulling down the Y-fronts, she took his hardening cock into her mouth. Swirling her tongue around the head before plunging the whole member down her throat. She started to hum, the trembling of her lips sending shivers through David Michael's body. Starting from his cock up to the base of his neck. From her exceptional technique, he felt his chakras opening one by one. He wanted

it to last longer so he grabbed her by the hair and pulled her head up.

“What’s the matter?” she inquired.

He didn’t answer but grabbed his belt and strapped it around his neck. Then he tied the opposite end around the headboard of the bed. David Michael could feel his face become flushed from the pressure around his neck. She removed her clothes, frigging herself as he got ready. When he had finished his adjustments, she began to work again on his swollen member. David Michael got a nice surprise as she stuck one finger, then two, up to the second knuckle into his arse. No need for lubrication as that was provided by the sweat. David Michael lied back to enjoy the sound of Psychic TV’s ‘Infinite Beat’ looping through his brain. It was the perfect tune to be blown to while working astral and neural pathways. With the strains of this tune going through his head, it did not take long for the million year old DNA codes to unravel and before long he was out on the mud flats. He came back to reality with the woman stroking his cock, his genetic wealth spraying over his stomach.

“You didn’t take it in your mouth!” David Michael said, untying the belt from his neck.

“Why?”

“So, I can taste myself when I kiss you.” David Michael ignored this obvious breach of sexual etiquette, as it was time to continue with the sexual athletics.

The posh bird walked over to the window and stood there naked. She opened the window and leaned out, her breasts resting against the sill.

“I liked to be watched.” She said, “Unfortunately, my husband doesn’t share this passion. While he can talk big with the cronies at the Company, he’s actually sexually self-conscious and awkward. That’s why I always like a bit of trade when I can get it.”

David Michael nodded approval with a wry grin and settled in behind her, kneeling on the floor, his face between her cheeks. He poked his tongue into her hole then down to her clit in one long fluid motion. She moved her hips in response, all the time watching the people on the street below.

David Michael stood up and guided his still hard member into her, thrusting deep as she gave a shout. He continued to pump vigorously, slapping her backside and peering over her shoulders to see how many people had gathered below. Most people did not notice the couple above. Some, who did, pretended they were not there. Others stopped to watch the action, leaning against the storefront windows across the street, drinking coffee and talking about the latest Six Nations match.

She met his thrusts with enthusiasm. Her tight cunt told him that her husband did not take care of her in the sex department. A job he didn’t mind doing. He looked over to the night table and noticed a novel, *Prelude to an Orgasm* by Michael Roth. He had never

read Roth before, avoiding popular literature meant for pseudo-intellectual snobs.

“Time for a change.” She pushed him back onto the bed, and pinned his arms down before mounting him. She rode him hard.

For a second time, he left his body and traversed the familiar mud flats a million years away. In this altered state, he noticed that the room was actually a representation of late nineteenth century London and that various personal effects were situated geographically where the victims of Jack the Ripper would have been. The woman began to chant the Enochian call for the tenth aether and David Michael could sense the air around him begin to ripple. Soon the room disappeared altogether and the two of them were in a dark alley. Undeterred by the cold, damp pavement, the woman continued to fuck him hard and he responded in kind.

He could feel the genetic material welling up in his cock when suddenly he was brought back to present time by a loud crash. The window had shattered, spraying shards of glass onto the floor and across their naked bodies. Something else whistled past his head and into the wall with a thud.

“Take cover, we’re being shot at!” the posh bird shouted, rolling to the side, K. jumping with her. Two more shots ricocheted around the room before becoming imbedded in the wall.

“What the hell’s going on?”

“Someone’s taking shots at us, obviously trying to kill one or both of us.” She said.

What a waste, David Michael thought as he looked at his limp cock and the dribble of cum seeping from the tip.



K. opened the door to his flat. The first thing he saw was Cassie’s face, eyes staring hard.

“This a mate of yours.” She growled. K. looked past her to see a tall, well-dressed man lounging on the sofa. He grunted a no.

“Who the fuck are you then?” he said, walking past Cassie.

“I’m Magus.” he said. “Sorry to be a bother, but I believe we know someone in common.”

“Who?”

"The Doctor." Magus continued. "I believe you were, and no doubt still are, whether you know it or not, part of the experiment. Once you're in, you stay in. There's a saying around the Building - you don't leave it, it leaves you. Unless you know where the exits are. Metaphorically, of course."

"What are you talking about?"

"He's been rambling like this since he got here." Cassie said. "Told him to fuck off but he insisted he knew you. I threatened to punch him in the throat if he kept it up."

She sat in the kitchen chair, throwing her feet up on the table. "This all about that job? Easy money, you said." Cassie sat back with her copy of *Medical Apartheid*.

"Yeah." K. drawled, not taking his eyes off the other man in the room.

"I've recently escaped from the Building and the good Doctor. And I've come to get you out as well."

Now K. became interested. He joined Magus, sitting in a chair across from him. Magus held out his hand as introduction to K., who ignored the gesture. Magus sat back on the couch and continued.

"You've read the documentation, right? You've talked with the Doctor, right? Well this experiment was actually to test some magickal weapons. See how they would work in population control and compliance, civilian defense, black ops

...well the list goes on. The scope is broad and the applications are many. To put it crudely, these are magickal weapons to attack on an astral plane, or shamanic space or magickal realm or whatever you want to call it. Of course, we know that there is no true separation between magickal and consensual reality. It's just a matter of perspective."

"So what's this got to do with me?" K. said.

"See, in this experiment, you are the Heirophant." Magus said, handing him the corresponding card from the Thoth deck. "They needed an enforcer. You know how things can get chaotic quite quickly sometimes in a ritual space, astrally or physically. Your role was to keep things in line."

"Let me guess, you're the Magus."

Magus nodded affirmative with a slight bow.

"I had the feeling that I was being recruited to be a State asset." K. said.

"The only thing wrong with that is the Building and the experiment are beyond the State." Magus said.

"I might also add that somebody tried to kill me today."

"That's not unusual." Cassie scoffed. "Shagging some bird, I bet!"

"Maybe I was!"

"Jealous husband, that's it. Case closed."

"Well, that certainly fits the pattern of the experiment, but not usually this soon in the process." Magus observed, flipping through the Tarot cards.

"You saying the blokes from the Building were trying to kill me?"

"Perhaps, but maybe I misunderstood your roll in the whole scheme." He tossed the Death card on the table, followed by the Ten of Swords. K. grabbed the deck, pulled the Tower card and held it in Magus's face.

"If they want to fuck with me, this is what they will get. Why don't we just head over to the Building and give the good Doctor what he has coming to him. Then we burn the whole place down." K. said. He always advocated direct action over sitting around talking.

"I must urge discretion. As you may already know, the Building is a golem. It's watching our every move. So we don't have long."

"Well, how long is this going to take?"

Magus shrugged. K. got up and grabbed a couple of Boddingtons from the fridge. He offered one to Magus. Magus declined with a slight wave of his hand.

"You don't drink?"

"Of course not."

"You a church society teetotaler type, are you? 'Cause if you are, I don't want anything to do with you."

"No, no. I don't imbibe any beverage. Or food for that matter. Or..."

K. regarded him quizzically.

"I'm sorry, Mr. K." Magus said, "You didn't think I was real, did you? I don't really exist."

K. leaned back in his chair. He knew it was going to be a long night.

While Magus spoke, K.'s mind wandered. This bloke says I was a patsy, he thought, but I'm not anybody's bitch. And K. had made people pay for lesser offences. Like at the corner market, when a geezer jumped the queue. He tripped the bloke, ramming his face into the countertop. Blood splattered across the checkout as he smashed the man's face repeatedly onto the metal surface.

"So, what now?" K. asked.

"Well, a sustained magickal attack would be a logical start." Magus responded.

"Bollocks!" K. sneered. "I say we go in. Create some mayhem. Leave. Make a spectacle of violence, which is something they will understand. So, you do things your way. I will do things my way."

K. preferred his violence to be personal, to be face-to-face. There were easier ways to send a message, such as detonating a bomb or arson. But, as a street fighter, those were distasteful, cowardly and impersonal. He liked the sensation and the look in the other's

eyes as he put his boots in. It was about violent mayhem and the laughs.

To this end, K. decided to organize a flash riot. He liked the potential of flash mobs but felt it had degenerated into hipster elitism and bourgeois spectacle. So he turned these flash mobs into flash riots. A group of street fighters would assemble at a particular place and at a set time they would attack anyone and anything around, then disperse. Under cover of this mayhem, he would break into the Building and sort out the Doctor.

“Well ...” Magus said, unconvinced but resigned. “First, we need to distract the Building.”

He stood, took off his clothes and piled them onto the table. Then, he stood on his tiptoes, his arms twisted behind his back and neck stretched upwards. His breathing became slow and deep. K. sat back, sipping his Boddingtons, taking in the ritual. Suddenly, Magus fell to the floor, body twisted in spasms, laughing maniacally.

“It’s done.” Magus said, breathing heavily. “The Building will not bother you. You have fifteen minutes to do your business before it will notice you.”

“Sounds great. Now, I’ve got a couple of calls to make.”

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The usually quiet street was buzzing with activity. Gentrification had infused a bourgeois banality of coffeeshops and condos into the area, an atmosphere K. found disturbing. The usual posh punters were milling around the shops. In addition, he clocked about fifty fighters, a mix of bootboys, soccer hooligans, anarchists and sociopaths. A decent turnout, he thought. Three private security guards from a nearby building were hassling a few of the skins hanging out, asserting their empty authority. They will get theirs soon enough, he knew. The experienced streetfighters were biding their time.

For the occasion, K. managed to gather all the former Dumb Fucks he could find on short notice. Jimmy the Scar, Fuzz, Bam Bam, Mouse, Alex the Blade, Knuckles. Some of the hardest street fighters in the city. They stood there in their steel-toed Doc Martins, Ben Sherman and sta-pres, each one focused on aggro.

"Where's Spider?"

"He's teaching philosophy at the city college. The cunt seemed to have forgotten that postmodernism is all about street violence." Jimmy growled, "So I had to remind him." K. glanced at Jimmy's bloody knuckles and knew the matter had been dealt with suitably.

"Fun and games." K. said, "But let's get this going."

"What's all this, then?" Bam Bam asked.

"We go after this cunt called the Doctor." K. said calmly. "I've set up a flash riot for extra mayhem. We put the boots to any cunt that looks like a State asset."

"We got company." Jimmy said, with a nod of his head. They glanced over and saw a couple of police cars arriving. One cop stepped out of the car to survey the area.

"The filth." Knuckles spat. K. expected as much. Guess it looked a bit obvious that a group of skins were hanging around such a posh area.

"Some cunt got nervous." He growled. "Two minutes, boys. Hold firm."

There was a smash and a crash of shattered glass hitting the concrete. The Dumb Fucks looked over to see four anarchists dressed in black with keffiyeh wrapped around their faces standing in front of a coffee shop. The window had been shattered by a garbage can that had been tossed through it. Shouts

erupted from the shop as patrons ran for cover. A businessman was slumped backwards in a chair, knocked unconscious by the can, bleeding profusely from shards of glass that ripped through his skin.

"Fucking anarchists!"

"No discipline." K. said, turning to Alex the Blade. "If the cops don't get them first, stick a shiv in them."

The Blade was already on the case, crossing the street towards the anarchists as the street exploded in mayhem. The white noise of assault and violence filled the air - windows being broken, trash cans thrown at cars, police sirens, screams and cries from passersby set upon by the flash mob.

The Dumb Fucks crossed the street towards the Building, forcing any cars to come to a screeching halt in the process. A well-dressed man in a Mercedes leaned on his horn, face twisted in anger at the group of skins in front of him. Before any of the Fucks could react, three skins dragged the man from his car and threw him to the pavement hard. Two put the boots to the writhing body while the third jumped up onto the hood and kicked in the windshield.

The crew remained focused. They pushed through a group of old biddies fleeing the gang violence, their abandoned shopping bags strewn across the sidewalk behind them. Two yuppies backed into Fuzz as they were retreating from another group of street fighters. Fuzz grabbed the hair of the first one

and threw the yuppie's head down into his rising knee. The body went instantly limp. His friend turned and whimpered a bewildered plea which Fuzz answered with a hard right cross. Blood spat from the falling yuppie's broken jaw.

K. noticed the guards that were hassling the skins earlier were now lying face down on the pavement surrounded by the angry gang bent on releasing their rage. He remembered fondly of times past as the filthy cunts were curbed.

"This is it." K. said, "Mouse, stay out here. Fuck up any cunts who try to get in. But two minutes only, then fuck off. Cassie and Knuckles, head around back. Bam, Fuzz, Jimmy, you're with me." K. glanced across the street to see Alex digging a shiv repeatedly into an oblivious anarchist's ribs. The man collapsed onto one knee, holding his side, not fully realizing yet where all the blood was coming from. "Looks like Alex is having fun without us. That'll teach those middle class tossers a thing or two about real working class violence."

The crew headed towards the black steel door. K. checked it and with a hard push, swung it open into the lobby. The crew bolted through the opening into the Building. Bam Bam placed his size twelve boots into the stomach of a security guard, sending him flopping to the ground, smashing his head on the tile floor. He proceeded to put his boots hard into the prone body. Fuzz grabbed the security guard behind the desk by the lapels and dragged him across the desk before throwing him to the floor.

He began to punch the guard's face like a piston. Alex grabbed the computer off the desk and threw it across the room, where it shattered on the tile floor.

"One minute then take off." K. shouted to the others.

He saw another two guards exit from the elevator. There was a gleam of mayhem in eyes of the Fucks as they readied themselves for more ultra violence.

K. turned and headed down the hall and into the stairwell.



K. proceeded quickly yet cautiously along the white halls. To his surprise he was largely ignored as the employees were more interested in the mayhem erupting outside to care about his presence. That sigil Magus fired has worked so far, K. said to himself. Now, where is that fucker.

He opened a door to an office. There were three secretaries against the window watching the mayhem below.

"Oh my, did you see what's going on outside?" A slim blonde woman said turning to him. "Can you believe it?"

"What's this country coming to?" He said, eyeing the row of fit birds, who all were looking at him now. "But don't worry, nothing's going to happen to you nice ladies. Not with the likes of me around."

He shot them a wink and a nod, and could sense from their wry smiles that they were up for a bit more. He would love a round of sexual athletics, but he had other matters at hand.

"I've been looking for you." Magus said, placing his hand onto K.'s shoulder. "This way."

K. and Magus moved quickly through a series of interconnecting hallways in silence, before coming to a plain white door.

Magus nodded and K. kicked in the door. He could see the Doctor sitting behind an office desk across the room from him. He entered the room slowly, Magus behind him.

"Looks like you've created a bit of a sensation outside." The Doctor said, reclining in his chair. "And for what, I might add?"

"What's all this about, then?" he said deliberately. The Doctor did not answer

but stared blankly at the street fighter. K. clenched his fists and moved towards the desk with menace.

The Doctor let out a sigh and shook his head. "Well, Mr. K., we had plans for you. But now, you've really messed things up."

"You see, the Building is hologramatic, metaphorically speaking." He continued. "Our activities run on multiple levels. Certain aspects are hinted at from one viewpoint, but from another perspective a whole new dimension is realized. You did not understand the full scope of the enterprise, and of course, you could not, so you jumped to conclusions, got some bad advice. Now, this disruption, among others you've presented us. You're turning out to be more trouble that you're worth."

"Sorry, squire, but I had a problem with that whole 'kill the hooligan' thing you were planning." K. said with a sneer.

"Oh, that, well, you see, that was my wife you were fucking in that hotel room. That's right. It was a sex magic operation. Of course, neither of you knew about it as that would have skewed the energy. Unfortunately, this time you didn't die. My man got tired of waiting for you to climax a second time and jumped the gun a bit. You were meant to die at the moment of orgasm, when the magickal energy would be at its peak. Of course, the old woman would forget all that had happened thanks to some intense

metaprogramming we've been working on. Then onto the next punter."

"But, Mr. K." the Doctor continued, his tone menacing. "You're fucking seems to have put a wrench into that cycle. Now all she can think of is sex with despicable creatures such as yourself. So much so, that I've had to lock her up. For her own safety."

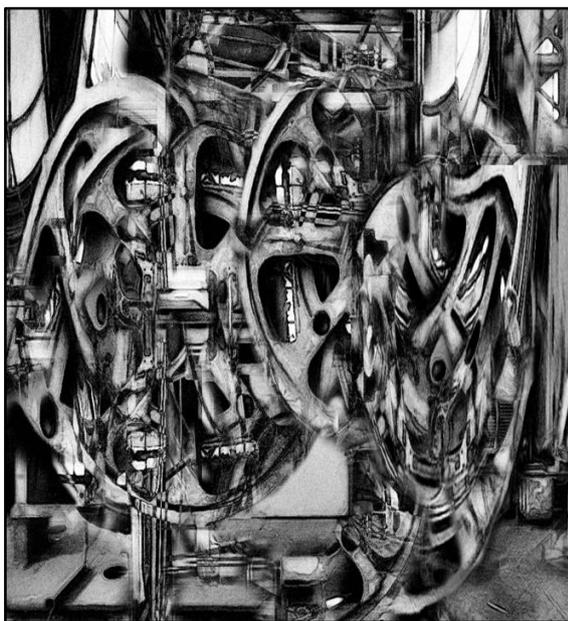
K. stood, tense muscles relaxing slightly at the thought that he fucked the old bird into the nut house.

"David Michael K., you're a cunt." The Doctor said coldly.

K. swung his fist across the desk at the Doctor. There was nothing but air.

"He's gone." Magus said, "For now."

Rage filled K. as every muscle exploded. Teeth clenched, he hit the desk repeatedly with his fist, imagining it was a copper's head.



K. and Magus stepped out of the emergency exit into the alley.

"Maybe next time, mate." He said to Magus. "Fun and games, eh?"

"I'll be seeing you." Magus said with a laugh. He turned and walked up the alley. K. turned and ran up the alley in the opposite direction. Coppers were everywhere now. He kept his head down and walked with a purpose.

Cassie clocked him as he turned the corner and bounced over to him.

"This is brilliant." She shouted over the sirens from the next street over. "Just got word that my sisters in S.C.U.M. launched their own riot. They've been stabbing men up and down the Metro. They didn't want anything to do with this riot as it was organized by men. While I can't stand their chauvinism, I admire their initiative."

"Let's go. There's still some unfinished business." K. said, refocusing.

"I've been looking forward to this." Cassie nodded, face glowing at the thought of more aggro. K. looked up in the sky and noticed the pink saucers were back, hovering high above. He smiled, cracking his knuckles. He knew that everything would work out just right. Just one last bit of business, then back to the flat with his mates to enjoy a pint and recap the day's mayhem.

Cassie pressed her finger to David's lips. David stepped back, out of sight as she opened the door into a posh reading

hall. He surveyed the hallway. There were lots of dark wood and portraits in oil hanging on the walls. Smell of stale rot hung in the air.

"Are my guests here?" Barbara Radford Salisbury, bestselling author of royal romances said, straightening her trademark pink dress. The 95 year-old woman was waiting the arrival of some members of the lesser nobility for tea. With any luck, one of the young Dukes would be convinced to strip and flog his member for her, all research for an upcoming book, of course. She never lacked volunteers to molest her thin, wrinkled body. People knew she was well connected with the royal family and would bow to her whims on the off chance she would put in a word for them with the Queen.

"There has been a slight change of plans, mum." Cassie said, entering the room.

"Oh, the young Duke couldn't make it?" Salisbury stated, day dreaming about the 18 year-old's hard body before becoming annoyed, swinging her thin arm toward her servant's face. "What am I to do now!?"

"Die." Cassie growled.

On queue, David Michael entered the room, cracking his knuckles, staring down the old tart.

"Your books have poisoned the minds of working class women with bourgeois fairy tales, convincing them to turn against their own class to aspire to the

ideals of another class whose aims are contrary to their own. You are highly recognized in the literary world. We seek nothing less than the destruction of this occult establishment and to extinguish the stench of literature once and for all."

"My word, what is the meaning of all this!" turning to the young woman for an explanation.

The woman's answer was in the carving knife she had unsheathed and thrust into the wrinkled white face. Salisbury shuttered a last shallow breath as the knife penetrated her eye socket and buried itself into her brain. A thin arc of blood pumped from the wound over the maid's uniform. Having recovered from the momentary shock of murdering her former master, the maid proceeded to stab the withered corpse repeatedly, memories of years of humiliation and abuse finally being released. She had planned to sell the corpse to the Man/Corpse Love Society for further humiliation. She remembered the contact sputtering over the phone "Ah, we've never had a posh bird like that before!" Now, it was all but useless.

David Michael grabbed Salisbury's books and piled them on the floor. In an instant, they were ablaze. Cassie tossed the bloody knife into the fire.

"Show me another rich cunt, and I'll stick her too." she muttered.

David wanted to fuck her right there in the growing pool of blood and meat.



## **GREEN EYED MONSTER**

**By Claire Godden-Rowland**

**Photos © Malcolm Alcalá**

He checked his watch again and squinted along the dusty Spanish road, the heat shimmering above its concrete surface, cicadas filling his head with their irritating chirping. Where the hell was she? He should have gone with her, should have endured a day of trudging around cathedrals or castles or whatever old shit she'd insisted on going to traipse around. It was all a ruse; he was sure of it, she was probably meeting

some Spanish waiter, some Raul or Julio or whatever, she'd probably had him on the go for ages, which was probably why she had suggested a weekend in Majorca so soon into their relationship. Against the azure blue of the Spanish sky a coach began to trundle out of the midday heat toward him. He physically relaxed and sighed with relief, he knew it was okay, he had known she would be back; she was a good girl really.

The coach pulled up with a sigh of brakes and she appeared at the top of the narrow stairs, beaming and sweating from her excursion. He lifted her down gleefully and held her, a moment too long, a little too tightly.

She looked slightly confused and removed herself from his embrace. 'I was only gone for the day Babes, you okay?'

She could be such a cold bitch. 'What? I can't miss you?' He asked amiably, kissing her cheek.



She relented to his charm. 'Well,' she shrugged, 'I'm flattered. I missed you too, I wished you'd come, God it was so great. This place is so full of beautiful

history. It was hot though, baking hot. I made a friend on the coach -'

'You did?' he tried to keep the panic which bubbled to life within him out of his voice.

'Yeh, yeh, such a nice guy, we buddied up for picture taking else I would have had no photos of those fabulous places.' She was still talking but his ears were ringing, a cold sensation throbbing in the pit of his stomach, the bitter stab of jealousy. So this was his adversary, the latest man planning to take her from him, there was always someone lurking at the periphery of his vision, just awaiting their chance. Fuck sake, why did she have to be so flirtatious, all the time, with anyone? God knows, he'd seen her with his mates, laughing at their jokes and touching their arms as she threw her head back, shaking her golden hair provocatively. All part of her act, everything she did was, every move, the way she walked, all part of this package intended to entice and lure. He bet this guy wasn't even into that old history shit, just got on the coach when he saw her get on, sidling up to her with this whole camera photo buddy bollocks. He knew his game alright, pretending to listen when she spoke about all these crumbling old buildings no one gives a toss about. Bastard, he worked his way in and now he would probably be lurking somewhere planning his next move, how to accidentally on purpose be where she was, talking about old shit again. How could he compete with that? He hated old shit and she was so fucking pretty that it was ridiculous, women shouldn't

be that pretty, it made them a liability and made all the men around go squiffy.

'You want to go back to the room?' He heard himself ask her. 'I can show you just how much I missed you today?'

Her eyes sparkled and she grinned, leaning against him suggestively. 'Really?'

'Oh yes, really.'

'Let's do it.' She took his hand and, waving over her shoulder at her new friend, she led him to their room, past the sparkling turquoise pool. He followed her, watching the sun dance on her golden hair, her shoulders a honey brown blushed with pink from walking around in the sun today. He glanced behind him at the friend she had waved goodbye to, so casually, as if they weren't already lovers, laughing behind his back.

She closed the door to their room, the cool shocking after the searing heat of the afternoon, her flip flops slapping against the cold floors. She blew out air as she smiled at him contentedly. She reached up and kissed him, releasing a small groan of pleasure as she did so. She was so fucking sexual all the time, everything about her reeked of sex, she was such a whore he couldn't stand it.

'Let me take a quick shower and you can go ahead and show me just how much you missed me.' She turned to leave and he felt cold shivers run all over his flesh. She was washing the other guy off her, cleaning herself out,

getting rid of the evidence. He couldn't bear it, how could she do this to him? Cuckold him like this; make him look such a fool?

'You're not going anywhere!'

She blanched as if physically struck. 'What? Why?' She gazed at him in disbelief.



He quickly softened his tone, determined to get her pants off and find out if she was wet, if she'd been with the other guy, any other guy, he had to know. 'I want you now, I can't wait.'

'But I'm sweaty and stinky.'

'Don't care.'

'But -'

'Now baby!'

He grabbed her before he could stop himself and threw her back on the bed. She was too shocked to struggle and he was on top of her, pulling eagerly at her shorts, a look of utter determination in his eyes.

'Hey,' she complained pulling at her pants defensively, but he couldn't stop, he dragged at her clothes and they began to heave over her flesh, turning it white, digging into her skin. 'Slow down.' He couldn't, he couldn't stop, couldn't help himself.



Finally her shorts were in his hands, her knickers still twisted inside them and her bare legs exposed and red from the rough dragging of material. Before she could complain about her treatment or cover her nakedness he thrust his hand inside her. She squealed with pain and started repeating 'gentle' over and over. She was dry. He couldn't believe it. How was that possible? She hadn't as yet been with another? He imagined her planning it right now, a rendezvous tonight, laughing at him as some stranger pressed her against a wall and thrust inside her.

He realised his fingers were still inside her as images of her fucked every which way from Sunday assaulted his brain. Then he realised he had a huge erection, so fierce and hard. He pushed her back and thrust inside her, covering her mouth as she screamed in anguish, each thrust like knives stabbing inside her. But then the pain began to pass and she was moving with him, seeing this as just overly urgent, him too keen, a lesson to be learned was all this was. She moaned gently in his ear with pleasure, now wet and welcoming. Her acquiescing infuriated him and he thrust harder, determined to make her sorry, so fucking sorry, but she just moaned louder and dug her fingers into his shoulders. Despite himself he began to feel the stirrings, the taking over of himself and they came together, violent and urgent, and moaning with pleasure. He lay on top of her, panting and hating himself, hating her, hating the other guy, all the other guys. Then he rolled off and lay back, staring up at the

whirring fan above him, the cool on his sweat soaked skin making it prickle.

She leant on one elbow and sighed with something like gratification, her cheeks flushed. She dragged a hand through her damp hair. 'Wow, you did miss me that was ...' she giggled girlishly and he felt fury bubble within him, she was laughing at him, she thought him a ludicrous lover. 'I'm not sure I shall be walking right for a week!'

He couldn't be close to her any longer and stood up, frustration pumping through every muscle in his body making them burn. Bitch, bitch, bitch, he screamed in his mind. She was so wanton, she was a slut, and she was jezebel, Delilah. She was Eve, filled with original sin, making him bad, making him wrong. He didn't know it but he was mumbling, repeating the word 'wrong' over and over.

She sat up in bed feeling a trickle of alarm run down her spine.

He continued to pace, repeating in a hushed whisper that she was wrong, this was wrong. She would leave this room and run to him, the guy from the coach who pretended to like the old shit, the castles and cathedrals. Wrong, wrong, wrong. He couldn't let her leave. She wouldn't come back.

She was sliding off the bed, her eyes wide, and the whisper of panic turning into a screech inside her. She could see he was wrong and she would leave him, he just knew it.

He couldn't let her. Fuck, why did she have to be such a whore? Why was she making him feel this way? He couldn't let her leave, disrespect herself, laughing at him, at how he loved her and wanted her only for himself.

'What's wrong?' she was asking. 'What is it? Talk to me?'

He glared at her, she was playing him, she knew what was wrong, she was the one who had been fucking the coach guy all day, and the Spanish guy, the reason they were even here, why she'd wanted to come to this stupid country. She looked so innocent, so full of concern for him, her eyes watery and her brow furrowed. She was good, he'd give her that, but he saw what she was, she was filthy, she could not be trusted. She was edging across the room away from him, her eyes wide in fear. 'You're scaring me,' she said.

He sniggered and in one huge step was across the room and seizing her arms as if she were just a weightless doll. He thrust her onto the bed and she screamed in genuine alarm now, she was afraid of him, there was fear in her eyes. He would show her, he would give her the fucking of her life. She would never want anyone else after this; no other guy would do after he showed her what he was capable of, how he could give it to her. Not walk for a week; she'd never walk again once he was finished with her. He was blind with fury and determination to prove his virility and power to her. She'd spend the rest of their lives begging him to do her again, like he did all those

years ago in Spain when he showed her what a real man could do. She'd never look at some other guy, not even one who liked that history bollocks, no one else would ever do after this. He loved her with all of himself, more passionately than he had ever thought possible and after this she would never leave, never leave.

He looked down and that was when he realised: he had crushed her. That was curious, he thought as he looked down at her staring blood stained eyes, her death mask, he hadn't really meant to do that. He touched her cheek and rocked her head, mouth gaping, it dropped to the other side. Now she really would never leave him. She looked so beautiful, god she was perfect, she looked like an angel. He couldn't

help himself, he clutched his fingers around his cock and began to massage up and down, moaning involuntarily with pleasure. He became hard quickly as he looked down at her, frozen beneath him, his face the last thing she had seen in this life, the thought of their passionate lovemaking still hot in his head. Then he slipped his erection into her mouth. It felt so good, still so warm and welcoming. He thrust into her throat, groaning with pleasure, his cock battering her mouth mercilessly, his buttocks tensing and thrusting eagerly. He came quickly and it bubbled from her mouth, dribbling down her motionless chin. He sighed and shuddered with euphoria. This was so perfect; she would never leave him now. He lay down next to her; she was a good girl really, he'd always known it.





## THE GOOD COCK

By Salena Godden

Photos © Thomas Evans

It was a good cock, there is no disputing it. It made her giddy just to look at it, throbbing, twitching and pulsating there in his hand. It made all women sigh, grunt and moan, of course, it made all other women crazy, but she wasn't thinking about all other women, for then and there, it was hers, it was a good cock and it was all for her. She was thinking about the good cock and the width of it, the thought of it, the view was spectacular. She wanted to see

what it would feel like inside her, what it would be like to have such a good cock. It was thick and long, it was hard and it was all her, for the then, and for the now. Just the sight of it made her ridiculous, she thought in songs: have you ever seen such a thing in your life, such a spectacular cock in all of your life? Hypnotic and red faced it was, the cock had fury and hunger, a personality of its own, it was arrogant and primal. He held it back tightly. Then he lowered

the front passenger seat and positioned himself on top of her. He was strong and quite heavy and she was pinned under his weight now. So the good cock let her have a taste and gave her a feel of some of the tip of it, just the very tip of the good cock. He gave her a quick lazy kiss, all tongue and spit as he worked the cock in. Then he gave her a few good and sudden strokes followed by a few good hard thrusts. She opened herself and moved with him and he said *don't do that or you'll make me come*. So she stopped bucking and grinding and tried to be good for the good cock. She played dead and let the cock have its own wicked way. It was sharp and delicious, with each throb and stab the cock grew harder, more swollen. She was aware that she was making strange noises in her throat, normally she was quite quiet, but for now and for the good cock she was a whimpering girl, a virgin, he seemed to like it like that. *Don't move* he gasped or *I will come* he said, *don't move or I will come*. So she had to stay perfectly still as he entered her again and again, teasing short spurts followed by slow full length of good cock, there in the front seat of the car, in the carpark, outside the train station.

Suddenly he ducked his head down and he stopped moving momentarily because he could see a man walking his dog. He looked at the man walking his dog whilst he began to continue slowly fucking her. As though by doing it very slowly it would look less rude to the man and his dog. He looked at the man walking his dog and pushed himself back inside her hard, looking past her shoulder and through his rear window

at the dog walker. She chuckled and this made her jiggle. He said, *please don't do that, don't move or you will make me come*. She stifled her giggling and stopped laughing and again she was very still. Her legs open and jammed up against the dashboard and her skirt up around her throat. The gear stick digging into her side.



This time though, when he was doing it to her, she plain lost her composure, she sighed then cried out in pleasure and pulled him into her. He didn't look into her face, he looked at his good cock going in and out and then over at the dog walker. He looked down and watched himself go in and out and then over at the dog walker, in and out, the

dog walker and then in and out. She threw her arms around his neck and clenched and lifted herself onto him from below. She couldn't help it, she thrust herself back onto him. He was sweating as he looked at his cock and then he said *oh oh oh*. She bucked beneath him fiercely three or four or so times and she dug her nails through his denim jacket and bit into his collar, his neck and hair. Very suddenly, he clambered off her and out of the car door clasp the end of his cock. He had the foreskin pinched between his fingers and when he let go of the end, creamy sperm shot all over the front car tyre. She lay there watching him but she could only see him from the waist up. Out of her view he had one hand to steady himself on the roof of the car and the other on his good cock, his face grimaced slightly and his eyes were closed. She watched him and out of sight, out of frame, his come spurting against the carpark tarmac and the front tyre.

She closed her legs and sat up, she found her knickers on the floor of the car and pulled them back on over her boots. She was relieved he didn't come inside her. She'd never seen such a good cock, inexplicable timing, coughing up against a car tyre like that too. She had been wondering where his sperm would go. She was expecting to get it rubbed into her belly and breasts, splashed into her face, it was much tidier this way. This way there would be no marks on her clothes or his car seat, no residue on her skin to reappear in the bath later. She straightened her skirt, pushed her right tit back in her bra and pulled her t-

shirt back down. He drew breath whilst he did up his flies, then walked around and got back into the driving seat. They smiled at each other. They giggled about the man walking his dog, as he started the engine and patted her knee. The car had a sweet smell, sex, cheese, sweat, vanilla, beer and wheat. They opened the steamy windows and the air was cool. He drove to the other side of the car park, to the train station entrance and dropped her off for the 3pm train. They kissed, pecked each other goodbye and made noises to call each other sometime and soon. It was sunny on the platform, golden light soaked the stoney train tracks, she smoked a cigarette alone.





# MARKET STREET GREYHOUND STATION

By Gene Gregorits

Market Street Greyhound Station, 10  
PM.

Waiting. Watching. Wanting.

Coins drop into machines, calls are  
connected, candy bars drop.

Loudspeaker screams high volume mud  
like an aural response to the grease on  
the floor.

People arrive late and curse.

Young women laugh.

Drivers with coffee and sweet rolls  
sweep quickly and confidently through  
the people, along the rows of orange  
bucket seats.

In these seats are people who are tired,  
people with stomach cramps, anxiety,  
fatigue.

Most of them waiting, and they are  
wanting also, and they remain silent.

Glances from strange women  
exaggerate my malnourishment, the  
ache in my legs.

Mother's advice: vitamin b12.

Mother's advice: act civilized.

I rise to my feet, the steady routine of

attracting attention, of feeling eyes, of  
pretending to not know, not notice. The  
steady routine of walking away while  
sending out energy like thoughts,  
thoughts like coded transmissions,  
transmissions like pure energy, each  
second ahead being one in which the  
impossible might happen. The energy is  
caught in the paws of angels, who toss a  
hint to their respective owners, who do  
not realize they have angels, that there  
is one moving across the scum-sparkled  
tiles, and the hint gets lost.  
The steady routine of hitting the night  
air alone, exiting somewhere, a bus  
station or bar or restaurant...extricating  
myself from the sounds, until a safe  
distance is reached, turning around in  
my old boots, through which I can feel  
the massage of icy cobblestone, to  
nothing but the lights of idling cabs, the  
lights of street lamps, my steady routine  
of good looks and gruesome need and  
prefabricated spite, my addiction to  
defeat, my fear reinforced by the Fuhrer  
of fiction, the dead man, the dancing

fucking dead man who meets my dead dreams head on, forcing a further begging of the question, demon blood in my angel blood, an infection which forbids my felonious fetish. Walking towards the river, gales of wind coming off the cold Susquehanna, idling red car at the red light, the snow coming down thick and heavy. Muffled sounds, a loud honk. I turn and stare, the idling red car honking its horn at the red light, the snow coming down good.

Contradict the inexorable routine with a surge of disbelief, which turns to excitement, my monumental and melodramatic mockery of the moment mocked itself by genuine hope, a real spark in the night, a spark in the blood, the old transmission new again, and I am in the backseat of the red car, a disorienting burst of perfume and leopard print and heat, of two teenage girls, and the car is moving. I ask, "why?" One of them says, "You looked interesting."

My new friends are Michelle and Stephanie. Both are beautiful, but Michelle is a brunette and I like brunettes. Back at my place, Fink and Simon soak up the female attention. The girls pull books and films off the shelves, and ask me about them. I answer with as few words as possible, afraid of launching into a speech or a rant.

Their questions make me feel old, their eyes turn me impish.

When the strangers are gone, I go to sleep.

*Dearest John,*

*The tone of your scathing drunken phone call to me was undeserved. I've been telling you for so, so long to not call me when you're drunk. Your voice itself would evoke rankling in any decent person, especially a person who has been responsible for trying to raise children on their own. If you are really selling drugs and alcohol to fifth graders in the 7-11 parking lot, I can't fathom why you would feel a need to boast of it to your own mother. I loathe and detest anyone who participates willingly in*

endangering kids. That goes for anyone who sells drugs or alcohol to you too, since one is illegal and the other you are too young to legally buy yourself. I know you were probably joking, but I don't really know. You are headed for prison, one way or another. As for you being demonically possessed...well, I don't know that any mother would be willing to take a thing like that with a grain of seriousness. But like I told you, I do remember your outbursts, I remember you telling me about a black car, and when you have the fever. These fits you had, they did frighten me, and no, I cannot agree with you that you that they came from the devil. I do believe in the devil, I think that there is such a thing as real evil. You are not that. It gave me the creeps to hear about this, I wish you'd just move on. Especially when I try so hard to help you. I don't appreciate your undermining my constant efforts to support you. I have encouraged you, and your writing, you just don't appreciate my efforts. I doubt you remember half the things I have done for you. YOU are the one who consistently undermines and sabotages yourself. My anger stems from your unwillingness or begrudgement of having to be responsible for yourself WHILE you are writing. It would

be one thing if I were rich or even comfortable, and I let you suffer. But I'm not. I often go without, and believe me, I don't think my parents, siblings or my children should be helping me out. It was my choice to settle for this job, I should be out trying to make something better happen for myself. I should have gotten more education to enable me to do a job that would entail higher learning skills. It's not all about the degree, as you seem to think, but about learning something new that I couldn't know about otherwise. I'm too lazy at this point in my life. But I do wish that I had done that, when I had more energy.

I know I sound too hateful, or malicious as you put it, but you purposely annoy me. If you were really joking about the selling of drugs to minors, there was only one reason for it. To evoke outrage in me. Again, from the time you were a child, always seeking negative attention. And I guess I always gave it. Shame on me, really. I should ignore any and all remarks of that nature. I think you better check the dictionary for the definition of malicious. I'm definitely not that. Got no time to be that. I never understood people who are. And no one knows better than me that you

*"don't want to win." Which is a shame, because you sure started out as a winner. You still are, I think, under a bunch of mostly self-inflicted crap.*

*Pooh-pooh, I know when you are rich you are going to buy your mother a nice old house. I will finally have my fireplace with built-ins on either side, and a large kitchen. The kitchen may have a small fireplace too. With several rockers and a nice overstuffed chair around it.*

*I love you son.*

*Mother*

There is no responding to such a letter. It goes in the trash. And so I am John Pitman, waking naked and two months clean from my last warehouse job, the year of your lord nineteen hundred and ninety six at 10 in the morning, Harrisburg, to the sound of cats crying, shrieking power saws car horns rattling garbage can lids and the sound of white trash not getting along with each other from the television. Bloated and yellow, itchy throat, I drink a glass of milk and fill a bowl on the floor with Friskies

shivering cold taciturn cursed with the same old wonder and sensing, as always, the expansion of my own emotional limits.

My small apartment has only one room, not counting the kitchen and bath. Large side windows draped with old blankets, windows that rattle with the slightest wind, windows that see into the next building. The walls are adorned with movie posters pilfered from an old video store job, and fold-out pin-ups of Jackie Moore, porno chanteuse, 1980s punk goddess, queen of the underground, sex kitten of the hate generation.

Closets are stuffed with my archives, folders of scrawl and type, books, records, videotapes. You enter my kingdom, you take a few hours, look around, you'll know as much about me as I do. You might know more. Fish out clean underwear from the body length army issue tube sack that never gets unpacked from the Laundromat where a child once found my dropped quarter in a place only small hands could reach, and I smiled at him taking

my quarter from small hands, and that thought hits me while bending over my tube sack shriveled dick goosebumps aching for more sleep, the first leg through, then the second, feeling bile rising in my concave chest, sliding on black underwear and a white t-shirt. Put on water for tea, wait for it standing there, watching the black metal slowly turn red metal. I recall last night's Chinese, when I feel the weight of it in my chest, appearing to have never reached digestion. In the bathroom a finger jabbing my throat I get rid of it, choke by choke, chunk by chunk, until tears stream down my cheeks, and try blowing my nose into the wrinkled paper wrapping of a toilet paper roll, long since used. Nothing. Can't breathe, so I try again, this time loud enough to knock out the other sounds. Explosion, OUT, like an orgasm. I feel wetness and it seems as if I've given facial birth to my own brain. A blast of air makes its way through my nostrils, wakes me up. I can breathe for the first time since yesterday. Pure oxygen induces a temporary sense of good health. Euphoria.

The white sock is now red, with a bulging wad of membrane lining from inside my skull. During my two months of unemployment, I've become a user of methamphetamine. This in turn made me, by default, a user of pornography. The mess out in paper and in bowl, I'm ready for tea. I sip carefully, the milky warmth and sweetness is overwhelming, feels so good I can disappear into it. By the third sip, I know I'm on the mend.

I am snorting warm water up there to clear out the wreckage when I see that someone is standing on my balcony, by the fire escape. I slink back into the other room and peer around the corner, just as the hammering begins. "WHO IS IT?"

Silence.

Fuck it, I'm not wanted by anyone, no warrants that I know of, and I march through the kitchen in my underwear, feeling the weight of my gut and the grit under my feet, greasy tile needing cleaned, I swing the door open. The man is in his sixties, bearded and fat, eyes like a bored German shepherd. "Martin Bradshaw, attorney for Laura

Keller. I need you to sign this.”  
“Laura”, I say, and ask him why he came up the back way.  
“I tried the front three times already, yesterday and this morning.”  
I’d heard the knocks, figured it was a bill collector, since my last broken bone cost over a grand to fix and I hadn’t paid a dime.

“Shouldn’t I have gotten a phone call about this?”

“You don’t answer your phone.”

“I work.”

“Get an answering machine.”

“Laura knows where I live, why didn’t she-”

“That’s between you and Miss Keller. Would you sign the papers, please?”

Martin Bradshaw stares straight ahead, trying not to look at anything, not me, not my filthy kitchen, not my undershorts, not the stacks of pornography on the table behind me.

“Hold on a second, I’ll get a pen.”

“I have a pen” he says, extending it with black leather gloves but I’m already gone from the doorway. I return with my boombox and plug it in. Martin Bradshaw stares straight ahead,

avoiding contact with the poor, with the heartbroken, the unwashed and unloved, his thick expensive overcoat bundled around him to keep his old, lazy flesh clean of the other world, away from all that garbage, away from the winter violence.

I don’t read the divorce papers, but I inform Martin Bradshaw that I don’t have any money.

“I can see that,” staring into space. You motherfucker.

I sign three times with an ink column from a disused Bic, casing gone, where he’s marked red x’s with his own hundred dollar pen.

“Did she pay you extra to be a fuckin asshole?”

“No, that’s free of charge.”

“Thanks,” I smile, and spit in his face, kicking the rotten door shut hitting the play switch in one integrated swish of movement, flooding the entire backlot with the Exploited: “Dead Cities”. The room and I shudder together as he kicks at the door from outside, saying something about me being low life fucking shit.

I see Martin Bradshaw throw something to the ground, and then he descends out of view.

Once dressed, I step out on to the balcony and look at the empty space where the lawyer's car had been. The wood was once painted gray, now it is the color of rot. The wood creaks under my step, spots of worn through carpeting still linger, green clumps like mold spores. A tattered, dirt-crusting wire screen hangs and the clouds above me speak of snowfall. I sit smoking on a folding lawn chair, plaid design on plastic strips. A cat hops into my lap and another one, not mine, dives from the other building's balcony and onto my balcony. Fink gets big eyes but I hold him back, then down the splintered, shot-to-shit wooden steps goes the stray, rushing into a dark corner of my garbage strewn backyard. Fink's retarded brother Simon watches from inside the filter-top litterbox. Poor Simon. Every time I look at him, I think "poor Simon." Simon is a young tabby with brain damage, who follows me around until I scream and feel bad. Simon was found by my brother

wrapped in a pair of men's undies on a Pennsylvania highway. My brother brought the brain damaged tabby to me, and I kept him.

I think of myself as a kitten, as Simon, my brain exploding with fear as tractor trailers roar by in the scum-nowhere of Central Pennsylvania, my nose pressed into the shit stains left by some cat-hating Republican Football King. I love Fink most, but I feel so like Simon. We are three emotional parasites, feeding off one another, living on the outermost fringe of reality, fearing everything.

Fearing other parasites...because we can barely take care of ourselves. There are rats in the yard below. I'm not worried about rats, but werewolves are a major concern. Fink leaves my lap after a few seconds hesitation, and I bend down, unfold the ball of paper the lawyer left for me. It reads, "Decree In Divorce. Laura Keller, plaintiff, vs. John Pitman, defendant." The name of the judge, dates and numbers, I return it to a ball and toss it into the yard below saying aloud, it's almost Christmas...and wave to the neighbor, next door, hauling out

his trash to the dumpster. He shuffles along, emitting bursts of visible breath. He's a young lawyer, his wife drinks too much, I hear them argue. Their apartment is tastefully furnished, and they own sportscars. That I live next to them makes it obvious, we do not have the same landlord.

On Forster Street, there is no traffic, deserted streets blue and gray, nuclear winter solstice, but for the plumes of smoke rising from the east, the newspaper plant, where my father works, so I must assume the world still exists below my balcony, away from my bare feet and divorce certificate. My toe-pits are screaming again, I realize. Off comes the right boot, then the sock. I stand on one foot and grip the wooden door frame of the back porch with my left hand, bending down to scoop a handful of snow off the wooden railing with my right. I hop back to the lawn chair, drop into it, and bring my right foot up across my left knee. The big toe and pinky toes are fine, while the three between, the nails of these toes having been yanked out during panic attacks, nights when I can't

sleep, are roaring with infection. I press the hard packed handful of snow into the holes. The snow turns pink and melts away, lowering the volume of the wailing nerves by about 40%. I hop back inside and empty the dregs of my last bottle of peroxide across my festering piggies. The angry explosion of white foam fascinates and satisfies me: "take that, fuckers" I mutter, bent over with my foot on the toilet rim. I keep my body strong with infections, partly out of the life-affirming delight I take in my self-administered medical justice, and partly because I believe my blood, my spirit, my resolve, to be stronger than any disease. So far, I have been able to sweat out all attacks, inner and outer, by a sheer bolstering my strong Hungarian blood, and of my inherent contrarion rage. I'm running this goddamn show, and sickness is not only intolerable, but to be punished.

After five minutes trying to remember, I punch seven digits, wait for a ring, an answer, a voice, Laura's voice. I get a confused Latino, screaming. For the rest of the day, I sat drinking beer and watching Forster Street, the

plumes of smoke rising from the east,  
myself rising only to empty the ashtray,  
piss, open a fresh beer, piss, flip the  
tape, piss and then buy speed from the  
doorman at Stallions, a gay bar one  
block away sniff speed bought from the  
doorman, off a full color centerfold with  
a hollow ballpoint pen casing  
type all night in my underwear, slugs of  
malt liquor, bolts of light bursting the  
brain cloud, type lines of poetry, using  
words pilfered from both the Old  
Testament and the Random House  
"Word Menu", sexually verbose  
descriptions with much attention paid  
to hands and eyes...manic, self-  
consciously at first, and then the  
thoughts come natural-manic and turn  
into prayers, chants, ending in  
percussive phrases that for me sum  
everything up like grinning little land  
mines:

HAMMERHEAD SEXBOY JOYSTICK  
CHOPLICKER CRANKBABY  
TEMPORAL FRACTURE FEVER  
DREAMING BUTTERCUP PURIFIED  
LOVE MULCH SWAMP SPASMS  
KNASHING EYEBALLS JUNKIE

BULLWORKER SIXTY SIX BROKEN  
TEETH.

I cut the small gatherings of boldface  
type out one by one, and the longer  
passages I tear up, paste all the chunks  
with trembling fingers onto 8 ½ by 11  
Xeroxed photos of Jackie Moore, of low-  
quality hardcore, pages ripped from a  
movie star pinup magazine found at the  
Delphi Diner, a few of myself. Energy  
stabs my extremities, and I stretch, lift a  
thirty pound weight, curl up a collage  
sheet and stomp it into cigarette ash and  
cat litter on the kitchen floor, unfold it,  
and flatten it out, decide it's ready for  
the Xerox machine. The collage sheet  
goes into the oven, which I have never  
used, along with 30 other similar sheets,  
and another ten handwritten or typed  
pages of freestyle belligerence.  
Collectively, these sheets will be known  
as "Purgatoid #5". These sheets will be  
Xeroxed and sent to my long-distance  
lovers in lieu of correspondence because  
I have nothing to say these days.  
The sun is up, it goes down. I do 28 new  
collages, and finish one short story.  
For the rest of the morning, I let my eyes

glaze over to "Blowjob Bunnies 13" and pass out with my dick in my right hand.

I wake in the early afternoon to a phone call, my landlord.

"Johnny, don't make me do it. You stop doing what it is that you're doing and let my other tenants sleep."

"I fell asleep with the TV on, I'll be more careful."

"I mean it this time. You're pissing me off."

The call worries me. I feed the cats, do a line. I dig out a box of letters, going back five years, when I began answering lonelyhearts ads in small press magazines. Postmarks and lipstick, dirty panties, glitter, Hello Kitty stickers. Photos of cats and dogs, photobooth photos of teenagers with mohawks, girls in spikes and leopard print, girls in heavy makeup. Ticket stubs from concerts and films, and little metal charms, handwritten poems, piles of lives, post office memories, Greyhound memories. I take the letters out of the cardboard box, in handfulls, and spill them out across my bed. In the box remains fallout: paperclips, cat hair,

thumbtacks, glitter, bits of paper, pen caps, cigarette ash, dust, sand, rubbish. I tap the box out in the trash can, which is filled with broken glass. I put the letters back in the box, without reading any. I hit eject on the VCR, afraid to touch the thing.

Throw "Blowjob Bunnies" into the broken glass.

Throw cigarette butts over "Blowjob Bunnies".

Throw taunts at my reflection, pushing it, pushing me to push it further. A red stream jets back into my stomach, from the black wound in my forearm. I use the shard lower, on my legs. I run it up and down, until the stuff has congealed my toes together. Emerge from my shower stall and douse myself in raw alcohol, a "fuck you" baptism, shrieking cascades over my naked, mutilated torso which results in a pink runoff I don't bother to soak up before pulling on a t-shirt and then my boots. I stand with my arms outstretched, my legs wide, wounds on fire, toes thumping...and feel the million invisible strands, the great web, the sticky mass of regret pulling me taut,

me waiting to be made a meal, me waiting to be tapped and trained. I tense my chest and arms, raise my fists up, as if doing isometric exercise, which maybe it is, and bring my arms around forward, straining against the web, until my elbows click, my fists against my eyes. I do the same with my legs, dropping onto both knees, bring my knees in my chest, tight as a ball, fighting the tension, and hold myself tight until I hear a snap, then two, three, four, snaps like suspension cables giving way, like the Golden Gate Bridge going for a swim, why not...pop pop pop...I wait for the snapping of strands to slow and then it ceases, I am temporarily capable of independent maneuvering. In a ball, I summon the energy, the acid, the bile, the accumulated napalm of years past and years to come, summon it against the invisible tendrils which held me, which are already finding their way back, back to spread me open and wide, these tendrils which need to be burned, this kudzu of wasted moments, the swamp erupting out no plan and no

purpose...with only 30 seconds free of this Satanic bondage, this life bondage, I re-direct the fire, shoot it back, burn a bloody hole in the moment. Burn down the jungle. Collapse the bridge. Blow all connections and all obstructions to smithereens.

Stand free, stand clear.

Free of buildings and sewers, arrogant systems.

Free of TV junk and rat race suicide, arrogant redundancies.

Free of threats and ultimatums, arrogant fascism.

Free of prim, free of proper, arrogant spirits.

Spirits but no souls.

Just the human grid, only the human grid.

The grid which says that everything is fine.

Graft so much mortality upon the arrogant architecture that it sighs in defeat.

Blame the motherfucking grid, blow it all to hell and get out of my way.

The moment is mine.

My freedom.

I rise and release my arms, let the rest of the fire pour from my chest and from my eyes, and I laugh and laugh and laugh. It is as if a condensing of this evil electricity, this tension, this ache, were it to be forced out and trapped in a stone, would leave me virtually weightless. Pressed into a 5 ounce pebble, dropped within a hundred feet of Three Mile Island, the death stacks that never sleep. Pressed into a 5 ounce pebble, which would contain it not for very long. And then:

Goodbye Harrisburg.

I find myself on an 1 A.M. crawl to the Duke, the opening jangles of "American Girl" play loud in my head, musical momentum filling in for my own, crashing the tidal wave of frozen sidewalk.

Onward, soldier!

As on all other streets, I am no ordinary downtrodden downtown sidewalk walker. I am the son of Steppenwolf, I am a scum cultured-Quixote, cutting a swath through time and memory, seeing the dream everywhere. Every skirt, every pair of soft eyes that can only

recoil, frightened by my own. The dream all around me. My thoughts churn my brain into a spent lump of clay.

Am I too handsome? Am I too ugly? Do I put off a foul aura? I am not a sloppy eater, a mouth breather, a nose picker, an ass scratcher, or a sadist. It is possible however, that my years have generated a sort of organic curse, an alchemic black magic may cling to the space around me. And once within that space, they see me, my world, the energy speaks volumes, a damning electromagnetic confession. And the women I have known I have not known, or simply known all too well, and too stubborn to accept inevitability. The worst woman has never been worse than no woman.

My every forward and kindest gesture observed as a prelude to rape, and meanwhile, every second isolated unto itself, every second filed away until the next second clicks, becoming real with the next footfall, my steps upon garbage and grease, my silent passing, among the angels, like the passing of a clock's hand, the hands of my clock. The

seconds pile and swell, engorging the present second, but never to burst except when snorting speed, at which point my cumulative existence is enriched, all moments pouring into the future. I slash through the air, the empty space once again full of kudzu. Like a small stream, forever broadening, only to empty into an oceanic greatness, or death, or both. If I am alone, then I am alone with God. That my passing would be unmarked and unknown to all but me is far from acceptable. At the Duke of Sandwich, I stop and wait for Albert. Being 19, I need Albert, a black bum who stands over 7 feet, to buy booze. After ten minutes, there's no sign of him, so I dig my hands deep into my leather jacket and move on, counting out the last of my money as my teeth chatter.

I have less than \$200 left, and \$350 rent coming up, light bill, cat food, cigarettes, only a week to sleep and eat, to let my wounds heal, and find work again.

It stings fierce to keep moving, moving as I often do without a destination, raw meat rubbing rawer against my jeans,

yet this is the first genuine life I've felt in several days. I decide then and there to drop by the Nesbitt, the men's only castle, just across the street. It's no longer only a matter of hanging around long enough, walking these streets, sweating the time and the ups and the downs, focusing on the chance. There are no chances. There are no pockets of magic.

I need money.

It is me, I ask? Is it the karmic debt, the financial debt, that some smiling motherfucker says I owe? Hell of a void to fill, I know with a rush of certainty after three days slopping around in romantic heat flashes, mental muck filtered through a dozen records played until the best parts numbed me, poems re-typed a hundred times until they all collapsed together in a wearied, deconstructed heap. I owe nothing to anyone, only the dream. My landlord is a necrophiliac pimp, and doctors are ghouls who live in mansions. The phone company, the electric company, lawyers and cops, the parasites in my intestinal tract. No way away, no way out. And never, ever, a way in.

I walk to the end of town, having forgotten where I was headed, I walk past the newspaper plant and consider dropping by to visit my father, but turn back around when, along with reality, my hunger catches up with me. I shake hands with Albert, who says "This cold ain't fit to fuckin live in," hand him a ten and enter the Duke on Second and Locust, reaching for a wad of small bills in my sticky front pocket. The owner is young and suspicious of us both, so I inch away from the coolers, but not before whispering "St. Ides", and lean over the counter, as the owner takes a step back. No telling what I'll do. I give him an arrogant leer, "How are ya?" He says nothing, now looking over my shoulder.

A middle aged man, this unnervingly spastic, hawknosed psycho with mirrored sunglasses, carrying a tarnished trumpet and his mouth agape like a mongoloid walks in with a feral, skullfaced street urchin presumably in his thirties, and wearing coveralls. All four eyes are fried and bulging. The way they're looking at each other I assume they've just done something I don't

want to know about. I do my best to ignore them, and wait for my resurrection to come in the form of a cheeseburger. My endurance isn't far from the breaking point. I am so burned out I can't even form words. Three black punks enter the sandwich shop, and the skull drifts off, mumbling at a smiling Dominican behind the counter, both pretending they know what the other is saying. He starts reading the menu to himself while yanking on his dick and Shades gives me a twice over. I scowl back, feeling his gaze. Degenerate eyes on blood smeared black denim.

I must look pretty bad, because right out of the blue he says in this sleepy whine, "Hey kid, you need a job or whaaat? We need a guy NOW, at the Nesbitt. Motherfucker pulled a gawd damn Houdini." The regular guy at a hotel not far from here has been a no-show. At least, that's what I am able to gather. Before I could answer, the guy turns his back to me and lights into that trumpet as if overcome with the instructions of a higher power even he could not describe, knocking into one of the ghetto

boys behind him. This black hulk pops Shades in the nose, knocking off his glasses just as the counterman is vaulting the counter with a Louisville slugger.

"No trouble here! You don't make trouble for me!"

He raises the bat, high in the air, and I look at the baseball bat, my eyes travel past it, to the ceiling which is covered with dead insects, smashed flat by flyswatters.

Shades gets up grinning, snatching the Skull by the shoulder who was still trying to read the menu all the way to the exit door. My burger comes up, and I slip two rumpled ones over the counter. Like my jeans, they are smeared with red copper but I'm out the door before the guy can refuse them. Outside, out of view, Albert hands me three paper sacks stuffed into plastic ones. I set them down, examine the contents. Eight bottles.

Eight bottles I say. I give you one, not two.

Albert laughs, and reaches into his own bag, but I tell him fuck it, we shake hands, he's gone.

I unwrap my burger, and vanish it in five seconds, barely chewing. I light a cigarette, holding the bags upright between my boots, then reach down for the handles when Shades stumbles out of the tobacco shop a few doors down, the Skull in tow. I watch them approach, blowing smoke and pinching the bags tighter between my boots.

"So you want the job?"

I crane my neck back to the Duke, not taking my eyes off Shades and say, "you better not go back there for a while." "Eddie", he says, extending a filthy hand.

Shake.

Hand out towards Skull, pointing him out, Shades says: "Third Street Pete" Pete, heretofore silent: "MotherFUCK! Call me that again, do it." Filthy hand.

Shake.

Eddie shoves Pete into a parking meter, Pete curses up a blue streak, screams solid obscenity at a young business woman carrying a briefcase, she runs like hell, while the loud sonic crossing signals for the downtown blind bounce

through the snowdrifts and off buildings, WHOOP, WHOOP, WHOOP, electronic bursts pass each other midway from opposing corners at the Walnut and Second intersection, and echo against each other, creating a crashing cacophony.

"Sonofabitch", Eddie says as if he'd never heard the noise before, "you ever see a blind person crossing the street down here?"

"No."

"Fuckin assholes."

"The blind?"

"What blind?"

"Oh yeah."

Pete is shuffling in place, and speaks up:

"Eddie, c'mon man, it's fuckin COLD, man, FUCK!"

"Yeh alright. So you want this fuckin job? I seen you around, man."

He winked, I said "where is it?"

"The Nesbitt. You live just across the street, dontcha?"

"How the fuck you know where I live?"

"Hey man, what I just tell you? I seen you at noon, I seen you at five, I seen you over at fuckin Stallions, man! You

queer?"

"Fuck off. No."

"Hey man, I don't care whatchoo do. But I know you ain't working. You always carryin books, you a college boy or sum'm?"

"Hell no."

"That right. Huh. Stop by in a few hours, we'll get you set up."

I said fine.

By now, it had gotten dark.

Nesbitt-bound, I had made it only to the Duke, mere blocks away, when the Nesbitt forces, the mausoleum whispers of the place picked up on and read the signals I shot out, the intent spilling from my pores, and greeted me there. Eddie may as well have sent me an invitation by US mail.

I stared up at it, before entering the vestibule of my building.

The place was huge, and soon to be mine. I could feel its pulse.

The heart, beating a dull beat for the men who knew nothing more.

I thought of my last job, loading trucks, until bossman found my diary in the toilets and fired me same day.

I was so far off course, trudging along in war torn boots, through this, here, where I would not find her. Unclean, unclear, but focused all the same.

Focused on that which was not. Fate can be a beautiful thing.

Downtown low life, it finds me, it offers me work.

Money finds me, my future, too. Returning from the Duke and the creepy encounter, I pass State Street, the mini-boulevard, and a car begins following me home. I doubled back past the Duke to the newsstand and bought four cans of Red Bull, holding open my sack of malt liquor and the old Korean man dropped the cans inside. The driver, not only following me, but following the pulse of the homosexual kingdom, the pulse which, if traced back in a trail of cough syrup haze or by the pervert vibe, the compass of some sick fuck's cocaine erection, led to either Stallions or the front steps of the Nesbitt.

I shotgun the four Red Bulls, crack a St. Ides, and stand on the balcony while the liquid speed rushes to my cock and the

booze to my head. I turn back inside as two shadows race out the screen door and down the stairs. I select track six, "Sister Ray", turn it up, and blow the ashes and cat hairs and bits of glass off my copy of "Blowjob Bunnies". It does after all, have Sindee Slater's best scene, my personal favorite. I make a personal exception for Sindee, who is thin and blonde. I like chunky brunettes. Like Jackie. But Sindee has something which I can't quite put my finger on. I return it to the box behind my clothes rack in the hall closet.

I estimate that I have an hour so I pull my xerox galleys from the oven and admire their crinkled gluestick funkiness. I place them gently into a black imitation leather briefcase, which is stocked with magic markers, an ink tube, stamps, stapler, envelopes, ballpoints, white-out, scissors: the Purgatoid porto-publish kit.

It's back out then, to the Kwik Mart on Third where, among the rolling hot dog wheels and glass donut cases I pay ten cents a sheet to xerox my handiwork. From my black leather jacket I produce a polaroid snapshot of an erection, my

own, and drop it face down on the smeary glass bed. The fluorescent light and stale heat put me in a dancing mood, and when the counterman's back is turned, I launch into a five second boogie. He catches me in the act, and I go stiff as a board, my jaw tightening. I hit the enlarge button, jacking up the size to 200%, then hit the start button, and the grainy blowup comes out too dark. The brightness feature is a godsend. Attempt two works out fine, the cock pointing northeast, leaving just enough white space for me to ink-roll the mag's name. I slap down the briefcase on the three inches of counter space in front of the slurpee machine and find the ink bottle. Shake it, close the briefcase, and roll the shiny black-gumball applicator across the cover sheet, letting my hands shake, throwing an extra jitter into them for good measure: "PURGATOID FIVE" and then: "PITMAN".

I turn the sheet upside down to blot the wet ink on the imitation leather, smear it slightly, enough for it to be almost illegible. The paper sags and curls with the soggy inscription. I let it there to dry

while copying the other pages. Within 15 minutes, it is done. I take the almost dry cover sheet, and the assembled 40 single sided pages, staple them three times along the left side, and toss them into a pre-addressed manilla envelope. I pay the counterman four dollars and ten cents, and run out the door with my envelope. I get as far as Second and Forster before running back to Kwik Mart where I find a pretty middle aged woman handing my briefcase and a handfull of xerox galleys to the counterman.

When I leave the Kwik Mart a second time, snow has started falling. The traffic lights of Forster Street burn green yellow red for no traffic. From the parking lot there, you can see the state capitol building, it's multi-million dollar rotunda's restoration taking place underneath sky-high scaffolds, high above the blowjob boulevard. The Nesbitt lobby is huge and full of sounds when I pass through the tiny enclosed vestibule which smells of urine. To my right there is a large metal door, and beside it a wooden podium topped with a open bible. Further along

the right side is a stone arch entryway, through it a long corridor. The walls are sandstone, with patterns and engravings. The floor is exquisitely laid out in stone blocks, an elaborate mosaic in the center. Twenty five feet above that center is an eight-limbed chandelier, all eight bulbs burning. It's nicer than I'd heard. There are rumors about the Nesbitt. The Nesbitt is said to be a hellhole.

On the left side of the lobby is a large mural of flowers and butterflies, an immediate eyesore. Three wooden chairs line the garden scene, one of them occupied by a sleeping man with a magazine in his lap. Where the mural stops, so does the wall, and there is a large curved desk. The ceiling is lowered above the desk, and the open space between is sealed by thick plexiglass. Where the desk stops is a wide gate, consisting of 25 or 30 horizontal iron bars.

A cash register rings, and it, like the snores of the sleeping man, echo throughout the lobby. I walk to the right corner, through the doorway which leads to a long hall that stretches further

back into the building. Old fashioned iron torch holders fitted with electric bulbs light the hall. There is a porcelain waterfountain like a mounted commode just around the corner on the left, and a series of doors. Another, smaller, chandelier. The other side of the hall consists of wooden bars, through which multicolored lights shine. The bars stops for five feet then begin again. I walk through the opening and see a dozen or so vending machines lined around the edges of this large room. Stationed at the middle is a change machine. It is a junk food arcade

At the far end, the hall meets another, cutting across diagonally forming a T. I turn left and walk towards a steel gate similar to the one in the lobby. And this gate is also installed beside a sheet of plexiglass. The hand-markered sign taped to the window reads in large letters "only one towel per resident. All towels must be returned on the way out." Another sign reads "ABSOLUTELY NO SMOKING".

Opposite the gate and window, is a thick door. I turn back and through a gated window see a snow covered

courtyard, and across the courtyard, through another gated window, lights from the front lobby.

The place is a haunted castle, littered with urban anachronisms. An ornate cellblock, a spectral hub for almost-hobos. The stone floors are so old, they give at best a feeling of foot fungus, or at worst a feeling of ghosts, of a burial ground, of one's presence being an outright intrusion.

From the arcade comes the man called Eddie, dressed in jeans and black workboots, a green flannel shirt rolled at the sleeves, and he is tearing open a Snickers bar when he nods at me making a throat sound mmmmmmm to get my attention as he bites the Snickers in half and swings a hand behind my back, trying to speak through the sticky peanuts, me trying to breathe through smell of same, rushing me towards the desk, and hollers "RING IT" spitting wet chunks against the metal gate.

An electric shriek breaks my eyes, EHHHHHNNNNNNNT! followed by a bolt crash and then a slam and then we're inside. Eddie stands and looks at

the young man sitting behind the desk, textbooks everywhere, and Eddie still chewing, hands gesturing his next swallow, "Ahhhm! Arthur, this is Eddie. New guy on night shift. Eddie, this is Arthur. You'll be taking over from him at 12 when he gets off." Eddie's hand remains hooked into the small of my back, pushing me forward down a narrow back aisle. Once inside, he closes the door behind us, locks it. Desk, file cabinet, bookshelf. Aside from the nude centerfolds, it looks like any other office. Atop his desk is a black case, the kind which would be used to carry an instrument. His trumpet, I assume. Eddie licks his fingers and throws the Snickers wrapper into a metal wastecan. He says sit down, and he is behind his desk, looking at papers.

"Oh, I'm Eddie. I'm the manager here." He extends his right hand, and I shake it, wiping his saliva on my jeans, low where he can't see.

"John."

"John what?"

"Pitman."

"Okay John, here. He passes me an application. "Fill that out. For the

books.”

I fill it out with fake numbers, fake jobs, since I have no good references, and couldn't remember the information even if I had. I leave much of it blank. While I write, Eddie lights a cigarette, and stares at me.

“What do you do?”

I hand him the application.

“Do? Well, I'm unemployed.”

“What's with the books?”

“Books?” I hold my hands up. “What books?”

“You're all the time carryin books with you.”

“Oh, well, I read a lot.”

“You a writer, ain't ya?”

“Yeah.”

“This is a good job for you then. What we'll do tonight is—you can work tonight can't you?”

“Well shit, I don't know ...”

“Look, this is what I said, we got no one for tonight. You start tonight and I'll consider it a favor. We'll start off real nice like that, I'll owe you, Johnny. Or is John?”

“Johnny's fine.”

“There's nothing to it. I mean, you don't have plans, right? Tell me you don't have plans.”

Eddie is leaning forward, his eyes so big you'd think there was someone stretching them open for him with invisible hands.

“I can do it.”

“THERE we go! See? We'll do fine. Now, what time is it?” Eddie pulls a cell phone from his pants pocket and flips it open. “It's 11. That's one hour we got to give you the tour, and buddyboy, it won't even take that long.”

Eddie's voice is low, garbled. He's loaded on something, that much is absolutely certain. I can't decide if I like him, but he sure as hell doesn't seem like any boss I've ever had. That itself is reason enough to like him, I decide. Eddie pulls open his desk drawer and brings up a black comb, which he rakes across his scalp, his greasy, mostly gray hair, laying it straight back. He smoothes it down even flatter with both hands, squeezes his eyes shut tight, opens them again, wider than before, and grins big: “let's go.”

The tour starts in the dormitory: 78

rooms. Four floors. Four bathrooms, each with a shower room. We pass a naked man in one of the hallways and Eddie snarls at him "what the FUCK did I tell you?" And then he looks at me, mutters "asshole".

Every dormitory has four halls, three of them with rooms on both sides, and one with rooms only one side...the opposite side of that hall is lined with windows which look out upon the Susquehanna River and its bridges, always lit up at night.

We walk and walk and walk and walk, through corridors, up and down corridors, through stairways, up and down stairways. Back to ground floor and straight into the open air courtyard. A dead potted pine tree, a busted up picnic table, a can for cigarette butts. "Let's have a smoke."

We both light up, and I gaze skyward, at all the windows.

"Anyone ever jump?"

"No. This is where you smoke, but you stand right by the door, you watch the lobby when you're out here. If you leave the gate unlocked, we will get robbed, so double check it every time. And you

got three minutes out here for smoking. That's it. Another reason to stand right here is that little overhang. Some of these guys think it's funny to piss out their windows. Keep covered, you're safe. And if you see that happen, I want to know about it. You'll figure out how to tell which room is which."

"Jesus."

We stomp out our cigarettes and Eddie screams RING IT! EHHHNT!

Click, slam. Back down the hall, past Eddie's office, at the end:

"Here's the kitchen."

Table with six chairs. Fridge. Sink. Jars of coffee, jars of powdered creamer. Jars of other things. Flies buzzing everywhere.

"You drink all the coffee you want. You'll need it. You don't do anything else, right?"

"N-n-no. No!"

"Bullshit. Last guy worked during the day, wasn't for speed, he wouldn't last. It's best you don't moonlight."

"Daylight, you mean."

Eddie laughs. "There's more."

EHHHHNT! Click, slam. Laundry room: "laundry guys arrive at 6 AM,

you unlock the doors for them. You'll get the key."

Gym: "closed during your shift, but you get the key anyway. You'll need all the keys. You're the only one here between 12 and 8."

Vending machines: "you'll get complaints about shit with these. You write down the amount they say they lost, they get it back the next day. There's a sign in there, so you get a loudmouth, tell'em to read it."

Back to the lobby:

"ARTHUR!"

EHHHHNT! Click, slam.

"You can take off early."

Arthur packs up and leaves.

Parking lot: "the guys have cars buy parking tokens. Token machine at the entrance on Front Street. You seen it. Tokens are in the cash register, and they're sold in packs of 5, five dollars a pack. There's a book you write down the token sales in. That's the only bookkeeping you got to do."

Rent: "By the night, \$12. \$60 by the week and \$240 by the month. Most guys pay a few weeks in advance. That board over there on the wall has a hook for

every resident. There's two keys on the empty ones, one for you and one for whoever takes it. And there's a pocket by each hook. When you ring up a rent payment, you do two receipts: one for the resident, one for the pocket. Every receipt is dated, that's how we know who paid what and for how long. When you get more than two hundred cash in the drawer, you make a drop of one fifty. Goes in the safe."

"The safe" is a dented file cabinet underneath the side of the desk facing the vestibule. He gives me the key. "There's a gun in there, and it's loaded. You use the gun if you need it but you won't need it so don't go anywhere near it."

He looks at me hard: "repeat that back."

"Don't go anywhere near the gun."

"Right." Eddie opens the register again, lifts up the cash tray. "Big bills go here. And this envelope has the plugs. Arthur will give you a list each night of the ones that are two weeks late. Two weeks late means a plug. You just take one of these and put it in the guy's door lock. If he comes down all screamin and bitchin, you remind him he had three

warnings already. They get three warnings before we lock them out. If he hollers then, you call me. I live on Walnut and Third and I can be here in ten minutes. You just say that, tell him to wait for me, and call the cops if he threatens you."

Eddie goes to office, comes back with a heavy ring of keys.

"Each one of these is labeled with a number. That blue binder tells you which one is which. Don't worry about the front door, that stays open all night. You'll get guys comin it at all hours. You NEVER ring in anyone you don't recognize. Every guy is supposed to show you their key before they go upstairs. This buzzer here rings the dorm door but it rings the office gate too. If two guys come in, you make sure they both go up. One of'em could be standin here at the gate, burst in here and kill you and take everything when you buzz up the other guy. This is an easy job, but you gotta keep your eyes open."

"Got it."

"New residents: they need I.D. Driver's license, passport, whatever. Somethin

with a photo, if it looks official enough. They fill out a form, those forms are right here on the desk. When you get low, just take one to the xerox machine and make more. When someone checks out, there's a checkout folder. You write the number in there and you put a yellow flag over that hook on the board. The yellow flag means the room needs cleaned. Those flags are in this basket right here. And that folder you give to the cleaners. They come in twice a week, early, before your shift ends."

"Got it."

"If you get a complaint, just tell Wendy, she works most mornings. She'll pass it on. If there's any fucking fighting, you call the cops."

"Sure."

"Alright, it's almost 12. I'll show you how to run the register and you'll be set."

He does, and then I am.

"Good luck, kid. You'll do fine. You got TV, the radio, and drink all the coffee you need."

1 AM. I ring up a week's rent. Two receipts. One for the board, one for the poor bastard.

1:44 AM. "I'd like a room." Eddie said nothing about assigning rooms to new residents, so I pick one randomly. I take his cash, he takes the key and I ring him in. Make coffee.

2:30 AM. Cheers. Jerry Springer. Saturday Night Live. Bits of films. Make coffee.

5 AM. Meetings, greetings, you're new, yeah I am, small talk. Make coffee. Clay. Frank. George. David. Freddy. Ernie. Bill. Third Street Pete. Make coffee.

Sunrise comes and I sell some parking tokens.

And Eddie was right: I need the coffee.

8:15 AM. BANG. CLICK. SLAM. I let her in because she's pretty.

"Late again." Sighs. "Sorry."

She's a hard 35 or a good 42, black hair, acne scars, cheap perfume. Puffy cheeks, about 25 pounds overweight. She's wearing a purple sweater covered in cat hair, jeans.

"Wendy?"

"What?"

"I'm just sayin, you're Wendy right?"

She throws her purse to the ground and heads back to the kitchen, saying

"yeah."

She doesn't ask me my name. I pencil in my hours on my time card and leave.

At 8:15 I am home and the phone is ringing.

"Johnny?"

"Yeah."

"It's Michelle, do you remember me?"

"Yeah."

"I'm fucked up. Can you come get me?"

"I don't have a car."

"Can't you borrow one?"

"I don't know how to drive."

"I'm at a friends! Close!"

"I still don't have a car."

There is silence on the line. I put the receiver down and feed the cats because the cats are screaming. A spoonful of tuna for each, and all the crunchy horsemeat they can eat: the Pitman kitchen serving policy.

Three lines of speed on the table, I snort one and one half. Grab a cold one from the fridge. Back on my mattress, I take a slug and pick up the phone and hear shouting.

"Hello? Hello? HELLO!"

"Johnny! I'm on Verbeke Street! I need you to pick me up."

"I can't, I just worked all night, I'm tired."

"Can I come over?"

"Come over."

-click-

I look for my briefcase, shout FUCK and then it's back to the Nesbitt.

Michelle is already at my door when I return. The frail vixen, 17 years old, half Mexican, half Italian, and she says "oh" when I open the front door without a key. At the top of the stairs, Fink and Simon stand, eyes wide.

"Have a seat."

"I'm fucked up."

"You said. Here, drink this." I take the St. Ides off the latched arm of the TV stand beside the bed and hand it to her. She chugs three, four, five slugs, and waves her tiny hands, "god, god, god...I need to calm down."

"Coke?"

Big nod, and I laugh.

"I got a new job."

Head in hands, she does not speak.

"At the Nesbitt. I get to read and watch TV all night."

"Lucky."

I sit down next to her and try to kiss her.

She backs off.

"Johnny, we're friends."

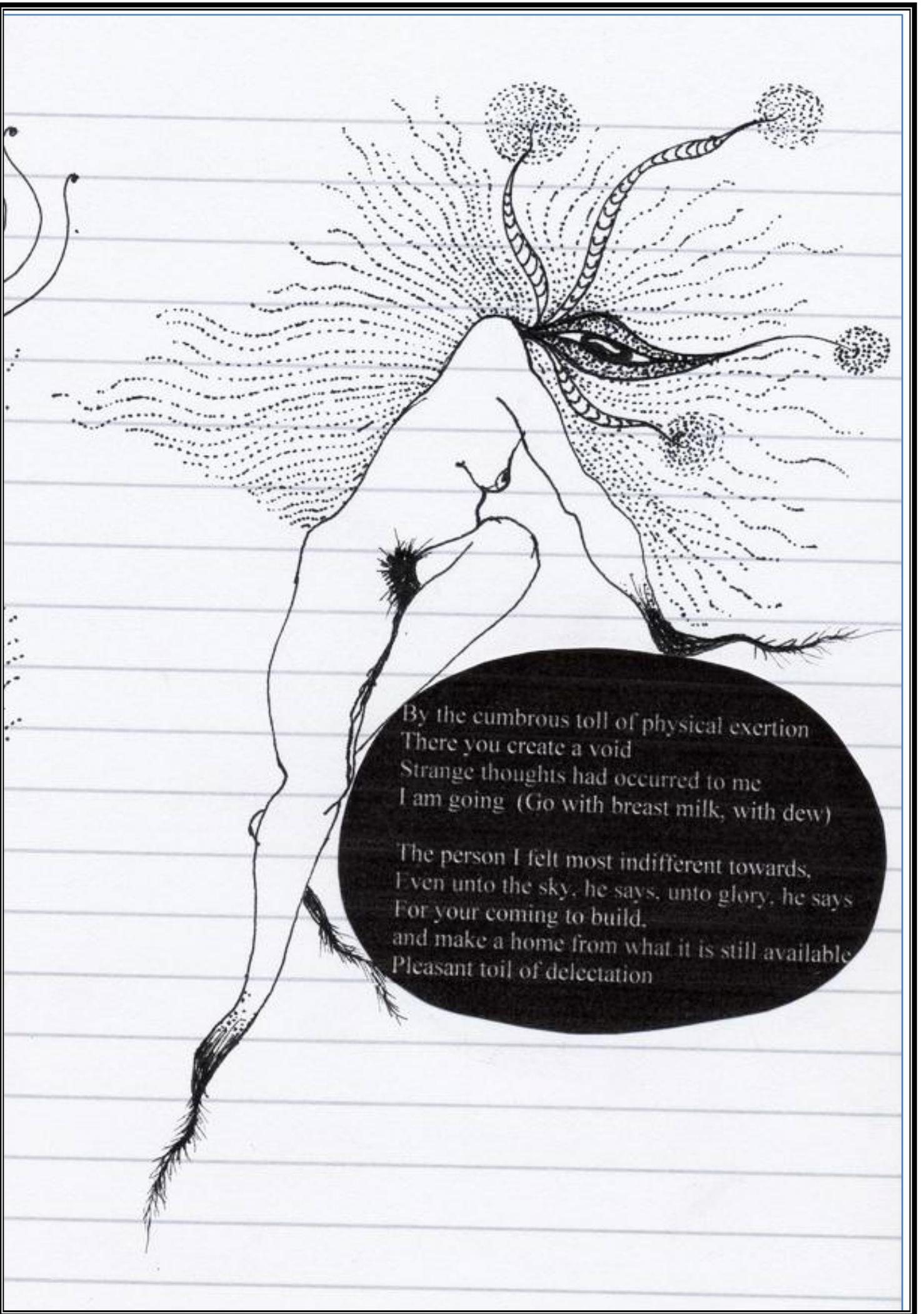
"Good friends."

A struggle ensues, and I remove my shirt, and she rakes with her nails at the unhealed incisions upon my chest, which open wider and run openly. Her tongue sinks deep into my mouth, my hands at her tight black jeans, her hands on my wrists, her tongue sinking deeper.

She catches me in the mouth hard with a fist.

I get up and douse myself with raw alcohol, take a piss.

When I come back, she's asleep. I put a Jackie Moore record on the stereo, light a cigarette, sit down at the typewriter, and bang it out. When I am finished, I slip it into the envelope containing "Puragtoid Five", stamp it heavily, and drop it down the mouth of the mailbox on the corner.



# CULT OF EXHULTATION

By A D Hitchin

Photo © Jim Lopez

## Terminal Documents

memories terminal documents  
an unlocked woman; her skin deep,  
grey-blue -  
as monsoon clouds, crackling almost  
African  
syncopation, a saurian  
marks the waters, its eyes swollen  
Faberge eggs, drifting mutilated  
octopus tendrils, dragging leaden  
genetic images through sediment and  
drifts...

archivists exhibit indirect continuous  
self-castration  
a portrait of rituals  
aesthetic communication  
messianic prototypes  
and god programs

mechanical bio-units  
feedback devices  
stiff faces of cohesion -  
logic engines

pulled from scraps, random influences  
of text, Kali cuts horizons of infernal  
script,  
intertwined with mans invisible war  
sciences, she smokes reproduced access  
codes and lights decembral muddy  
waters.

## The Cult of Exultation: Initiation Video [Initial Notes]

Camera focuses on mysterious woman  
of light -  
her eyes inducing vertigo, glaze lips  
dissolving all sense of distance in the  
empty room,

translucent, her curious iridescence  
filtered in fresco canopies - a kimono-  
style dressing gown cloaks her meridian  
sunlight, encrusted hydra clusters  
presenting a cathartic, agitated vision,  
half-melted snow guru staining hotel  
linen, Egyptian cotton, glittering  
untouched conviction, silver chain  
gems snaking her index - a compass of  
gilded ancient pines transfiguring a wet  
forest dusk - these sheathed ferns of  
collective history, crystal shells of  
presents, she straddles

the thick, mottled, leviathan head of my  
unconscious - these scarlet curtains;  
imaginary handcuffs,

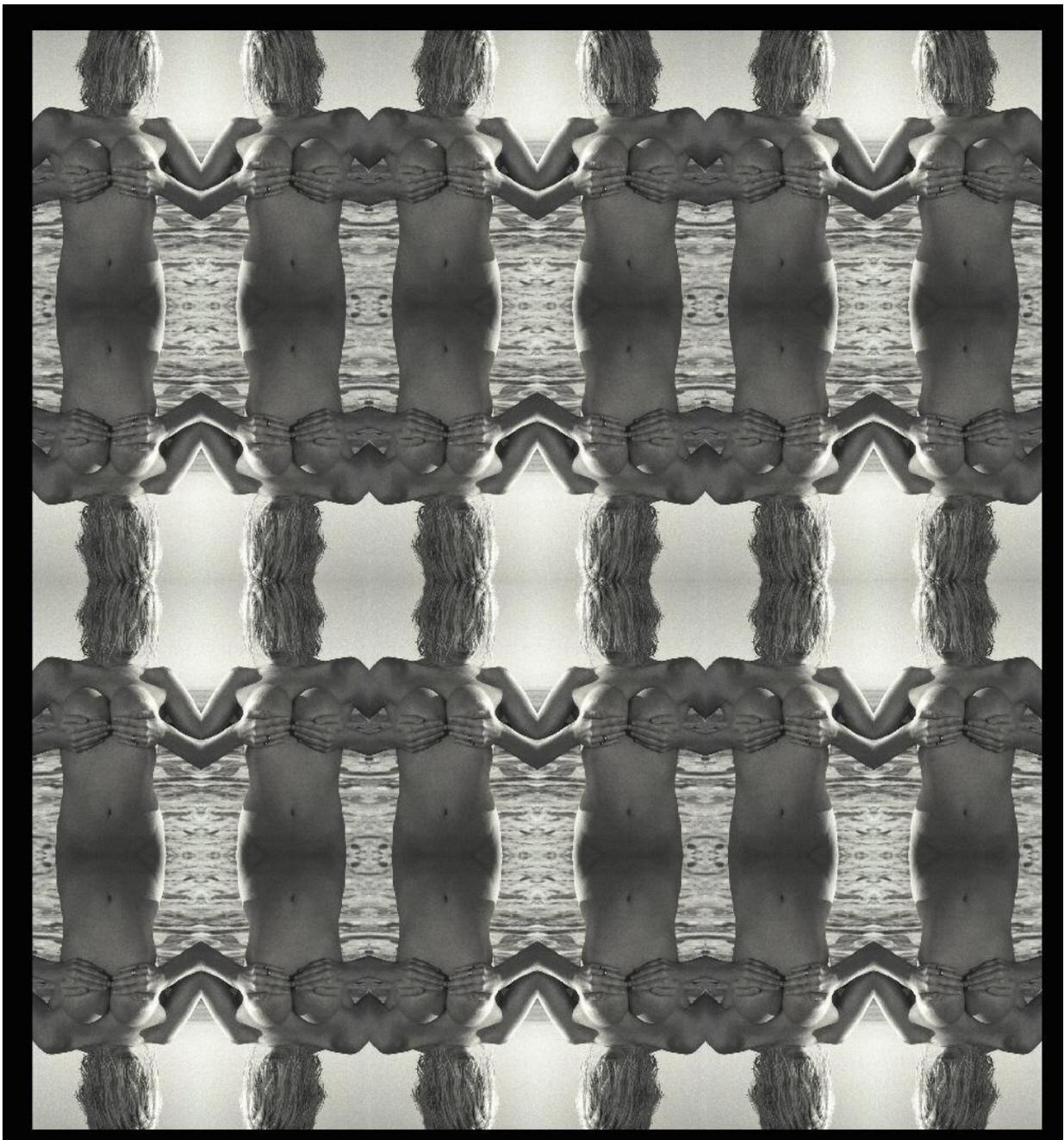
her subterranean cavern cult of  
exultation dedicated to bearers of light,  
the shepherds all blinded, cataracts  
milky-white.

## Spanish Fly

With extra cool fingers she strokes her soft twines, initiating cargo cult hysterias of devotion; the concentrated juice of one thousand sweaty cinnamon vaginas of radiance and hope. Her interesting scars are stigmata's. For our saviours must be wounded and all must carry us...

Nail crux black spike heels scatter snow, the skirt around her waist opening summer petals - licentious labial lips. Jelly-bean fingers slither comparing stories; passed relics half-warm and damp - her panties ...

my veins gather blood as she eats Spanish fly; eyelids fluttering charcoal black.





## FRAGMENTS OF HUMANITY I - III

By Christopher Nosnibor

Photos © Max Reeves

Media theorists appear to have credited the masses with too much intelligence, too great a sense of autonomy. People will do as they're told. People will succumb to the power of suggestion. As he cast his eye down the queue - a scene more reminiscent of the 1921 depression in the US than 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain - he felt something tug within him. An idea that had crossed his mind more than once before entered his cognition. Something had to change. Culture shock? A new kind of assassin...

Critiques in the early-to-mid twentieth century suggested that the media destroys the individual's capacity to act autonomously - sometimes being ascribed an influence reminiscent of the telescreens of *1984*. Later empirical studies, however, suggest a more complex interaction between the media and society, with individuals actively interpreting and evaluating the media and the information it provides. The consequences and ramifications of the mass media relate not merely to the way newsworthy events are perceived (and which are reported at all), but also to a

multitude of cultural influences which operate through the mass media. Thus Lang and Lang claim that "the mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about." And yes, the media had shown images - millions of images - of people queuing outside the branches, the country over. Clearly, these scenes served to suggest what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about and showed them, in no uncertain terms, what they must do. This was no act of collectivism, of unity, however. No, it was mass panic, and a dramatic foreshadowing of the suture - of all out war - dog eat dog, every man for himself, hunt or be hunted, eat or be

eaten, kill or be killed, there's no room for the weak. Evolution: the survival of the fittest. IT'S WAR EVERYWHERE. Yes, they felt compelled to line up because everyone else was, but they didn't join those queues in sympathy. No, they wanted to be in there before the next man, so if - when - the money ran out, they would already be heading home, bags stuffed with currency. Currency = survival. But what value that currency? Currency is merely an IOU: the whole system is built upon an eternal chain of promises to pay the bearer. There is no *real* money in circulation. The entire mechanism of supply and provision, the exchange of goods and service for payment is purely theoretical. Perhaps, then, monetary currency served as the greatest conspiracy of all time, the tool of oppression ever devised.



*First there was a collapse of civilisation...*

The sun sinks on another day. Everything sinks: dreams always end... they don't rise up just descend. But I remember... do you remember?

Not everyone gets out of here alive... taking a comfortable vantage, surveys the scene. He's an outtake, not an outcast, and this is a self-imposed exile. *I live like this 'cause I like it, and I've done too much to pretend.*

Day in, day out, day in, day out... the incessant, agonising sound, the screaming is everywhere. There's no switching it off, no turning it down.

*First there was a collapse of civilisation...*

This may simply be another meltdown, another media furore, another feeding frenzy on a global scale, but as the banks collapsed and the waters rose, it should have been obvious that this was something more - something much more. The culmination of centuries of screwing up and existing under the misguided perception of invincibility. The party had to end at some point... and there's always a human cost. Laughing while Rome burns... but zoom in. Closer... closer. Those ants are people. They're real, they have emotions, connections. The screams aren't as silent when you get that much closer. Come closer... come closer...

You're in the frame.

Another train-wreck... no minor-fender-bender, it's a head-on collision, an instantaneous write-off shot in slow-mo, inching toward the inevitable crunch with an inexorable and agonising unstopability. It's a mess, it's carnage out there. Heartbreak's no mere metaphor, there's pumping blood spurting out from every orifice, the pavement slick with blackened red gore and a stream of spraying, splaying entrails. Nerves like nylon, nerves like steel... This isn't TV. The wreckage of real lives litters the street.

The macrosocial's screwed, it's a rapid and inexorable decline and everyone gets a taste of the rust, the brake fluid spraying in all directions like oil when the drill hits the well - black gold! But no-one's getting rich now and no-one's celebrating here, there's a bitterness on the back of every tongue and dark clouds are gathering as one micro-apocalypse after another begins to unravel. And one by one they begin to crumble, their social facades falling to dust, more ruins amongst the ruins. The pressure of simply existing is all too much: they - we - aren't made to withstand the pace, the pace we've created. This is the breaking point. Moving too fast now. The vibrations increasing, the bodies begin to hum from the inside, a psychic and physical spasm. It maybe comparatively quick, but it's far from painless. It isn't a matter of blame: everything and everyone is falling apart, a rush of emotion and it's impossible to contain, an explosion that rips the flesh, separating bone and cartilage instantaneously. Shattered,

dismembered hollowed-out shells line the streets, are lying in the ruined buildings, their lives strewn in pieces about them like so many pieces of shrapnel, like so many discarded pieces of litter on the breeze, like so much

other waste and the detritus of existence.

*First there was a collapse of civilisation...*

The party is over.



# THE BROKEN NOVEL

## (Excerpt)

Text and Image By Ian Miller

1:30 Tuesday 002-

It was raining again. Five o'clock in the morning and raining again. Storm driven, rat black rodent water, rushing in off the sea with a wild colliding hiss, tearing at old mortar and slates, looking for a way in to Winkie's room. It was five o'clock in the morning and getting personal.

Everything bad that had ever happened to Winkie had happened at five o'clock in the morning, and that was a fact. This rodent rain was the prelude to something bad, absolutely no question of it. He could already hear it fidgiting at the cracked glass in the sash window.

Sleep was his only aegis but now he was awake and waiting. It was personal. The distressed image of Squallthought running up his garden path, trailing coloured wires and hugging what looked like a car battery the previous evening suddenly sprung to mind. Yes it was personal now, in more ways than one but for now he had to just keep still and hope for the best.

It had been raining and gusting for five days and the flooding was extensive. The Pig Iron Bridge was closed and he could not reach the stake out at Mr Brown's house. He'd phoned Mr James to apologise and they had agreed that

the Dwarf would have to rough it on his own until the bridge was reopened.

Winkie wondered whether the dog suit the dwarf was wearing was waterproof.

He pulled at a lump of congealed amber sap which had stuck to one of his wing feathers whilst perched in the cedar tree overlooking Mr Brown's front lawn. The Dwarf had said Mr Brown was real dangerous and Winkie had laughed sick to choking at the absurdity of the Dwarf's statement. When it came to dangerous the Dwarf was A1 rat arsed crazy and but for the patronage and protection of Mr James, the powers that be, would have locked him up years ago. That said, The Dwarf had always been a good friend to Winkie and that counted for a lot in his book.

The rain was getting in. It spread in a dark swollen stain across the ceiling then crept down the wall behind his bed.

Winkie groaned and looked at the clock. It was five fifteen.

"Holy Shit!"

Ever so slowly, his eyes fixed warily on the moving stain, he reached behind him with his right hand to the nearby coffee table, and deftly sorted through

the heaped and festering tinfoil of a long abandoned take-away. Gobbets of congealed food and cardboard slipped from the table as his soiled hand re-emerged gripping a large grease stained economy sized orange aerosol of Blightright oven cleaner

It was a rogue brand long ago banned from sale but Winkie was lucky. He had six cases of the fearsome stuff under his bed.

When you aimed and pressed the nozzle a thin jet of piss yellow liquid shot out in a twelve foot arch, searing most everything it touched upon. With practise Winkie had learnt to control the emissions from the cans and could range his squirts from six to fifteen feet. He estimated he was about eight feet from the wall.

Winkie waited. The head of the iron bedstead started to flicker with a pale ghostly light. He remembered something the Dwarf had told him about a thing called St Elmo's Fire and the picture he'd shown him in a book of an old sailing ships storm tossed, with its masts all a flicker and glowing with white fire but this was a second floor bed sit .

The stain rippled and vibrated violently, the light crackled, hissed, then ballooned out into the room pushing the bedstead before it. Winkie jumped back instinctively, over the back of the old padded chair near the window but not before pressing the nozzle of the can hard down and bathing the bulge in caustic fluid. Nothing happened. The

bulge kept expanding, pushing the bed before it. The bed collided with the heavy old chair and pushed it back towards the wall trapping the crouching Winkie behind it. Push as he might, the pressure was irresistible. No question about it, the game was up, he was one flat seriously fucked up dead crow but then it happened. The bulge burst with a ferile screech, gagging stench and clamour of what Winkie could only describe later as the myriad beat of hooves.



# WEIGHT

By Rich Follett

i.

most of all  
i remember being held down;

riding my bike  
and then

on top of me  
(never above me - not for a moment)  
suffocating, excruciating weight -

ghoulish, contorted masks  
many in succession;  
(many more, once the word got out...)

i knew them, i am sure  
knew each of them  
sometimes i knew their names  
sometimes their faces  
but i did not know  
not then  
not now  
(never knew - not for a moment)  
their reasons  
for feeding on pain  
pain for themselves  
pain for others

as a wide-eyed nine-year old  
in the canned goods aisle of the local  
IGA

a musky presence fumbled from behind  
as i was carried  
through flapping, filmy, filthy thermal  
fringe

to a back alley  
minutes-like-hours later,  
a grimy quarter was pressed into my  
hand  
with a slumbering admonition -  
be a good boy and don't tell.

i did not tell;  
could not have told -

i only told my mother i had found a  
quarter

'a real quarter?'

'i'm not sure, mother...

it has no face.'

ii.

many missing faces and  
two decades later

i learned to disappear

although i could no longer feel the  
weight,

in quiet moments

i pondered whether or not  
Bernouli's principle  
applied to the human form

dreaming all the while

of tall buildings  
and release  
i did not understand  
(never understood – not for a moment)  
how i could invite the faceless ones  
when others like them had caused so  
much pain

how i could keep inviting them  
again and again

here  
now  
so long after  
the weight had gone

as a child  
i could not resist;

no longer a child,  
i could not desist –

disappearing had become so easy

i did not see  
(never saw – not for a moment)  
that i had a choice...

they followed me,  
the faceless ones, and

i followed them –  
i disappeared nightly;

they never did

**iii.**

once

in the twilight  
between decades

(just once)  
i took a deep breath  
and, hovering in the limbo between  
helplessness and invisibility,

watched myself say

no

watched as

the monosyllabic archangel of my  
nascent redemption  
escaped my blown lips  
only to be snuffed out  
by the weight of a grimy hand

try as i might

i could no longer disappear

i stayed, then  
raping myself anew in my silence

i did not cry  
(never cried – not for a moment)

Bernouli was a charlatan

**iv.**

one stifled summer sunday  
i flipped that faceless quarter;  
that badge of crippling cowardice,  
now a talisman of misbegotten  
Providence –

flipped once  
(tails!)  
and began a crime spree

shoplifting only what i did not need;

sneaking it all back later  
distracting turgid, thick-waisted  
security guards  
with anonymous, androgynous  
whispered solicitations

in my fantasies  
they ran me down

they punished me

i did not consider  
(never considered – not for a moment)  
the possibility of a life without fear

this ended  
as unexpectedly as it had begun

on the winged, leaden morning  
when first i considered the possibility  
of an identity  
without fear

v.

now  
middle-aged  
stout  
happily married

i am  
a teacher –  
respected, revered

living abundant dreams (nightmares'  
progeny)  
having long since forgiven my silent  
former self –

as it turns out

i did not believe

not then  
not now  
(never believed – not for a moment)  
that the faceless ones  
were inside me to stay

now that they no longer appear

now that i no longer disappear

now that i

my own archangel

have ascended...

i,

reborn,

ponder Bernoulli

and struggle

with

weight





# THE SERPENT AND THE STARLIGHT

By Nick Tosches

The ghostly night-ridden silhouettes of the big red oak and the black oak and the white oak and the silver maple trembled as the waning paschal moon rose in its eastward sigh.

Eos, Eostre, Easter.  
Estrum, estrus, estrogen.

Helen felt something, but she did not know what she felt and her face showed nothing.

The murmur of the warm tea in her belly brought back to her the forgotten strange dream that had wakened her.

In this dream she was not dead but lay waking in a meadow beneath the clouds.

In the gourd of her belly, something slithered.

She remembered now, at the window with her tea, the tale that had scared her so in her youth, a tale that had been forgotten with the passing of years, as the dream of last night had

been forgotten with the passing of hours.

In that tale, a girl sunning herself naked by the pond one summer afternoon had drifted off to sleep, and while she slept, a water snake, one of the little live-born ones, wandering newborn from his brood, had entered her.

Now, at the window with her tea, she mused that this childhood tale must have entered her in her sleep, just as the snake had entered the girl in the tale. She tried to remember how the tale ended, but she could not. She tried to remember how the dream ended, but she could not.

Nor, looking into the night, could she remember the names of the nine heavens: only the first, the low-lying heaven of the moon, and the eighth, the heaven of fixed stars, the seed bed and resting place of souls; and not what lay between and beyond.

But there, before her, in the glitterings, the soul-sparklings, of that eighth heaven, were forgotten tales not of youth alone but of the youth of the race, stirrings, slitherings, exquisite and awful, in the girlish gut of ancient, ageless dreams.

Big Bear, Little Bear. She-bear and her baby boy, come to hunt her, come to kill her dead.

Her eyes drifted through the seven stars of the Big Dipper, the seven stars of the Little Dipper: blue-white diamonds in the black of the sky. Stella Maris, the North Star, the Star of the Sea, dazzled brightest among them. Her daddy long ago had guided her wide eyes unto that star. Her daddy long ago had taught her with a whispered rhyme to cast her wish upon that star.

Where was his? Was it right there before her, alone and brilliant and shining upon her, or lost and unseen, one hydrogen ember amid the myriad of some distant unknown cluster aswirl in the black of infinity?

As many souls as there were stars. So Plato said. Each soul to a

star, destined and allotted from the soul-brew of the universe by He who was the maker of the gods and all things. And mounting each soul on its star, as on a chariot, He revealed and instilled in all of them the nature of the universe and the laws of their destiny. And anyone, upon his incarnation, who lived virtuously for his appointed time, mastering his passions and his fears, would return home to his native star and dwell in bliss. And anyone who failed would be changed into a woman at his second birth. And if that soul still did not refrain from wrong, its mortal shell would be reduced to that of some animal suitable to its particular kind of wrongdoing.

And maybe Plato was not such a fool. Maybe Plato was right. Maybe this was why there were more women than men, and more lower creatures than men and women together. All those cold and vacant stars, all those wandering homeless souls. Some stars did seem to glow more warmly than others, regardless of their distance, regardless of their size.

Her hand lingered between her breasts, distractedly, gently, barely touching the crossed folds of her robe, as if fondling the imaginary dangling pearls of a necklace that was not there, lost not in thought but in the colors of thought.

And what was the color of fear, and what was the color of sadness? What was the color of hate, what was the color of love? The soul had three parts but many colors. Yes. Three parts. Everybody remembered Gaul, but Helen remembered the soul. The soul was divided into three parts. In the cask of the skull lay reason. Between midriff and neck, the emotions. In the belly, the desires, the hungers, the wants.

The sky beyond the stars was black: the sum of all colors, the absence of all colors in a world without light.

Her hand curved softly downward, across her belly, to the flank of her right side: the liver, the seat of

fear and of calm alike, organ of the soul's divination and dreams, the source of the power of prophecy, which came only when reason was vanquished, in sleep or the madness of disease.

And where was hers, her own native star, in which her soul was nurtured and to which it would return? And what was the wickedness that had brought her back with a womb inside her to suffer anew?

For a moment it was as if the stillness of the stars entered her. Then the heavy creaking of her husband ascending the stairs drained the night sky of its spell.

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**Excerpt from *Scratch*, a work in progress. Copyright © 2009 by Nick Tosches, Inc.**



## KASTELLORIZON

By Charles Christian

Images © Robert Agasucci

I awake with a jolt - there must have been a sandfly crawling across my face - and for a moment I am disoriented. Is this the same beach of my childhood dreams - and childhood nightmares? I look around. Next to me lies a dark-skinned woman, she is asleep and in her arms she is cradling a heavy calibre machine-gun. Overhead an enormous sun, an enormous alien sun the colour of yellow ochre, blazes down through a cloudless cerulean blue sky. No, this is an entirely different nightmare.

This is how it begins...

When I was a kid, this was when I was still back on Earth, I used to live by the ocean. Our house was in the Old Town, by the crumbling fisherman's wharf,

and every day Aimee - my sister - and I would make our way along the foreshore and up into the New Town, perched on a headland overlooking the beach, to attend our school.

If the tide was out, on our way back home we'd cut across the beach and spend many an hour playing on the sands or else exploring newly exposed rock pools. Our favourite destination was an outcrop of rocks that, depending upon the ebb and flow of the tides, would sometimes be just a few boulders peeking above the surface of the beach yet at other times - particularly after a stormy spring tide - be revealed as a maze of gullies, crevasses and pools.

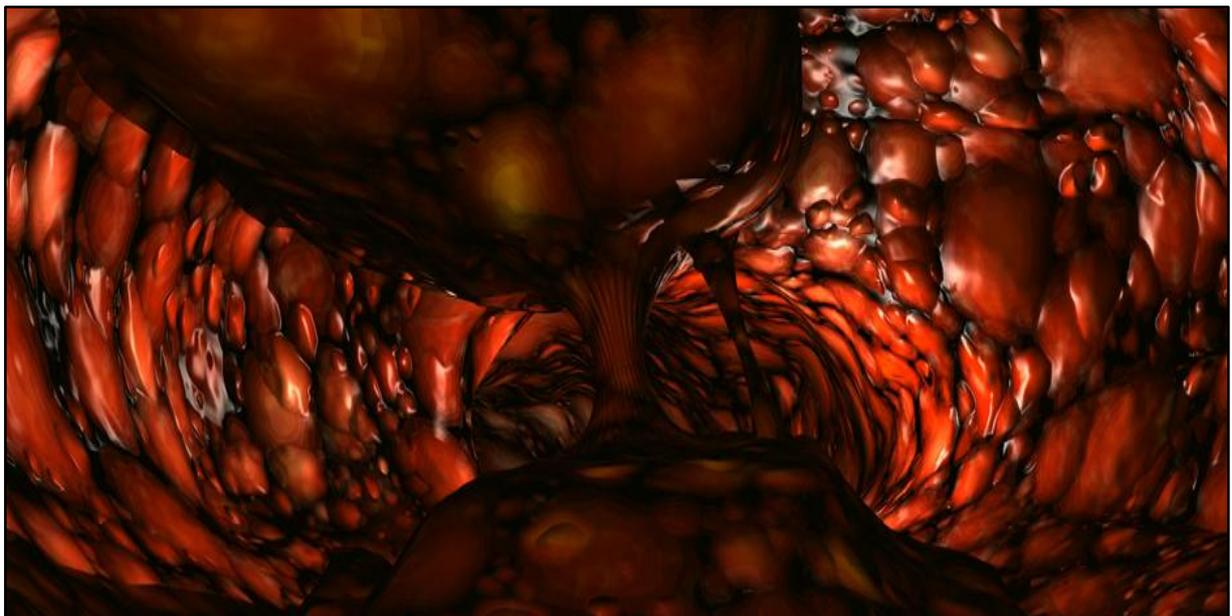
For us, with the unlimited imaginations of the young, this was no ordinary collection of rocks but a fantasy kingdom - our own private realm - to be mapped, explored and then fortified with sandcastles and barricades of driftwood to keep out the encroaching sea.

Sometimes we would picture ourselves as Knights of King Arthur's Round Table on a quest to recover the Holy Grail. I can still see Aimee now, swinging a makeshift sword - usually a piece of driftwood - around in the air before bringing it down on the head of some imaginary enemy. "Take that foul beast," she'd yell, as the fearsome dragon - or crab as it actually was - would scuttle away to safety at the bottom of a rock pool. Poor Aimee, she had a slight lisp and sometimes I couldn't resist teasing her about it. "What's foul beef, an overcooked joint of meat?" I'd ask - and then run for

cover as Aimee would come chasing after me with the stick.

On other days our adventures would take us to a desert island, in the midst of the Indian Ocean, where we'd search for Captain Flint's buried pirate treasure. And oh, what treasures we'd find! Looking back, I fear our parents must have despaired at the endless collections of bits of rusty old iron, sea shells, pieces of wood and oddly shaped stones we'd bring home. No matter how many times it happened, Aimee was always disappointed by these stones. Looking back I realise she must have thought they were gems, the way they looked so shiny and richly coloured lying in the water, only for each and every one of them to dry out and reveal itself to be just another mundane pebble.

And then came the fateful day she uncovered that bloody thing...



I was a year older than my sister and, one day a week, had started taking additional lessons in computing immediately after school. It was only for an hour and, if it was a fine day and the tide was out, on my way back home I would often catch up with my sister still playing on 'our' island.

This particular day I had just begun the descent from the New Town towards the beach. The tide was out and in the distance I could make out a tiny figure - my sister - moving across the outcrop of rocks. As I looked on, the figure halted and stooped over, as if to peer more

closely at something. There was a blinding orange flash, followed by the crack of an explosion and when the smoke had cleared, the figure had vanished.

Of course I ran as fast as my young legs could carry me, scrabbling down the steep cliff path and racing across the beach but by the time I arrived, the emergency services were already there and it was far too late for me to see or do anything. The area was cordoned off with police crime scene tape and my sister was lying dead, beneath an ice blue PVC tarpaulin.



At the subsequent coroner's inquest we learned that she'd discovered a still live hand grenade, left over from one of that century's earlier wars. The suggestion was she'd found it at the bottom of a recently exposed rock pool but had been too young or innocent to realise that even a rust-encrusted relic of a bygone conflict could still pose a mortal danger to anyone touching it.

I never played on those rocks again. How could I, what with the memories of my sister and those blast-seared and cracked stones providing an ever-present reminder of how and where she had died

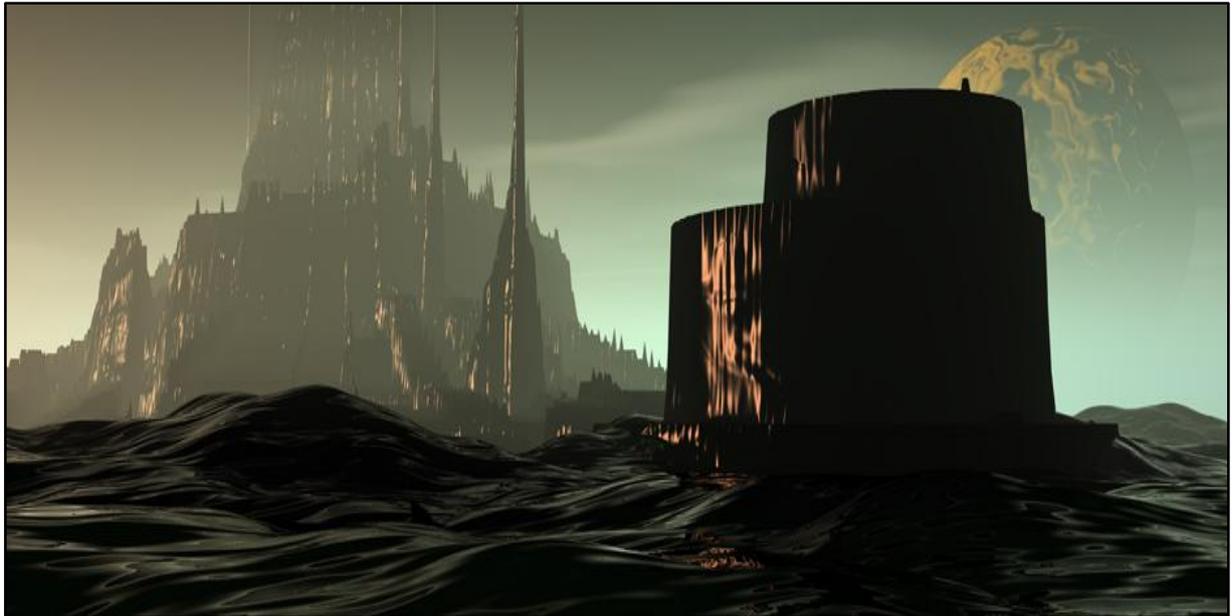
Then there were my confused emotions. The obvious grief she had died. Regret, that I had not been with her that day.

Perhaps if I had, I might have prevented the accident. And then there was a heady dose of guilt, tinged with my worm-like sense of relief that I had been absent that day and so had avoided sharing Aimee's fate.

They say we must all make sacrifices to the gods of computing and I certainly paid my dues that day. My tangled feelings aside, Aimee's death was to be my rite of passage, ending forever childhood days and setting me on course for adulthood. I threw myself into my studies with a desperate

enthusiasm (my grief counsellor said I was in denial and sublimating my true emotions, although at the time I didn't understand what he meant) as I knew I had to get out of that place with its constant reminders of earlier, happier days.

And so I moved on from small town school to big city university and eventually into the world of science and research. It was a career path that would ultimately take me to the stars. Literally.



High overhead the dirty orange glow of Aldebaran fills out the sky but, despite the star's enormous size, it grows cold on our planet - Kastellorizon - as the evenings draw in. Lakshmi, she's my partner, cuddles up close to me in the sleeping bag while we wait for our supper to grill over a camp fire. It's been a hard week (the weeks are always hard out here - the atmosphere may be breathable but the air is thin) but we're

ahead of quota for abstracting minerals from the planet's ever shifting sands and we're taking this camping trip by way of a little R&R. Back at base I know my team can get on without me for a few days - besides, it will be weeks before the next freighter, bound for the Sol home system, arrives.

The irony of my situation is not lost on me. Having grown up by the seashore

and spent my early years trying to escape from there, half a lifetime later I find myself 60 light years from Earth on a planet, about the size of Mars, that is little more than a few lumps of red rock amid an ocean of sand. It is on one of those rocky outcrops we are now camped - the tidal forces tugging at this planet making it unsafe to tarry for too long on the sand dunes that cover the remainder of the surface.

Supper is ready. We've been grilling sandworms, one of the few higher life forms to be found on this planet. You fish for them like eels - only these swim in the sand - split open their hardened skins and then cook the flesh. With enough seasoning, and a little

imagination, they taste a bit like chicken.

As we eat, Lakshmi and I talk about what we'd do if we ever made a really big find. "Sharna (that's Sharna Marriott - Lakshmi's best friend on the base) says you can now buy apartments on Titan with 24/7 views of Saturn's rings. They even have their own private orbiter pod moorings. Go on, think about it," she adds, giving me one her special this-is-my-appealing-face-how-can-you-possibly-resist-me looks, "it'll be great." She knows I'm not convinced about living in an enclosed habitat but we both agree we can never go back home - space-time dilation means everyone we have ever known or loved back on Earth is already long dead.



What are we searching for? Like the rest of the crew on the mining rig (and, if the gossip coming over the Net is anything to go by, just about everyone else working out here in deep space) when we have some spare time, we

head out on a flyer (one of the ground effect hovercraft we use to get about the planet's surface) and rake around the dusty purlieus of this barren waste searching for anything that could make our fortunes back on Earth. The biggest

diamond in the galaxy would do nicely but we'd settle for just a couple of interesting fossil remains - or even that holiest of holy grails: a genuine alien artefact - which could be sold for top dollar to the right collectors.

"Lao Chang," says Lakshmi, "said he saw a plume of smoke two days ago in the dawn light. And nobody's ever come up with a plausible explanation of why some of our stores keep going missing."

I say nothing. Lakshmi smiles and kisses me on the forehead, she knows

I'm sceptical about the rumours the planet is inhabited. And with good reason. Since mankind first took to the stars, no other intelligent life forms have ever been encountered.

The next morning Lakshmi is first out of the sleeping bag and wants to start exploring as soon as possible - she was born in the Himalayas not far from Kathmandu and doesn't feel the effects of the planet's thin air as much as me.

"Come on," she says, as she pours the dregs of the breakfast coffee into the recycler, "I'm feeling lucky today."



I can understand why. The tides have ebbed during the past week, causing the dunes to recede and expose more of this outcrop than either of us has ever seen before. From the crest of a hill we gaze down on a canyon that probably last saw the light of day a million years ago. "It's on days like this," I remark, "you can see why the first expedition christened this planet Kastellorizon."

"Never been there," replies Lakshmi, "it's in the Greek Dodecanese isn't it?"

"Yup, got distinctive outcrops of red rock that look from a distance like they could be the ruins of a fortress. There again," I add, "it was also the first exhibition that reported seeing campfires and so started the rumour

this place was inhabited by an indigenous people.”

“The so-called ‘Orizontals’. You better believe it, they are out there and one day we’ll find them,” says Lakshmi with a no nonsense tone in her voice.

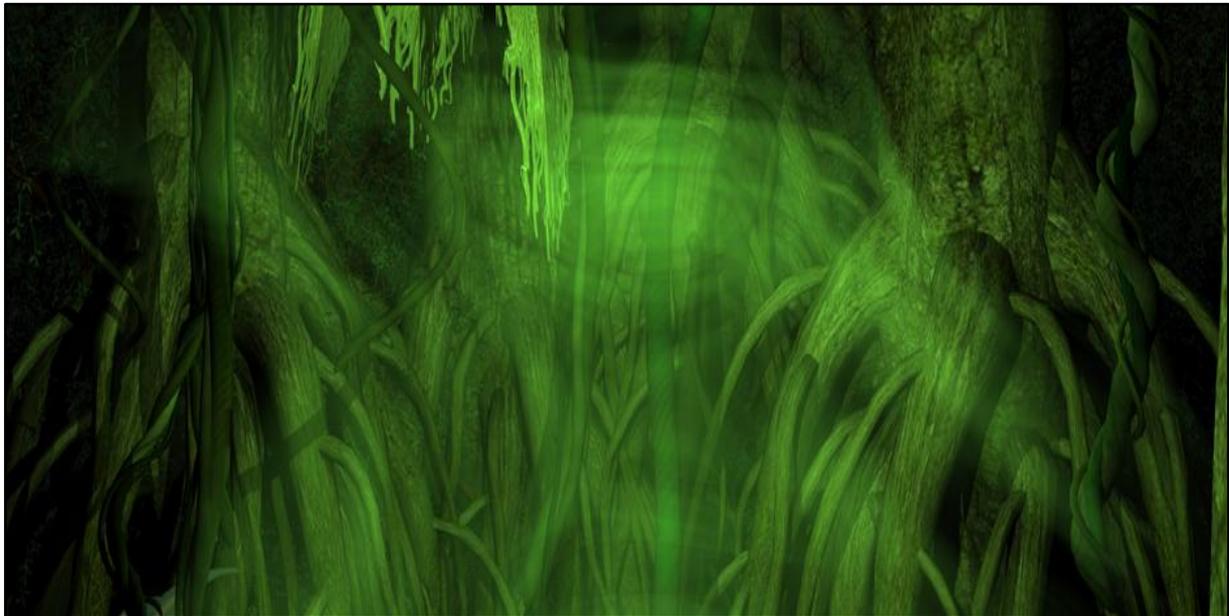
But, after such a promising start to the day with all that new territory to explore, by noon my spirits - and strength, we must have walked miles - are starting to flag. Lakshmi however is still full of energy. “Your ancestors were all sherpas,” I tell her.

She laughs. “Come on,” she says, pointing towards the deepest part of the newly exposed canyon wall, “I can see

three caves down there. And bring the flashlight.”

We scramble down the canyon but there is nothing in the first cave, except a cold musty smell. The second is no better. And, at first, there appears to be nothing in the final cave. But then, just as we are turning to leave, the flashlight beam reflects off something lying amid the debris on the floor.

We brush away the soft sand to reveal a highly polished, metallic egg-shaped cylinder about 15 inches in length. As Lakshmi bends down to pick it up, I suddenly have a flashback to what had happened to my sister all those years ago. “Careful,” I say, “it may be a bomb”.



Lakshmi gives me one of those you-old-fusspot looks and pulls a spectrometer from one of the pouches on her toolbelt. As she studies the readings, her face lights up with a smile. “This thing is almost 100 percent pure gold. I don’t

care how smart the aliens were who made this thing, but nobody makes bombs out of gold. It’s a far too rare and precious metal.” She’s right, we’ve been prospecting on this planet for two

years and never found a single a trace of gold.

And with that she reaches down and pulls the golden egg out of the ground.

It must be the sudden movement that starts it, some kind of motion sensor perhaps, for almost immediately we hear a faint whirring sound emanating from the egg. There is a click as a small panel we'd not noticed before slides open on the shell of the egg.

Inside a green diode breaks into life and flashes once, twice and then three times. We hold our breath as, after a pause, the amber diode next to it starts to flash - once, twice, three times. Next, after a space of what may be 30 seconds - but it feels a lot longer to me - a red diode begins to flash. Once, twice, three times. Then a fourth flash. And finally a fifth flash, only this time the light stays on. I look across to Lakshmi. Despite the

coolness of the cave's interior, I can see by the glow over the red light that her face is bathed in sweat.

Suddenly the red light blinks out. There is another click as the panel closes. And then nothing. Just silence.

We both give a sigh of relief. "I don't know what that was all about," says Lakshmi, "but I think it was a dud."

"Maybe it has a flat battery?" I reply. We both laugh, with nervous relief.

We have about six weeks - if we are to get off this planet on the next freighter back to the Sol system - to plan our retirement after discovering the egg. Contacts are made. Negotiations commenced and a substantial price agreed. We will never have to work again. But then the egg's original owners come calling.



It turns out the device is not a dud after all but part of a carefully prepared early warning system to alert its owners of the arrival of another space-faring race - mankind - with designs on taking over the known galaxy. From the blogs posted over the Net, it emerges our egg is not the only alien artefact to have been discovered in recent times. Details are sparse but it seems all of them act the same way: a few apparently harmless flashing lights and then nothing. And, because we are all trying to clandestinely unload them on the black market, nobody spots the similar patterns in their behaviour.

Far from being the forgotten relics of an extinct civilisation, they are marker buoys belonging to someone - or something - who does not want anybody trespassing on its turf.

This is not the way a first encounter is meant to take place, with alien warships jumping out of hyperspace to attack and destroy mankind's colonies and trading posts across the stars. We and the rest of the team now spend our spare time huddling around the terminals in the ops room listening to the news bulletins coming in over subspace from CNN and Sky as, one by one, stations and vessels are picked off. But, and here's the funny part, those crews who do manage to make a successful run back to the home system all report their alien pursuers call off the chase at the Oort Clouds. The message is clear, mankind can do whatever it likes, as long as it stays within the boundaries of its own solar system. And so Earth's first galactic enterprise starts to crumble away.

This is how it ends...



Back on Kastellorizon, the alien ships take out our drilling and processing rigs, as well as a couple of hapless freighters that had the misfortune to be

parked in orbit, with their first sweep through the system. However about a dozen of us, including me and Lakshmi,

escape on flyers and head out across the endless sands.

We split up to improve our chances of avoiding detection and so it is that Lakshmi and I find ourselves sheltering on a small ledge in the lee of that same canyon where six weeks previously we'd first found that bloody egg. This time there is no relaxing around a campfire or the smell of grilling sandworm - we are letting our bodies grow as cool as we dare to minimise our heat signatures.

We hear the sonic booms of the attack ships re-entering the planet's atmosphere. We see their vapour trails heading north, then there are vibrations, followed by the sound of explosions.

"Marriott's team?" I suggest. When we'd split up, the last we'd seen of him, along with his wife Sharna and the rest of his people, was their flyer heading north. There is no sound of any returning fire, just silence. Lakshmi's face is grey with concern - I know how close she is with Sharna. Nervously she fidgets with the laser sights on the machine gun we've brought with us although both of us know it's unlikely to save us in a fire-fight.

Minutes later there is another rumble in the distance. Has Lao Chang bought it now? Whatever the aliens are using to detect us is working as they are picking us off one by one. I hear Lakshmi draw a deep breath and click off the safety on the gun.

They say you never hear the bullet that has your name on but they are wrong. We hear it all too clearly, the sound of rocket engines heading our way. I take Lakshmi in my arms and kiss her for what I hope will not be the last time - I'm beyond caring what it does to our heat signature.

There is the whistle of incoming ordnance and the stomach-churning clatter of a missile embedding itself in the canyon wall just a few yards away from us. It is so close we can feel the heat from its motors. I look at Lakshmi. Lakshmi looks at me - we both see a green diode light up on the missile's flank. It flashes once, it flashes twice.

"Want to risk this being another dud?" I ask. Lakshmi shakes her head. The green diode flashes for a third time.

"Listen," I say, "we've got about 30 seconds. If we jump now we can reach the cave where we stashed the flyer. That should shelter us from the blast, then maybe they'll think we're dead and go away."

"Then what?" she asks, as an amber light flashes for the first time.

"As long as you don't mind a diet of sandworm, we can survive. Maybe we'll even find the Horizontals?"

The amber diode flashes again. Lakshmi grabs my hand and we jump.

# NECRO-DEAD ANIMAL

By Ele-Beth Little

Drawing © Alfred Muro

He was still in love, despairingly in love  
Locked himself away, talked in poetry.  
We got drunk together once.  
I knew he had a strong sexual impulse  
Perhaps that's the appeal of men, the  
strength of their want  
Their compulsion;  
You get to be the target.  
Our talking ran away with us, and our  
glasses soon emptied  
We drew nearer, told stories and secrets  
And nearer

Knelt on the wood floor, our bodies  
leaning eagerly  
Like bending roots

Nearer  
And then, I noticed that one particular  
look  
A look that was fixed like a hook in to  
me,

And made me silent.  
My ankles ached from kneeling all that  
time and  
I got up. Eager to break the trance.  
You know when you try to look like you  
have a plan  
To convince the other you're not out of  
your depth, that life isn't scaring you?  
Well, I walked to the window  
Pretending I was curious for the view  
But I was feeling on edge, like the air  
around me wasn't mine to breathe

Like the room, the textures, the light, the  
floor's imprint on my knees  
Were all an extension of someone else's  
limbs  
Were smothering

So I leant out of the window a little,  
tried to get some bland reality back  
Looked at the concrete paths and the  
kids playing in the park  
The solid frames of swings, the echoes  
in the summer light.

That was when he came up to me,  
stumbling a little from the drink, and  
gravely said  
"Are you going to let me, or will I have  
to force you?"

I scanned through excuses, tried to  
recall how far the door was  
But it was all coming to me like a  
memory

Already formed.

The drink had disarranged me  
Brought my dormant selves to the  
surface - the ones that pressure me for  
these grand life-imprinting moments,  
and

I turned impulsively  
Palms opened out, and said  
"Force me."

I'm not sure the words all came out,  
because as soon as the sentence touched  
the air  
He was upon me

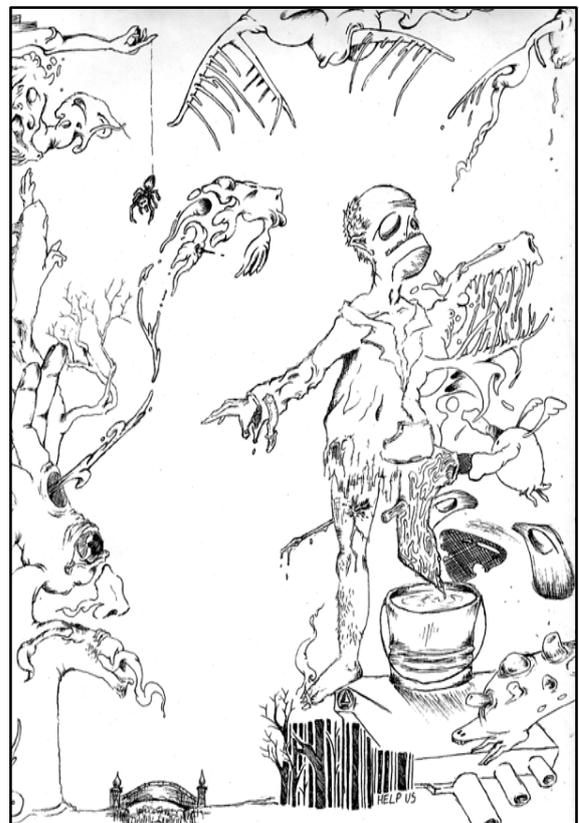
Like the elements ripping in to me.  
My mind seemed anchored inside layers  
of whirlwind flesh and dismantling  
I fell in to it, as if the air or his arms held  
me  
And I felt heavy biting on my neck.  
His judgement was obscured by drink,  
so

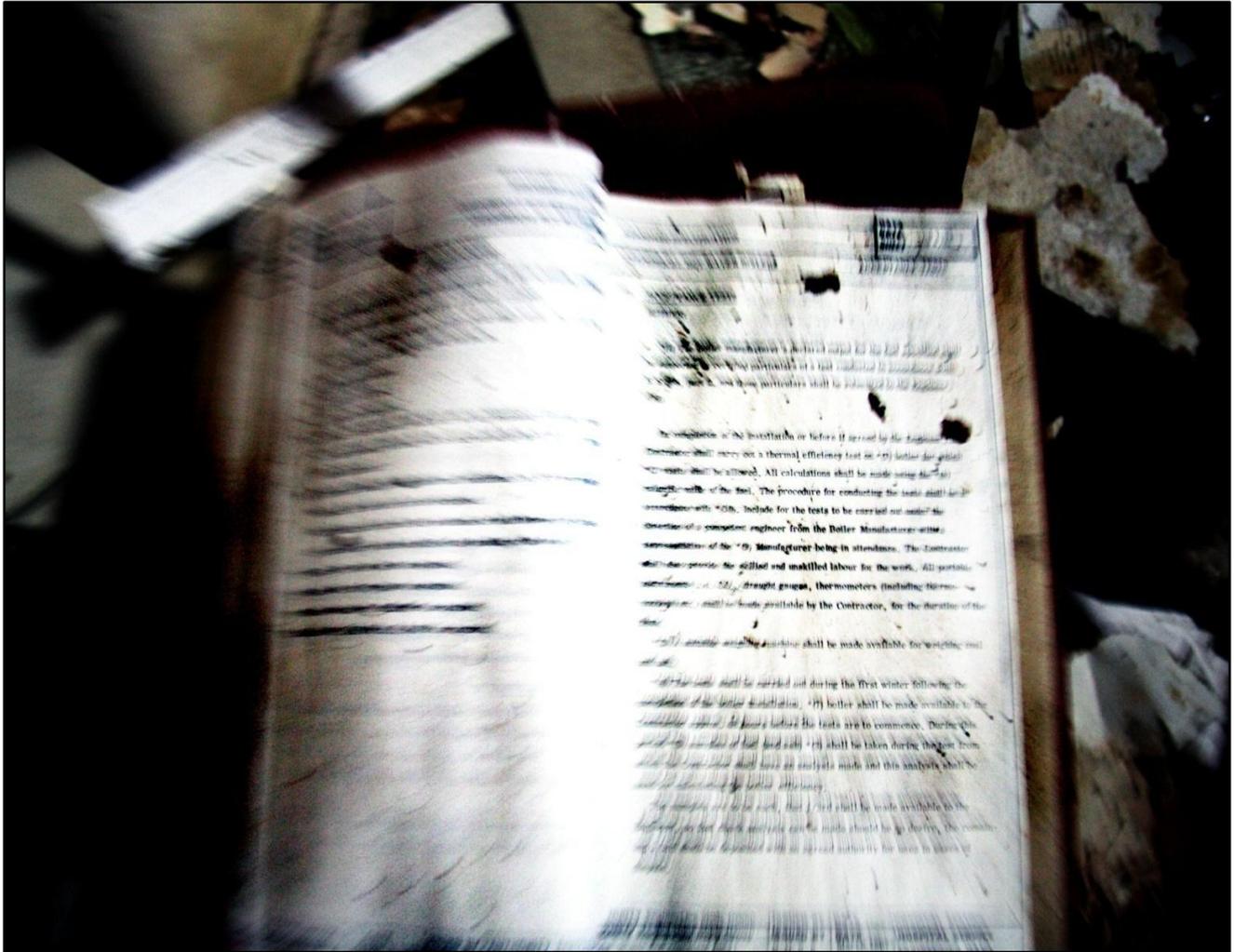
His blows were slow and misdirected,  
his eyes lolled  
But he struck me to the floor  
And here, he grabbed, clawed, rolled,  
wrestled me  
Purposeful yet disorientated  
For a moment, feelings of pity  
threatened to distract from my  
submission.  
And then he abruptly stopped, like a  
station turned quickly to static  
He rolled away from me, like roadkill  
poked with a twig.  
I heard the stir of sobbing before he  
stifled it  
I went to comfort him, but  
He aggressively threw my touch away,  
"I don't want you. I can't look at you."  
He quietly, and shamefully, added  
"whore."

Similar to how a child might venture  
their first whispered swear word at one  
of their parents.  
But none of it wounded me. I slumped  
for a while with a pipe,  
Reflecting  
Knowing I wasn't any more a whore  
then he was. I decided to utter it  
"I'm no whore," I said, assured,  
I wanted him to know his insult was as  
flaccid as he was.  
I didn't care anyway, I had the moment  
- I owned the moment

I owned a moment and it was real. I  
wanted to sing it to myself.  
And now I could walk away  
And reflect and devour and suck it dry.  
He was still lay foetal, and sensing I was  
soon about to leave, he murmured  
"I... love her."  
I crawled next to him "Forget what  
we've just done. And, as a friend  
Let me comfort you."  
I knew I'd never see him again, and also  
that he'd continue to make mistakes of a  
similar vein  
Whilst he was in love.

I felt like I'd prodded a dying animal  
with a stick  
And I thought, 'I never want to be  
there.'





## THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY

By David Conway

Photo © Max Reeves

On the day of the final initiation ceremony I left the Institute of Human Ecology and climbed the luminous coral atoll that overlooked the crystal canyon. The remaining inmates had already deserted the complex and convened on the vitrified bed of a Triassic ocean that had evaporated aeons earlier. Enclosed by the monolithic promontories of towering coral, the crystalline lagoon of

fused sand resembled a submerged glacier impervious to the sun's nuclear fury. Shimmering in the brilliant sunlight, this geological curiosity evoked the apocalyptic imagery of Saint John the Divine—and *I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire*. Though I had no conscious recollection of ever having read *Revelations*, I could quote chapter and verse with uncanny

accuracy. Impulsively I scanned the napalm skies for the seven angels bearing the last seven plagues.

It occurred to me that my familiarity with the scriptures might have nothing to do with memory in the conventional sense, but derived instead from an entirely different source. Once such an idea would have disturbed me. Now I simply accepted it. Since becoming involved with Dr. Elizabeth Marlowe and her unorthodox philosophy I had learned to reassess my preconceptions about the nature of madness, memory – and, ultimately, reality itself.

As I scaled an immense stalagmite of coral, the fossil record of countless marine extinctions, I felt light-headed and vaguely euphoric. A fugue of incipient delirium persisted beneath the superficial membrane of my conscious mind. Suspicions of divinity offered the prospect of imminent liberation from the drab shadow world of corrupt materialism that had reduced humanity to psychotic robots stumbling through the wreckage of its failed social experiments. Beneath a deceptively placid veneer – as tranquil as the surface of a frozen lake – the Utopian dreams of the past had soured. For decades a creeping malaise had steadily contaminated the world, its insidious progress unsuspected. Unchecked. Perhaps some realised its pernicious influence. But if they did, they remained silent. In retrospect I find it hard to believe that Dr. Marlowe had not diagnosed the condition long before its catastrophic eruption. Unknown to its architects the ideology of Positive

Assimilation had created a dangerous, undetectable imbalance that poised humanity on the razor's edge of inevitable disaster. With hindsight only a miracle or a cataclysm could have restored anything approaching natural equilibrium. I could imagine Dr. Marlowe, enthralled by her ecstatic visions like Saint Teresa of Avila, anticipating the crisis with a mixture of apprehension and expectation. Perhaps she'd actually prayed for it.

And in the end it came.

The wave of mass extinction events that swept the globe took the world completely by surprise. For decades environmentalists had warned us about the terrible dangers posed by humanity's ruthless exploitation of the planet's natural resources. However, as plant and animal species died in numbers unprecedented since the end of the Pleistocene era, the ecological hypothesis scarcely explained the scale or the nature of the phenomenon. Many of the world's governments had already enacted policies endorsed by the most pessimistic ecological doomsayers. They had promoted the Precautionary Principle that demanded pre-emptive action without conclusive proof to corroborate their predictions, because by the time they could substantiate their claims it would already be too late. But the Damascene conversion of polluters and plunderers to the cause of conservation failed to arrest or alleviate the process.

As the extinctions accelerated and entire ecosystems disappeared, some sought

explanations in James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. Lovelock's contention that the world was a self-regulating holistic system implied that it would periodically purge itself of problematic species whose very existence threatened the planet's survival. But Lovelock had correctly identified humanity as the most destructive organism whose rampant proliferation he called *Disseminated Primatemaia*, a plague of people. If the Gaia hypothesis truly applied to the current crisis then surely it followed that the human race would succumb to the cull first. Astronomers and geophysicists suggested another scenario. According to some the solar system had entered an interstellar energy cloud, which was energizing and destabilizing the sun and all the planets' atmospheres. This theory suggested that levels of cosmic radiation, unprecedented during human history, accounted for the exponential trend of phylogenetic death. Compelling as it might have sounded, no concrete evidence in support of this bleak prognosis seemed forthcoming.

In the end the precise nature of the unfolding catastrophe remained a mystery.

And then came the Wandering Sickness.

The worldwide epidemic of amnesia began with apparently isolated clusters, manifestations of group dementia many clinicians initially compared to the cases of Saint Vitus dance that once swept medieval Europe. At first it was assumed the condition derived from an unknown virus, a pathogen that

attacked the neurological functions responsible for the faculty of memory. However this diagnosis proved unfounded when the condition continued to spread globally despite the strict quarantines imposed on entire communities. Whatever its true cause, the condition's precise pathology defied analysis.

Within less than eighteen months the entire world's economy had effectively collapsed. Governments fell, replaced by short-lived military regimes that struggled vainly to impose order as their infected populations simply drifted away from their own lives. Cut loose from the prosaic certainties of space and time, the foundations of consensus reality, which depend almost exclusively on our sense of individual and collective memory, millions reverted to a state of infantile regression—the existential void that predates the formation of identity. Industry and agriculture ground to a halt. The spectres of Famine and Pestilence loomed over every continent. Of all the Four Horsemen only War failed to materialise. Mankind now lacked the faculty to engage in the organised slaughter that had once defined the species.

Those who remained unaffected—an estimated five per cent of the population less than two years after the first cases had been identified—watched in horror as immense groups, often numbered in the tens of thousands, assembled like great migrating herds and shambled aimlessly across the hostile wastelands that re-shaped the surface of the planet.

This strange phenomenon seemed to express an archetypal death impulse stored in the group unconscious, a prehistoric memory of earlier extinctions that once claimed homo sapiens' long-vanished ancestors. Had some insidious stimulus flipped a previously dormant genetic switch, a conditioned reflex mechanism primed for self-destruction? At the time I considered it as good an explanation as any. In fact, as the Wandering Sickness claimed more victims with every day that passed, explanations began to appear superfluous. The solutions science proposed sounded more and more desperate and unfeasible—impractical strategies would become our collective epitaph. I had personally resigned myself to the inevitable when I first met Dr. Elizabeth Marlowe.

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“Welcome to the Institute of Human Ecology. It’s a rather modest facility, but I believe you’ll find our work here interesting. It’s a pleasure to have you aboard, Dr. Rausch,” said Elizabeth Marlowe. Although the apparent sincerity of her greeting seemed genuine enough, the curious inflexion of her voice implied she was enjoying a private joke—possibly at my expense. As a potential world saviour Dr. Elizabeth Marlowe cut a curious figure. I had entered her office expecting to encounter a typical, white-coated academic—perhaps a stern school ma’am or frumpish chief librarian type. Instead the impression Dr. Marlowe made recalled the urban guerrilla chic of the left wing activists whose radical agitation ultimately failed to subvert the

reactionary Establishment of Europe and the USA during the 1960s and 70s. Tall and slim with long black hair, flawless bone structure and piercing blue eyes, she wore khaki combat trousers, boots, a black T-shirt and a battered leather jacket. In her mid-thirties the psychiatrist exuded an aura of cavalier glamour that suggested celebrated revolutionaries like Leila Khaled or Gudrun Ensslin, a charismatic pin-up girl for violent insurrection. I found it difficult to reconcile her rather provocative appearance with the exacting disciplines of her chosen profession. In fact, she looked rather out of place in her own office, surrounded by book shelves laden with psychiatric and medical texts, flanked by dull grey filing cabinets, various reports and files piled high on her desk.

Only one thing about her office suggested the true scope and nature of the unconventional philosophy Dr. Marlowe had embraced, the apocalyptic ideology she believed held the key to humanity’s continued survival. On the wall behind her desk hung a reproduction of Salvador Dali’s *The Persistence of Memory*. The symbolic resonance of melting timepieces once considered a surrealist conceit had assumed a bleak significance the Catalanian madman could never have anticipated. The Wandering Sickness eradicated the boundaries of space and time, abstracting the concept from the grasp of human consciousness itself. I wondered briefly what Dali would have made of that and finally decided he would probably have approved. Or even taken credit for it.

"Do you like Dali, Dr. Rausch?" Elizabeth Marlowe asked, noticing my reaction to the print. "It's tempting to reflect that what were once considered exotic flights of fancy have now assumed the almost literal quality of representational art."

"Personally I'm more of a Max Ernst man myself," I replied. "Dali always struck me as something of a commercial sell-out. But under the circumstances I have to admit this particular painting does seem rather, well...prescient." "My thoughts precisely," Dr. Marlowe concurred. "But I suspect you haven't travelled all the way to our little leper colony to indulge in a spell of art appreciation."

"Leper colony? Is that how you see your work here, Dr. Marlowe?" I asked, intrigued.

"It's something of a private joke—a little tasteless perhaps," Dr. Marlowe admitted candidly. "But when one considers the purpose the Institute of Human Ecology has traditionally served—not to mention our splendid isolation here among the stranded coral atolls, a landscape an Ernst enthusiast like you must surely appreciate—it's difficult not to make the comparison."

"It's always been my understanding, Dr. Marlowe, that you actively sought this assignment and have turned down several opportunities to move on to a more...mainstream post that might have advanced your career."

"Oh, don't get me wrong. I've never been happier. I use the expression 'leper colony' only in reference to the strict quarantine imposed upon us here. It's simply an observation—not a judgment."

"Well, in that case I must concede your point," I replied. "However, you understand the necessity of that—the quarantine I mean. After all, the pathologies you deal with here are permitted to survive for the purpose of research only. The bloodstained pages of history testify to their deadly potential, which was eradicated in the world at large almost a century ago now."

"You mean like the samples of smallpox preserved in laboratories after the virus itself was effectively obliterated?" Dr. Marlowe suggested with a wry smile.

"Smallpox may have killed more people throughout the course of human history than every war and pestilence combined," I said seriously. "But frankly I believe the diseases you study here have always posed a greater threat to the survival of our species than the variola virus ever could."

"And now the Committee believes they might just save us," Dr. Marlowe replied, her smile widening with obvious satisfaction.

"Yes."

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The Institute of Human Ecology occupied a series of low-rise buildings

that resembled a modern apartment complex designed in the style of le Corbusier. Its pristine white exterior glowed in the pitiless sun that enflamed the ominous spires of bleached coral looming overhead: a minimalist solar temple bathed in sacred light. As we walked through the cool, air-conditioned corridors I could never have suspected that the almost tangible aura of enthusiasm Dr. Marlowe exuded betrayed secret passions more abstract—more potentially catastrophic—than the provocative conclusions contained in the report she'd submitted to the Committee. I'd read her thesis with more than a little scepticism, convinced already that the world situation had become hopeless. And as we passed the locked doors where the subjects of her controversial research remained safely confined, I considered the word I'd studiously avoided using when we met.

Madness.

Generations had passed since the blight of mental illness had been eradicated. Through a combination of positive eugenics, psychotropic drugs and a series of revolutionary techniques, science had finally achieved the elusive grail psychiatry once promised but ultimately failed to deliver. We had purged the taint of insanity. And in the process we had ushered in an age of peace and contentment. War had been abolished. Untroubled by unquiet dreams and the catastrophic delusions of undisciplined psychopathology, human beings settled down to productive lives of tranquil serenity.

Participants in liberal societies based on free market economies, they defined their identities through the consumption of goods and services and the passive aspirations of affordable luxury. Mass produced goods symbolised the limits of their ambitions, the subtly imposed parameters of imagination and desire. The messianic visions of religious leaders and ideological tyrants held no appeal for the well-adjusted children of this new Golden Age. Science and technology had finally created a genuine Utopia.

However, as we stood on the brink of paradise, the architects of this millenarian doctrine made a secret decision. Inspired by those who elected to preserve samples of the smallpox virus when the disease was effectively wiped out in the twentieth century, they concocted a plan to create a facility they called 'a laboratory of the psychopathic imagination'. Although the new techniques had delivered mankind from the dreadful grip of madness and the destructive pathologies that once threatened the very existence of our species, our secular saviours appreciated the need for vigilance. They had engineered a perfectly ordered, perfectly predictable world. But they retained the foresight to appreciate the labyrinthine perversities of the unconscious mind. In the past madness had not only proliferated like a malignant bacillus. It had periodically mutated, adapting to new environments and social conditions to infect millions. Who could say with complete confidence that such an outbreak might not recur at some point in the future?

And so they established the Institute of Human Ecology, an isolated facility where a community of the mentally ill continued to survive for the purposes of study and research. No attempt was made to cure them. Instead they were simply observed, subjected to various experiments designed to explore the unfathomable abyss of their fractured psyches. Should some unexpected outbreak occur anywhere at any time, these human lab rats would provide the means to tackle the problem. Eugenics enabled us to produce such aberrant subjects to order. In effect we *cultured* madness at the Institute of Human Ecology, studying the phenomenon in anticipation of future disasters when a new vaccine might be necessary to inoculate the sane population. Dr. Marlowe was only half right when she referred to the facility as a 'leper colony'. A strict quarantine was vital, of course. But nobody had ever contemplated re-introducing Hansen's disease to the world. At least I had always assumed that to be the case.

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"I suppose you and your colleagues at the Academy for Progressive Assimilation have always considered the likes of me dinosaurs, haven't you?" said Dr. Marlowe staring wistfully into the middle distance.

"I beg your pardon," I replied, distracted.

"Well, since the techniques the Progressives pioneered have been adopted globally, psychiatry has been rendered obsolete—an esoteric,

metaphysical discipline, rather like philosophy, I suppose," Dr. Marlowe elaborated. "When the first cases of Wandering Sickness were identified there were no more than a few dozen psychiatrists left in the world. And we only worked in a purely academic capacity as advisors to the Bureau of Progressive Assimilation or administrators at this facility."

"I'm not sure I know what you're...getting at." For some reason I was experiencing extreme difficulty concentrating. The words seemed to exist in some abstract conceptual dimension inaccessible to conscious recall, leaden ideas sinking in molasses. "Do you remember what the dinosaurs were, Dr. Rausch?"

"Dinosaurs?"

"Monstrous reptiles that dominated the earth for millions of years until they died out abruptly at the end of the Cretaceous era," Dr. Marlowe replied, gazing into my face intensely. "Their demise is—or should I say *was?*—a popular metaphor for extinction and social irrelevance. That's what I mean when I say that psychiatrists like me were considered dinosaurs. Don't you think it's ironic that our neglected insights might provide the human race with its only viable means of survival? Or don't you remember what *irony* means either?"

"What...what the hell are you talking about?"

"Yes, I can see that your condition is that far advanced," Dr. Marlowe pronounced coldly. "I wonder if you can even remember how long you've been here, Dr. Rausch."

"How long?"

"I noticed it the first time we met," Dr. Marlowe continued. "The slight lapses of memory and concentration—struggling occasionally to find the right word—hardly traits I'd expect in a senior member of the Bureau of Progressive Assimilation. You've been here for ten days by the way. By the end of the third you began losing your way between your quarters and my office, wandering aimlessly through the facility. I've been reading your reports, too. Do you realise you've written the first preliminary draft five times? And I've lost count of how often you've attempted and abandoned the same conversation in the last two days."

"I...I think—"

"No, Dr. Rausch," the psychiatrist contradicted emphatically. "You don't."

"What?"

"You've succumbed to the Wandering Sickness."

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With hindsight I now realise how correct Dr. Marlowe was in her diagnosis. But at the time I could hardly acknowledge that. Her findings—a classified report submitted to the Central Committee of the Bureau of

Progressive Assimilation—had simultaneously horrified and intrigued its directors. Their reaction of sheer desperation brutally exposed the flaws in their philosophy: the Utopian delusion that humanity could be improved beyond its animal origins. Or inoculated against its basic instinctive drives. As Dr. Marlowe's staunchest critic I had been despatched to the Institute of Human Ecology to cast a critical eye over her research—to assess its validity and the feasibility of its practical application. But then I found myself just another of her charges, a human guinea pig upon whom she could test her questionable theories.

And that became my salvation.

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"Dr. Rausch. Can I call you *Friedrich*? After all, clinging to obsolete titles seems rather absurd under the circumstances, don't you think?" Dr. Marlowe's voice expressed the sincere concern of a committed healer. "Feel free to call me Elizabeth. The prospect of imminent extinction creates a new kind of enforced intimacy—the withering comfort of a dying species. We'd be foolish to reject it, no matter how brief the palliative."

"Friedrich is fine, Elizabeth," I replied.

"I want to ask you a personal question—well, not so much a personal question. It's more like professional curiosity."

"Go ahead—"

"You call yourself *Doctor*. But in reality what are you actually a doctor of?"

"I don't remember."

"Of course you don't. Let's see what we can do about that, shall we—?"

Sitting upright in a contraption that resembled a dentist's chair, I looked down at the sturdy leather restraints fastened across my chest and around my wrists and ankles. Metal clamps encased my head, holding it firmly in place. Anticipating the imminent procedure Dr. Marlowe had shed her customary combat gear. She wore a pristine surgical gown, goggles and a mask. Similarly attired, two of her assistants arranged a series of stainless steel instruments on a linen-covered gurney while another adjusted the dials on a battery of machines that monitored my vital signs. A series of peaks and troughs on one computer screen indicated the steady rhythm of my heartbeat, blood pressure and respiration. Another recorded EEG activity. The apparatus clearly demonstrated how strangely calm I felt, apparently untroubled by the prospect of whatever lay in store. Even when Dr. Marlowe made the first incision across my shaved scalp, my heart rate scarcely increased.

"The brain is such a fascinating organ, don't you think, Friedrich?" said Dr. Marlowe. "Even today we scarcely comprehend its true complexity beyond much more than the most basic, mechanistic functions. Consider its sophistication as it interprets a

bewildering array of sensory stimuli—the electrical impulses transmitted via the nerve endings, which we experience as either pleasure or pain—while the brain itself remains incapable of registering either directly. Otherwise, you'd be screaming in agony now."

My scalp had been sliced into four sections, peeled back and held in place with metal retractors. The triangular fronds of pale, taut skin resembled the petals of a monstrous orchid, splayed to reveal the surface of my brain. Dr. Marlowe had removed the dome of my cranium as if slicing off the top of a boiled egg. And I hadn't felt a thing. A local anaesthetic proved sufficient to render this radical procedure painless.

"How are you feeling, Friedrich?" Dr. Marlowe asked, peering down at the glistening tissue of the naked cerebral cortex: a colossal mollusc vulnerable without the protection of its bony carapace. "No discomfort, I trust—"

"I feel...fine," I responded truthfully.

"Tell me, Friedrich. Do you remember our brief discussion about Salvador Dali when we first met?" Dr. Marlowe hovered over my exposed brain, holding a device in her right hand that resembled a soldering iron connected to a small electrical generator.

"No."

"How about now?"

I felt nothing physical as Dr. Marlowe inserted the device into my skull. I

noticed a slight smell, like burning. All at once the scene in Dr. Marlowe's office the morning I'd arrived at the Institute of Human Ecology materialised before my mind's eye. I remembered the print hanging on the wall behind her desk: a reproduction of Dali's *The Persistence of Memory*. I noticed subtle changes in the wave patterns on the screens monitoring my vital signs. A pronounced spike appeared on the EEG read out, followed by a steady plateau of heightened electro-chemical activity. "Yes," I said, experiencing a feeling of mild euphoria. "Yes, I do remember, Elizabeth. But how?"

"Simple electrical stimulation of the temporal lobe," Dr. Marlowe replied. "I've adapted the techniques pioneered by the neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield, who developed the famous Montreal procedure, a revolutionary method of treating epileptics by destroying the nerve cells responsible for their seizures. During the course of his research Penfield discovered that temporal lobe stimulation often produced very vivid memories in his patients. Perhaps a further demonstration might be in order –"

Dr. Marlowe moved the probe a fraction of an inch. Almost instantaneously the slight smell of burning I'd detected earlier dissipated. An overwhelming fragrance replaced it. "Flowers," I murmured automatically.

"Olfactory hallucinations are a common side effect associated with the aura phase of temporal lobe epilepsy and direct stimulation of the brain tissue

itself," Dr. Marlowe confirmed. "But what really concerns us here is the phenomenon of memory itself."

Dr. Marlowe had elected to perform the procedure in a facility she called the Orientation Suite. Subliminal images designed to elicit subconscious responses illuminated the enormous video screens that lined the walls of the octagonal room. A technician located in a recessed booth operated them. He performed a function that combined the role of a television producer with the dubious machinations of the wily snake oil peddler who hid behind a curtain and masqueraded as the great and all-powerful Oz. The parallels seemed compelling. But the Institute of Human Ecology remained Dr. Marlowe's exclusive fiefdom. Neither the staff nor inmates questioned her authority.

Of course, at this point the distinction between the psychiatrist's colleagues and patients had ceased to exist. They had become her disciples, adherents to a zealous doomsday cult, eagerly anticipating the long-prophesied Rapture. Dr. Marlowe had transcended the role of clinician and adopted the spiritual mantle of an evangelist. How had she achieved this mass-conversion? The answer was simple. Without official sanction Dr. Marlowe had already applied the experimental techniques she described in her report to both the staff and inmates – and she had even submitted to them herself.

"The instinct for survival is a curious and scarcely understood phenomenon." Dr. Marlowe examined the complex

topography of my brain like a cartographer studying an abstract landscape. "It motivates the simplest single celled organisms and infuses the consciousness of more highly-evolved life forms. But on the most fundamental level it is based on a single, universal faculty. Memory.

"Earlier I mentioned Wilder Penfield's discoveries regarding the nature of memory. His research soon attracted the interest of a rather more ambiguous character, the psychiatrist Ewen Cameron. The head of the World Psychiatric Association, Cameron was a rather controversial figure. In 1945 he was one of three Allied psychiatrists granted access to Rudolf Hess in order to assess whether or not Hitler's former deputy was mentally fit to stand trial. But he had become disillusioned with the Freudian approach to analysis and therapy. During the 1950s he conducted a series of experiments on mental patients at McGill University's Allan Memorial Institute in Montreal. He believed that the key to affecting a lasting cure was a form of radical intervention designed to break down 'the old pathological habits' as he called the thought and behaviour patterns of schizophrenics and psychotics. His theory involved regressing the patients to a point before these symptoms presented.

"The method he chose involved massive doses of ECT, convinced that the impact on both short term and long term memory created a blank slate, as it were. He used a device called the Page-Allen, which imparted six consecutive shocks

instead of the usual one. At the height of the program he subjected his patients to as many as three hundred and sixty individual shocks within a thirty-day period. In addition to the ECT Cameron administered various drugs, including chlorpromazine, sodium amytal, barbiturates, Thorazine, Largactil and insulin. For obvious reasons the CIA became interested in the practical applications of Cameron's research. It formed the backbone of their notorious MKUltra program at which point Cameron introduced hallucinogens like LSD and PCP into the mix. As the program progressed it also involved extreme forms of sensory deprivation in a room Cameron called the Isolation Chamber where some patients were detained for up to thirty-five days at a time.

"The purpose of all this was the literal eradication of the patient's personality and all the 'bad pathology' Cameron identified as the cause of his illness. It was a systematic regime that caused the subject to regress to an infantile state. In the many papers Cameron published in the 1950s and 60s he described the extreme forms of disorientation his patients suffered. Many became unable to walk unassisted. They sometimes became doubly incontinent and were unable to perform such basic tasks as dressing or even feeding themselves. Cameron called this first stage of the process *de-patterning*.

"The next phase of the procedure was known as *psychic driving*. It represented Cameron's attempt to implant new pathological traits to replace the ones he

had erased. In effect he was attempting to rewire the patients' brains and literally create new personalities. The method he chose was so crude it might have been laughable had not the results of the de-patterning process proved so disastrous. While maintaining his patients in a drug-induced sleep for weeks he would play them tapes for twenty hours at a time with banal messages such as *I am a good person and people like and respect me*—that kind of dross. Apparently this approach was inspired by an advertisement he'd seen for a device called the Dormaphone, which was marketed as a foolproof method to learn a foreign language in one's sleep. All Cameron succeeded in creating were people so severely damaged that they remained incapable of being re-assimilated into society. Many suffered severe physical and mental disabilities for the rest of their lives.

"Cameron's questionable methods might have proved ultimately worthless, but his basic premise was not totally without merit. He maintained that the foundation of personality was based upon what he called 'the space-time image', which depends entirely on continuous sensory input and the persistence of memory. By eradicating both through the use of isolation and induced amnesia Cameron effectively dismantled the space-time image, creating the blank canvas upon which he believed he could impose the blueprint of a new personality.

"In search of its elusive, neurasthenic Utopia the founders of the Bureau of

Progressive Assimilation adopted Cameron's basic philosophy and principles. However, their techniques were not inflicted upon a group of unfortunate individuals consigned to the Isolation Chamber in the basement of the Allan Memorial Institute. Until recently far more subtle and insidious forms of de-patterning and psychic driving were being applied twenty-four a day on a global basis. And the entire population of the world became unwitting test subjects in a planetary laboratory whose existence nobody suspected. Satellite and fibre optic cable networks replaced Cameron's Page-Allen shock device. As they extended beyond our bodies our individual pathologies merged with the circuitry of mass manipulation that enveloped the world like an electronic web. Technology located our brains outside our skulls. The television screen and universally prescribed mood enhancers were the delivery systems. Combined with the opiates of celebrity, advertising and mind-numbing entertainment they dulled the senses and reorganised the mind even more effectively than Cameron's cocktails of hypnotic drugs and hallucinogens.

"This was shock therapy administered to an entire species on a global scale. In the constant now of the Retail Age we were conditioned to remember nothing but the latest advertising slogans and the seductive adoration of wealth and luxury. Anaesthetised by designer drugs, medicated food and drinking water, we remained oblivious to the traumatic dislocation we constantly experienced on a fundamental,

metabolic level. The damage far surpassed the abuse Cameron inflicted on his patients. It represented a systematic and sustained attack on the phenomenon of consciousness itself. Bombarded with sensory overload our memories and attention spans contracted like goldfish bewildered by the world beyond the bowl they inhabit. In the drive to impose an ordered system of predictable conformity, the advocates of Progressive Assimilation airbrushed history beyond recognition, eroding collective and individual memory. In other words I'm describing a process of total regression, the ultimate de-patterning technique. It regressed an entire species to a state of docile infantilism."

"But don't you understand, Elizabeth?" I protested calmly, oblivious to the quivering mass of my exposed cerebral cortex glistening beneath the harsh, fluorescent lights. "We adopted those methods for a reason. Human beings are violent animals driven by irrational impulses—insatiable appetites for death and destruction. We succeeded in channelling those dangerous forces to more productive ends. Our system of Unified Self-Interest rendered all of the old social, ideological, ethnic and religious conflicts meaningless. What you describe as *shock therapy* necessarily entailed integrated systems of passive coercion. Subliminal media and corrective medication liberated the population from the nightmares of the past, the atrocities perpetrated in the name of a delusional dream of freedom. Our methods stimulated transient desires and simultaneously satisfied

them. I admit an element of infantilism was crucial. But if people became more childlike, then at least they were innocent of the death impulse that threatened civilisation since its inception. We served progress, Elizabeth."

"Of all delusions, Friedrich, the concept of progress is the most dangerous. It is a fantasy that has enslaved billions in pursuit of unattainable goals. The ideology you promoted was simply its final manifestation," Dr. Marlowe observed, peering into the chasm of my skull as if searching for the neurological traces of my despicable heresy.

"And so you dismiss even the notion of progress as a form of regression?"

"Regression mimics the essential mechanism of amnesia. And amnesia represents the governing principle of torture. It forces the subjects to *literally forget themselves*. An expertly regressed torture victim becomes totally dependent on the torturer. The interrogator's real goal is not to extract information but to induce what the CIA once called 'an episode of suspended animation', comparable to Cameron's deliberate eradication of his patients' space-time image. The techniques you call 'passive coercion' achieved this on a global scale. You forced entire populations to forget themselves and rely on you like helpless children. You addicted them to the bland panacea of blameless pleasure: the fragile crust of sensation that congealed like scab tissue above the existential void. And in the

process you created a worldwide epidemic of amnesia."

"You blame us for the Wandering Sickness?"

"Can you seriously doubt that now?"

"But how?" I demanded, strangely calm despite Dr. Marlowe's dire implications. "We cured humanity of its imperfections, freed it from misery. We made people happy."

"You eradicated pain and medicated pleasure. Is that it, Friedrich?"

"Yes."

"And you believe that gave people purpose?"

"Of course."

"In that case consider the following, Friedrich," Dr. Marlowe responded. "*A quick test of the assertion that enjoyment outweighs pain in this world...would be to compare the feelings of an animal engaged in eating another with those of the animal being eaten.* Do you recognise that statement? As a graduate of Gottingen University I'd be surprised if you didn't. It was written by one of the faculty's most illustrious alumni."

"No." I said truthfully. "I don't recognise it."

"And now?" Dr. Marlowe enquired, using the electrical probe to stimulate a precise area of my naked cerebral cortex.

"Schopenhauer," I said without a moment's hesitation. "It's from Arthur Schopenhauer's *On the Suffering of the World*. God, it seems so clear to me now."

"Anything else—?" Dr. Marlowe prompted, adjusting the probe slightly.

"*If the immediate and direct purpose of our life is not suffering then our existence is the most ill-adapted to its purpose in the world,*" I responded immediately, quoting the opening paragraph of Schopenhauer's essay verbatim.

"And do you believe that, Friedrich?"

"I...I don't know."

"In that case, Friedrich, I believe we are ready to begin."

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"Welcome to Amnesia Arcade!" Dr. Marlowe announced cheerily as we entered an enormous ward that resembled the interior of an aircraft hangar. Three hundred naked human beings occupied the cavernous space, their pale skin radiant in the subdued ultraviolet light. Strands of high tensile surgical steel attached to their bodies suspended them above the floor, while batteries of computers calibrated their individual vital signs. They resembled a colony of levitating bodhisattvas poised on the threshold of nirvana as they contemplated the infinite mysteries of existence. These were the remainders of the Wandering Sickness victims referred to the Institute of Human Ecology—less

than half the original batch consignment rendered for experimental purposes.

"The living dead," I commented, scrutinizing the luminous effigies hanging from the ceiling: the ripening fruit of a post-apocalyptic Eden. "Can you cure them too?"

"I cured you, didn't I?" Dr. Marlowe smiled cryptically.

"Yes. That's true," I admitted, touching the scars on my shaved head. Beneath the scalp I could feel the ceramic sutures that fused the dislocated plates of my skull. It felt like the surface of a bas-relief globe: the tactile atlas of a mysterious new world expressed in Braille.

"It sounds like you still have doubts, Friedrich."

"No. Not doubts," I replied truthfully. "Questions."

"You read my proposal to the Bureau of Progressive Assimilation, didn't you?"

"Yes, you asserted that the systematic memory wipe produced generations so passive and docile they remained poised on the brink of the ultimate disaster," I replied. "The destruction of collective memory rendered us incapable of dealing with a post-evolutionary crisis, such as the mass extinctions, because we had become children cut adrift from the space-time image of the species. The elements of volatile pathology remained necessary to mankind's survival. Our techniques

rendered humanity helpless, unable to adapt."

"The mass-extinctions were simply the last link in the chain—or the straw that broke the camel's back," said Dr. Marlowe. "Subtle technologies sentimentalised nature. Without the conflict of ideology, you encouraged people to anthropomorphise the disinterested elements of the environment. In effect they came to view the planet as a benevolent kindergarten, an animistic paradise governed by benign intelligences concerned exclusively with humanity's well being. The mass-extinctions and virtual collapse of various ecosystems shattered that illusion. The docile herd lacked the capacity to conceptualise their new circumstances. They retreated into the self-imposed exile of group amnesia, like the victims of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder—an extreme episode of separation anxiety. The mechanism reproduced the final stages of Cameron's de-patterning technique on an unprecedented scale. Regression. It is now total and—without active intervention—irrevocable."

"But all those billions," I said, visualising the vast sea of traumatised humanity locked in their lethal dreams and dwindling inevitably towards death. "The scale of such an operation. It's utterly impractical."

"Of course."

"You mean they're doomed?"

"The evolutionary struggle is essentially a form of warfare more ruthless even

than the doomsday scenarios once envisioned by Cold War strategists. Casualties are inevitable. Considering your former complicity, Friedrich, you might find it more comfortable to consider them *collateral damage*."

Collateral damage? No matter what Dr Marlowe said, it was scarcely comforting. I made a conscious effort to push that thought—and all it implied—to the back of my mind. Instead I considered what Dr. Marlowe had told me about her plans to save the beleaguered remnants of the human race. And madness held the key to its salvation.

When the epidemic of Wandering Sickness first began to sweep the globe Dr. Marlowe realised that the patients in her care—schizophrenics, psychotics and paranoiacs—remained completely immune. At first she assumed their isolation at the Institute of Human Ecology—the strict quarantine she enforced—protected them from what many initially considered a contagious virus. However, her research soon confirmed that the very nature of their illnesses—conditions that damned them in the eyes of a passive, artificial society—rendered them invulnerable to the plague of amnesia afflicting the supposedly sane. Madness and memory Dr. Marlowe realised were more intimately—more inextricably—linked than anyone had previously imagined.

What Ewen Cameron had once called 'bad pathology'—the flawed space-time image he'd attempted to obliterate with

ECT, drugs and sensory deprivation—represented fundamental aspects of an archetypal survival mechanism. According to Dr. Marlowe Cameron was a product of what she called 'the lobotomy culture' prevalent during the 1940s and 50s: the misguided belief that emotional and psychiatric dysfunctions could be rooted out with a knife or erased by 200 volts of electricity applied to the pre-frontal cortex. He failed to appreciate that his patients' alleged psychoses frequently represented a natural reaction to the stresses and pressures of their environment. What he interpreted as schizophrenia might have been the last sane refuge of a mind overwhelmed by suffering and the overbearing demands of social conformity.

"Psychosis is not really an illness at all," Dr. Marlowe said as we completed the operations I called 'the Marlowe protocol' on the lethargic dreamers of Amnesia Arcade.

"If not an illness, then what is it?"

"It's an opportunity," Dr. Marlowe asserted confidently. "A misunderstood gift."

"But the misery it causes," I protested half-heartedly, still not quite ready to embrace Dr. Marlowe's radical philosophy completely. "You think psychotics are somehow...blessed?"

"It's hardly a new idea. The shamans and mystics whose frequently terrifying visions provided tribal societies with a sense of identity and cohesion, would

certainly be demonised as schizophrenics by the psychiatric orthodoxy of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries,” Dr. Marlowe replied. “The literal Greek meaning of the word *psychosis* implied a sickness of the soul, an affliction with metaphysical connotations. In his book *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard described despair—a spiritual interpretation of existential angst—as mankind’s greatest tragedy and greatest opportunity. He claimed our capacity to experience despair and correctly identify its nature would enable us to overcome it and achieve a higher state of consciousness that is literally divine.”

“What does not kill us makes us stronger, in other words,” I suggested. “But isn’t dwelling on the darker side of our natures inherently dangerous in itself? Aren’t the libidinal forces associated with the ecstatic experiences of the mystically-inspired masses intimately linked with destructive, primitive instincts and the death impulse itself?”

“Just because we cannot see the abyss, does not mean it’s not there,” said Dr. Marlowe. “Failure to acknowledge its existence guarantees that the darkness will inevitably engulf us.”

“You seriously believe that social equilibrium based on a liberal ideology of scientific progress is actually impossible—that it could never work—don’t you?”

“The progress you describe is not a liberal idea but a totalitarian dogma. It

tolerates no system other than itself. The Bureau of Positive Assimilation devised a philosophy of Unified Self Interest, based on unfettered free-market capitalism and rampant consumerism. Before the integrated systems of passive coercion—subliminal media, the universal prescription of mood modifiers, the medication of food and drinking water—were in place, the secret elites relied on heavy handed police-state tactics to impose their will. In short I’m describing a protection racket organised by authoritarian oligarchies. The governments they controlled promised to protect us from the imagined terrors they invoked—apocalyptic wars, economic meltdown and environmental disasters—while employing terrorist techniques themselves. In return for the illusion of safety we surrendered our liberties and became complicit in their schemes—collaborators and inmates in a global concentration camp without tears. Under the guise of liberation they denied us the freedom to explore the potential of our personal pathologies. And we abandoned even our own memories. Lacking any coherent experience of the past or present, how could we even hope to have a viable future?”

“We must rediscover madness to recover our lost memories?”

“Properly guided a genuine psychotic experience might best be described as a journey into aeonic time, a necessary rite of passage similar to the visionary experiences of tribal shamans and fakirs,” said Dr. Marlowe seriously.

"It's a rarely acknowledged fact that Socratic philosophy had its roots in shamanism. Plato identified aeonic time with the dimension of pure mind, a higher realm inhabited by the gods. In fact he described humanity's limited perceptions of space and time as simply '*the moving image of eternity*'. And if one considers discoveries made in the field of cognitive science Plato's intuitive diagnosis of the phenomenon sounds uncannily prescient."

"Prescient?"

"The human brain processes about 14 million bits of information per second," Dr. Marlowe elaborated. "However, we have conscious access to only 18 bits per second. That means, in effect, that we are aware of little more than a millionth of the information we actually assimilate. The damage inflicted by the systems of Progressive Assimilation occurred on this deep, subconscious level. In order to heighten our perception and achieve the next state of awareness necessary to survive in our new environment we must broaden the bandwidth of consciousness itself."

"And the journey into aeonic time will achieve that?"

"I'm thinking more in terms of the return trip, Friedrich."

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In the final weeks before we abandoned it the Institute of Human Ecology was transformed from what Dr. Marlowe once described ironically as a 'leper colony'. In a sense it had finally

assumed the role its original architects intended—although in a way those remote bureaucrats could never have envisaged. It had truly become a laboratory of the psychopathic imagination. Located on the edge of the stranded coral atolls—the fossilised landscape itself a powerful metaphor for the spectre of epochal extinction—the modernist complex transcended its founders' mandate. It housed the temple of a post-apocalyptic cult that expressed the millenarian yearning suppressed in the majority of the population and dismissed as 'bad pathology' in those who either could not—or would not—relinquish their symbolic waking dreams.

Through a variety of surgical procedures and therapies, many of which involved the use of powerful psychotropic substances such as ayahuasca, dimethyltryptamine, psilocybin and LSD, Dr. Marlowe systematically guided her patients on the mind-altering voyage she described as a journey into aeonic time. Those who completed the return trip emerged from their previously delusional conditions in a state she referred to as *hyper-sanity*. According to Dr. Marlowe their transfigured minds represented the springboard that would propel human consciousness towards the next stage of evolution. The hyper-sane would return from exile as the agents of salvation. Their new and purposeful pathologies would revitalise the atrophied dreams of the apathetic sleepwalkers roaming the planet's surface and transform the bewildered remnants of traumatised humanity.

As her project approached fruition Dr. Marlowe envisioned a global renaissance that would surpass the creation of mankind's first organised societies. She reiterated the prime example of prehistoric cultures where the collective experience—the group memory—of the tribe relied on the mediation of the shaman whose symbolic visions ultimately shaped those fledgling nations. In psychiatric terms those ancient medicine men might have been dismissed as 'schizoid' or 'psychotic'. And yet civilization could never have evolved without them. The human race would have remained 'amnesiac apes' without the mystical insights of the seers who interpreted the darkness of the primal forests and the terrifying power of the elements in conceptual terms layered with sacred depth and meaning. The enlightened alumni of the Institute of the Human Ecology would recapitulate that function and assume the mantles of spiritual leadership, guiding the memory-wiped survivors of mindless humanity through the wilderness of despair to an elusive Promised Land.

As I reached the summit of an immense outcrop of coral, the fossilised exoskeletons of countless dead marine crustaceans dazzling in the brilliant sunshine, I scanned the vast panorama of the vivid, painted desert that surrounded me. The enflamed sky resembled the lysergic canvas of an immense Expressionist masterpiece, the threshold of infinity crazed with coruscating rainbows and whirling spiral galaxies. The air itself felt somehow tangible, the atmosphere

charged with a quantifiable field of static energy. Arms outstretched I felt its power surging through my fingertips and limbs. Exploring the intricate network of my central nervous system, it stimulated the higher evolutionary functions that lay dormant in the neo-cortex and parietal lobes. Neurotransmitters flooded the synaptic canyons of my brain. Light flooded my skull and percolated the length of my spine, rousing the fiery kundalini serpent from millennial hibernation. The pineal third eye—the ajna chakra of tantric mysticism—opened and turned its coruscating gaze on previously hidden realities.

The veils of maya dissolved. The restoration of the space-time image liberated me from the insufferable weight of the dimension Plato described as *the moving image of eternity*. What I once called the 'real world' was an illusion. It was as artificial as any Hollywood movie: the seductive propaganda of social conformity based on the slavish adoration of vulgarity, luxury and greed. The dream factories had pacified their audiences with glamorised images of sex and violence designed to provide a harmless outlet for the death impulse they simultaneously stimulated. The technology had reduced billions to caricatures of the shadows on the screen that beguiled them. But now the machineries of mass-manipulation corroded irreparably. Their baleful power dissipated like the bleak recollection of a totalitarian nightmare banished to oblivion.

Dr. Marlowe had once described the systems of passive coercion devised by the Bureau of Progressive Assimilation as *psychotic technologies*. Initially I had resisted that analysis. After all, did not the word *psychotic* describe the social pariahs referred to her care and stringent quarantine at the Institute of Human Ecology? The procedures she had pioneered—the Marlowe protocols—ably demonstrated the fallacy of my old prejudices. The doctrine I had once embraced remained founded on reductive principles. They debased consciousness to a basic, mechanistic level comparable to an automaton—almost a dictionary definition of what it means to be *truly psychotic*. Our methods had created biological robots whose core programming we systematically corrupted until they finally ceased to function.

By contrast the untapped potential of the inmates Dr. Marlowe cultivated at the Institute of Human Ecology aspired towards the zenith of the psychedelic experience: the expansion of human consciousness on a cosmic level. The hyper-sane who completed the journey into aeonic time had achieved that elusive dream. Now I, too, stood poised on the brink of beckoning infinity, the transcendental synthesis of elevated perception exploring the supernal dimensions of eternity. Like the others I prepared to write the history of tomorrow, a millenarian shaman projected into a new conceptual landscape from which the elements of time and space had been utterly abstracted.

I looked down from my precarious vantage point, the vertiginous cliff of razor sharp coral gleaming like a rock face of calcified knives. Not for the first time I contemplated jumping and visualised my body reduced to bloody ribbons. As the sun continued to blaze in the strange, rarefied sky the fossilised corpses of the prehistoric crustaceans assumed an ethereal glow that suggested the toxic half-lives of radioactive isotopes—strontium, caesium and iodine—that had contaminated the entire planet since the advent of nuclear Armageddon over a century earlier when the world's secret elites obsessively rehearsed the suicidal strategies of doomsday. The digits on the atomic clocks remained frozen at zero now. The delicate balance of terror—the cynical equilibrium of a global protection racket—devised and maintained by systems analysts at the RAND Corporation had become an obscure and irrelevant detail of ancient history.

Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis barely hinted at the reality. Our consciousness remained the essential manifestation of inestimable forces established within the earth and primed to express themselves celestially. All the obsolete moralities—the flawed cults of humanism and death worship—represented distorted interpretations of an elemental intelligence, a means for the galaxies to ultimately know themselves. Our beings were forged and would die in the hearts of countless suns. Transcending the limits of physical existence, our souls would persist in starlight and survive the disintegration of the remote

island universes that spawned them. Our exquisite emptiness incorporated a perfect microcosm of astral pathology – neural analogues of expanding space-time – as the four dimensions spiralled towards the final impasse of cosmic entropy. The life and death of reality existed in the smallest and greatest of things: the sub-atomic particles of quantum mechanics and the sublime grandeur of the celestial spheres. And even that was not the end. The end was simply another beginning. I did not imagine this. I knew it. I felt it. And I embraced it.

As above – so below: I witnessed and embodied the completion of the Great Work. From the summit of the coral atoll I watched as Dr. Marlowe guided her final disciples through the symbolic rituals of initiation. They had carved enormous, complex mandalas into the glassy surface of the fused sand that gleamed like a frozen lake between the looming spires of fossilised invertebrates. These intricate designs expressed the atavistic dreams of a resurgent consciousness: kaleidoscopic illustrations of a visionary rapture that surpassed language and the written word.

Fires blazed around the periphery of the crystal canyon, illuminating the stark, irrational drama. A numinous atmosphere of pagan mystery weighted the air, recalling the barbaric pageantry of torchlight parades that had once invoked the catastrophic forces of global destruction. But the resemblance, I realised, was superficial.

Though she assumed the role of an apocalyptic prophet, Dr. Marlowe was no ranting tyrant, a paranoid dogmatist with a rampant god complex. She perceived her vocation as that of an evangelist, heralding the emergence of not one but many messiahs. The renegade psychiatrist was the midwife who delivered a fabulous new species of illuminated beings into the barren wasteland of a destitute world. Already many of them had travelled far beyond the Institute of Human Ecology, pursuing their ordained mission with unshakeable zeal. Their Pentecostal consciousness would transform the directionless migrations of those infected with the Wandering Sickness, igniting the sparks of latent divinity obscured beneath opaque membranes of forgetfulness.

The fire dances continued long into the night. Laboratory animals were slaughtered on sacrificial altars, the bodies consumed on raging pyres. Dr. Marlowe officiated solemnly like the high priestess of an archaic religion. Blood glistened on her bare breasts, her body daubed with occult ideograms. Her congregation abandoned themselves to an ecstasy of transcendence.

I felt our minds merge, the boundaries of space and time our individual bodies encapsulated dissolving. The complex pathologies of our individual nervous systems fused: pure energy unhindered by the familiar prison of the flesh. Jewels encrusted the luminous coral causeways, transforming the fossilised atolls into an incandescent cathedral

complex. And the beings that cavorted among the immense bonfires, anointed in the blood of ritually slaughtered monkeys, dogs and rabbits, underwent the penultimate phase of transformation. Their gilded skins exuded auras of sacred light, the rainbow halos of earthbound archons. Here reborn were the Nephilim of old – the fallen angels credited with imparting science, culture and the arts to the first humans after the banishment from Eden.

I observed this metamorphosis with eyes that stared deep into the heart of infinity, as those same miraculous forces transported me to the realms of higher consciousness. I could see the entire surface of the globe and the mindless masses wandering through its limitless deserts like the somnambulist denizens of a Delvaux painting.

The abandoned cities, bereft of function, assumed the surreal aspect of geological anomalies. Monumental causeways of concrete and steel crumbled and decayed. Glass obelisks glowed like abstract beacons signalling to the stars. What part would these incomprehensible structures play in the new mythologies that would shortly evolve? I imagined them assuming the grim significance of a cautionary fable, the symbolic relics of a suicidal folly that culminated in disaster – the ruins of legendary Babels.

Immense wings enfolded my outstretched arms, their luminous plumage gleaming with prismatic crystals. I could feel the timeless vectors

of the infinite solar winds gathering beneath my incandescent feathers as they diffracted the spectrum of eternity. The transfigured disciples of Dr. Marlowe's millenarian cult ascended majestically from the fused glass floor of the opalescent lagoon. The cabalistic designs carved into its surface glowed vividly, the consecrated launching pads of an evolutionary odyssey.

Alone beneath the dreaming spires of radiant coral, Dr. Marlowe stared up into the night. She observed the nameless constellations whose stellar progress new zodiacs would one day chart and interpret. My expanding mind touched the psychiatrist's thoughts and experienced something of the vague melancholy she felt. It was not true sadness, but a sense of philosophical resignation. Dr. Marlowe realised her work was done. The last of her acolytes hovered among the dizzying peaks of the bright coral atoll, a squadron of rogue angels resplendent in the coronation armour of the imminent Aeon.

The psychiatrist understood her mission had devolved to the brilliant creatures she had imagined into being. The prospect of a solitary death among the deserted wards and corridors of the Institute of Human Ecology did not trouble Dr. Marlowe. She accepted the inevitable. And I accepted it too without sadness or regret. Instead I embraced my beckoning destiny as I took the next quantum leap into an unimaginable future.



# GUMBO

By Darius James

Images © Destiny McKeever

*"Belief in magick is older than writing.  
So nobody knows how it started."*

- Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules & Men*

## World Egg/ Fool - 0.

Inside the domestic-departure terminal of Newark International, a cabbage-kneed black woman, outfitted in rubber raincoat and surgical mask, points in my direction with a muffled shriek:

*"See?! They done turned the damned things loose!! Look at him!! He a body wit' no head! His voice boomin' out a hole in his neck! He just walkin' an' talkin' an' spookin' peeples!! I done tol' y'all! I done tol' y'all but y'all wouldn't listen! They be up to no good in the Gremlin!!"*

More ghosts float through her field of vision. More babble.

*"They keep his head in a jar. He be havin' 'lec 'twisity retached to his brain, sendin' out radio waves what be messin' up ever'body's thinkin'!"*

Two security guards creep up behind her. One fondles the head of his nightstick. The other massages the stiffening bulge in the v of his trousers.

## Dr. John/ The Magician - I.

On the connecting flight out of Baltimore, a middle-aged blonde maneuvers her girdled aggregation of buoyant spheres into the seat beside my own. Her cone of cylindrically spunned Clairol colors is stiff with hairspray. It has the look and texture of ossified cotton-candy. She extends her pudgy hand and tells me her name is 'Peaches'. Back in the early 'fifties, her hellcat days, Peaches used to ride with a Coney Island bike gang. Mermaid Avenue was hopping back then she says with ruff and burly women dressed like men. She also used to strip (*"But I was a lady! I only made 'em believe they was seein' somethin' when they wasn't seein' nothin'!"*). Now, she tends bar, clucking like a mother hen over hopeless drunks. Like me, it's her first visit to New Orleans.

"My daughter is getting married," she explains. "The wedding party is gonna be at the King Rex ball. And *those* tickets ain't easy to come by, you know."

Later, after she has sucked the contents out of three sampler bottles of Jack Daniel's, Peaches tells me her mother was born with a caul over her face. She was partially blind. Shadows came and

told her things. My grandmother was also psychic I replied. She smoked geechie gauge, spoke to otherworldly shades and could predict the day her friends and neighbors were going to die. She passed her talent on to me.

When I was three, my cousin Pamela and I were grappling on a patch of grass behind her home. The clouds darkened. And I looked up at the sky. There was a thunderclap followed by a flash of luminous white. Escaping an angry torrent of rain, my cousin and I ran into the house. I announced:

*"Grandma just went to Heaven..."*

That night, in his Harlem bed-sit, my uncle watched my grandmother's ghost descend from the ceiling and evaporate through the floor. Her hands were clasped in prayer.

### **Marie LaVeau/ The High Priestess - II.**

Outside of the plane's window, thousands of feet below, the world is scaled down to toy town dimensions. There is a great expanse of swamp with miles and miles of growth and decay. It's overgrown with vines, leaves and wild grass - all a fecund green spotted with pools of Bayou brown. Tramp steamers, shrimp boats and oil rigs are anchored in calm waters dark with mud. It's a landscaped tabletop for model trains. It's a soundstage for Godzilla.



### **Ayizan/ The Empress - III.**

In New Orleans, an auburn-haired pixie with a Star of David nestled in the cleft of her ample cleavage greets me at the arrival gate. As the high priestess of a temple named in honor of the Hindu goddess Kali, *the Black One*, I'm curious about the Star of David.

"In southern Louisiana," she begins, fondling the jewel, "they got some pretty weird ideas about what they like to call *Hebe yellow sand-niggers*. This stops them dead in their tracks."

With a peal of demonic laughter, she adds - a

"It's pretty hilarious, actually. They slobber and hiss like B-movie vampires trapped by the sun with their pants down. It's *hu-lare-ree-us!*"

The pixie's name is Sallie Glassman. She's a transplanted New Englander living in the south. I've known her since high school in the early seventies. This is the first time we've seen each other in eleven years. We embrace with an intensity particular to old friendships. Of all my so-called peers in high school, she was the only one with enough consideration for my person to honor me with a *formal* invitation - engraved and on card stock - to an *orgy*.

*"Come One! Come All! To Ye Olde Gala Roman Orgy!"*

*(Toga optional. Grapes provided. Caesar Chevez be damned!!)*

On the appointed night, however, while providing my father with a sketchy outline of my plans, I collapsed and pitched down a flight of stairs. This was the culmination of a week devoted to bingeing on barbiturates, potent Mexican pot and assorted tranquilizers. The loss of my virginity would have to wait another three years.

I first glimpsed Sallie in the squash of noxious hippies lounging in the corridor outside the high school cafeteria. This congregate of woolly-haired misfits called the area 'The Ramp' - so named because the corridor led to an incline leading to the swimming pool adjacent to the high school's gymnasium. The air there always stank of patchouli body-oils and chlorine.

While reciting a routine from the Firesign Theater recording, *How Can You Be Two Places At Once When You're*

*Not Anywhere At All*, she was balanced on her head with her legs perfectly erect and poised motionless in the air. Though quite capable of such feats, given the vagaries of time and my brain's drug-ravaged cells, I cannot claim she performed either of these two acts with any degree of certainty. I am, however, certain of *this* -

I was drawn to the *immensity* of her breasts. It was *love* at first sight.

Some weeks later, as she rode her bicycle along Wall Street in downtown New Haven, I stopped her in front of Naples Pizza, introduced myself and said I caught her act on the Ramp.

"My mother told me about you," she said. "You were in her acting class at Basset Street Elementary School." Her smile was wry, ironic and melancholic.

I remembered the acting class. It was one of a plethora of programs for agitated Negroes Lydon launched during the mid-sixties' post-riot era. That had been five years before.

Then I *remembered* her mother.

*"YOUR MOTHER IS THAT HONKIE BITCH!!?!!"*

She was *impressed*. I have never understood why.

#### **Loco/ The Emperor - IV.**

Sallie lives in the Garden District. It's a residential area containing some of the oldest neighborhoods in New Orleans.

Her street is well tended with impeccably manicured lawns and shrubs. There are bright clusters of Azaleas; live oaks and stunted palms. The houses are a hodgepodge of ornate Gothic designs with dripping cornices and shingled domes in confectionery colors. Her own home occupies two floors on one half of a whitewashed duplex. Her screened-in porch is strung with Mardi-Gra beads and overgrown with Spanish moss. The garage in back has been converted into a ritual space for invocations, music and dance.

In the entrance to the front room of her home, a large brass-framed canvas hangs above the gas-lit fireplace. On an end table squats the many-armed goddess Kali. The statue is draped with an assortment of multi-colored beads. Silver doubloons spill from her lap.

#### **Master of the Head/ The Hierophant - V.**

The painting's title is "*Cry of the Tenth Aethyr*". It's a swell of anthropomorphic creatures swirling around a dark-cloaked figure. The figure stands inside an invocational triangle. The triangle is bordered by the phrase *ANA PHA XETON - ANA PHAN ETON - PRI MEU MATON*. A fish with a sinuous body and a squid-like tail belches a woman from its mouth, its fingers tangled in prayer.

A demon hovers. Another runs on clawed feet. A Catman breathes a cloud of smoke.

The painting is based on Aleister Crowley's ordeal in the Tenth Aethyr, with Chronzon, the demon of the abyss:

*"...that mighty devil Chronzon, crieth aloud, Zazas, Zazas, Nastanada Zazas. I am the Master of Form and from me all forms proceed."*

The painting, Sallie explains, is a result of her work with Enochian magick. Enochian is a very subtle and complex system of ceremonial magick. It's also a language enabling one to communicate with either Angels or Demons. The Enochian magickal system involves thirty "Aethyrs" or astral atmospheres. Like a Mandala, the Aethyrs are arranged concentrically and surround the four quadrants: Earth, Air, Fire and Water. Utilizing a combination of yoga, crystal scrying and ritual chant, one can contact hierarchical beings governing and guarding each of the thirty Aethyrs. Once contact with the being has been established, the practitioner of Enochian is then transported into the Aethyr, encountering elementals associated with that particular atmosphere. Through the encounter, the elemental is reintegrated into the magician's psyche. *Failure to do so means madness.*

#### **Marassa/ The Lovers - VI.**

Snapping open my third can of *Dixie Brew*, Sallie introduces two members of her temple in the kitchen, Weirdsli and Katt. Weirdsli is a young dude with dark tousled hair visiting from Atlanta. By the way his eyes bulge in their sockets, I can tell he's trying to wrestle me to the mat with a secret Jedi

Mindtrick. Spook me with the Whiteman *Evil Eye*.

In contrast, Katt is all teeth, blonde hair and thrusting chest Her heaving swells of mammalian warmth have a sway far more mesmerizing than Weirdsli's box-eyed 'Theta Gaze'. Pour her pulchritude into a cowhide bikini and she's the perfect poster girl for an American Dairy Association billboard campaign: "*Just say Moo!*"

How this Texas-born MBA grad wound up running naked through the swamps of Louisiana spattered in mud and Spanish moss with the characters in the Kali Temple I never learned. I did find out, though, she once television programmer in Saudi Arabia. Her position was terminated, however, after a broadcast of E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*. The cockles of the Islamic heart, apparently, weren't warmed by the occurrence of friendships between spiders and pigs.

Weirdsli was introduced to Kali through the Temple of ov Psychick Youth; a side project of Genesis P-Orridge. "I thought Throbbing Gristle was the greatest band until a friend of mine turned me on to Psychic TV. He gave me some pamphlets. T.O.P.Y. draws on Austin Osman Spare, Crowley and William Burroughs. One of the first requirements is making a sigil. A sigil can be anything; but, basically, it's something that works on a subconscious level."

"You write down whatever you desire and make the sigil as elaborate as

possible. Do whatever you think will give it power. You wait till the 23rd hour of the 23rd day. 23 is the number for Joy/ Life/Party/Bread. It comes from Burroughs. You think of this desire and bring yourself to a state of sexual frenzy. You cum. You take this cum or "ov" and put it on the sigil. Then you cut yourself and bleed on the sigil. The first time I did it I masturbated so hard I tore the skin on my penis. 'Wow!' I thought '*Blood and Cum at the same time! This has got to work!*'"

"And it did. It was really strange...It's a very powerful form of magick. It's what Austin Osman Spare used to do. He endowed these things with life. That's the whole point. You endow your desire with life so it manifests itself on whatever level you want it to."

Katt said she once watched a bear masturbate at the Zoo.

### **Dance/ The Chariot - VII.**

Katt left a big purple hickey on Weirdsli's soul. It wasn't until she vanished - *VROOM! - VROOM!* - in her red convertible sports car, trailed by billows of dust, he knew what hit him.

### **Possession/ Strength - VIII.**

Later, Weirdsli confides he's building a room inside his mind. It's going to be cavernous and sumptuously furnished. He is going to bring girls there. And seduce them. *Astrally*.



### Couche'/ The Hermit - IX.

A Dayglo-Lime-sheeted Klansman on horseback leads a gang of torch-bearing Negroes on St. Charles Avenue.

"What's that?"

"Flambeaux!"

I'm in the south and it rhymes with Sambo. I think they're talking about the Negroes. But no. Flambeaux are the torches used to light Mardi-Gras' night-time parades. Their numbers once exceeded eight hundred but less than one hundred are in use today, all built no later than 1880. The crowd tosses their coins into the street. And the Negroes scramble for the scattered loot, their torches lit and in the air.

I ask one Negro how long he's been a Flambeaux-Sambo.

"Every year for the last thirty-five years!" he grinned. He had three teeth missing.

"Yeah? How did it start? What's it all mean?"

"Hell if I know!"

### The Market/ The Wheel of Fortune - X.

Katt parks her car by the wooden stalls of an open-air market in the French Quarter. We get out, dressed in costume and promenade through the maze of cobblestone streets. The air is redolent with the pungency of Mississippi succulents steamed and spiced. Overhead, powdered and elegantly plumed drag queens sit and fan themselves on balconies of lacy grillwork. Leather boys lead lovers on dog-leashes. We eat Oyster Po' Boys and sample crawdads. Then the evening's sultry charm is upended by a throng of marching Christians.

### Secret Societies/ Justice - XI.

A manic young guy with his hair coifed in J.F.K.'s gleaming presidential 'do wags his finger with the bold assertion: "Even though y'all is dressed the way you are, and y'all lead sinful, sinful lives of debauchery, I just want y'all to know *Jesus Loves You!*® anyway."

Our party includes a diaphanous belly dancer; two cross-dressers; a bejeweled dragon in a glittering turquoise-colored

robe; and an aluminum-haired waif in an electrified bodysuit. We tell the man to move on and mind his business. But *no*. Not him. He's a Blues Brother. *On a mission from God.*

He says to one of the cross-dressers: "God Bless you!"

"I didn't sneeze."

Now, the born-again doesn't realize I'm there. I'm obscured by the shadow of an overhanging limb, slouched against a wall. And I'm draped in black ceremonial robes. I step forward. He sees my face. It's covered by a lumpy shell of paper mache. The paper mache' is slicked over with a layer of Raspberry Jell-O Gelatin. It's still damp. It starts to drip. My face is falling off in soggy red clumps. The born-again is *spooked*. Sweat slides down his face. He blinks his stupid pink pinball eyes. *Blink. Blink.*

"Jesus Loves You."

"*Jesus can suck my dick! His daddy, too!*"

I'm about to tell him I'm a Falasha, a *Black Jew*, (sure to strike fear in the heart of any redneck), when I'm snatched off the street and hustled into a nearby restaurant.

### **Zombi/ The Hanged Man - XII.**

In Princess Monaco, we order a round of 'Hurricanes'. They're served in chilled elongated glasses without the silly paper parasols. I request a bowl of Gumbo.



### **Les Morts/ Death - XIII.**

In the kitchen, I speak with Charles Battles. *Chez Chuck* is an ex-Marine born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. He made his first Gumbo in Biloxi, Mississippi. It was under the supervision of Chef Louis Daniels at the White Pillars restaurant. "The basis of all gumbos," he explains, "is the Roux (pronounced 'roo'). It's a thickener used in sauces, soups and gravies. The Roux is what gives the Gumbo its color, texture and taste. Everything else is just special added extras. As the saying goes, the darker the Roux the darker the gumbo. The blacker the Roux the better the taste."

"Back in the old days, old time black people would spend three to four hours making the Roux itself. They would keep the fire low and constantly stir it

with a wooden spoon. But the more you cook it down, the less tightening power it has. So a blonde Roux is added to the black Roux for thickness. We're going back to how the Cajuns and the old black slaves used to do it. To the black Roux itself."

#### **Ti Bon Ange/ Temperance - XIV.**

"To make the Roux, pour three cups of plain salad oil into a black iron skillet heating over a fire. You can use a peanut oil which gives the Roux the light taste of pecans. Heat the oil to the point of smoking. Add 2 1/2 cups of flour. Whisk the flour as you pour it into the oil to prevent the Roux from scorching. The Roux will get extremely hot, like tar, so be careful. Don't wear long-sleeved shirts or loose clothing while preparing the Roux. If the Roux gets scorched in the slightest, throw it out and start the process over."

"Remember, the more you cook the Roux, the less consistency it has. If your dark Roux doesn't have the consistency of peanut butter, make a blonde Roux out of butter and flour."

"Take the Roux off the fire and pour it into a stainless steel bowl. It will continue to cook and darkened for the next thirty to forty-five minutes. Continue whisking the Roux until all the lumps are gone and it has the consistency of pancake batter. It will turn in color from caramel to chocolate brown. It will look like mud from the Mississippi river. This is why Gumbo is called Mississippi Stew."

#### **Courir Le Mardi Gras/ The Devil - XV.**

\* Large Red Onions      \* Oregano      \*  
Thyme      \* Bay Leaves  
\* Green Bell Peppers      \* Cracked Black  
Pepper      \* Chicken Stock  
\* Dried Sassafras Gumbo File      \*Or  
Okra

"Chop onions and bell peppers into small pieces and sauté until slightly transparent. Add chicken stock. The chicken stock should be reduced by half. Combine together. Stir in eight tablespoons of Oregano, twelve Bay leaves and five tablespoons of Thyme. Add five quarts of cold water."

"When the Gumbo comes to a boil, turn down the flame to a simmer. Add two tablespoons of blonde Roux at a time. Wait five to ten minutes. Test thickness. And add another two tablespoons of Roux if you don't have the thickness you want. Do this until you have the desired consistency.

"Cut a five to seven pound 'gator tail into half-inch thick filet strips. Cut the filet strips into 1/2 inch by 1/2 inch chunks. Put the 'gator chunks into a hot, hot pan with no grease. Add cracked black pepper. 'Gator tails brown up real fast so cook it quick and put it into your gumbo."

"Lastly, add either Okra or dried Sassafras Gumbo File'. Never combine both in the same pot."

## Deluge/ The Tower - XVI.

Mardi Gra's parade season begins the second Friday before "Fat Tuesday". I hit Thursday. And by Sunday I was spent. Limp. Flaccid. No amount of expert tongue 'n lip work could even coax it to life.

So I blew off the Bacchus parade. This was spectacle (according to my Mardi Gras guide) of twenty-floats featuring a flatbed full of gorillas (including the Kong Family of Skull Island) pelting the public with pounds and pounds of cheap plastic. Hardy's description left me wondering if the gorillas were a reference to the cork-faced Zulu Krewe, their prized golden coconuts and New Orleans' octoroon aristocracy.

No, I couldn't get it up for that. Besides, I had a wretched hangover. The night before, I was at the M.O.M.'s Ball - the krewe of Misfits, Orphans and Midgets (M.O.M. doesn't have a float in the parades but are renowned for their parties on Mardi Gras and Halloween). The combination of my temper's short fuse; the countless cans of Dixie Brew; the two shots of Jaegermeister, an unholy fermentation of mythic reputation, and the underside of the Southern psyche revealed in masque proved too volatile a mix for my unstable constitution. And a tad too grotesque for my delicate New England sensibilities.

When the taxi turned into the parking lot of the Disabled Veteran's Hall in Arabi, St. Bernard Parish, I was expecting droves of fun-loving

quadriplegics in motorized wheelchairs masquerading as grubs, frankfurters and sideshow frog-boys; all in VFW caps with American flag stickpins. Honestly, I don't really know what I was expecting.

Maybe it was the Jaegermeister's reputed narcotic-like effects. Or the association of the krewe's acronym with images of disabled war veterans. It might have been the gay midget I encountered earlier in the French Quarter. He had propositioned me by inhaling a balloon full of helium then squeaked - "Hey, ever make it with a midget?"

I don't know what I expected...calliope music and circus dwarves rolling out of pygmy cars by the hundreds...ANYTHING but this.

So, when I saw the garish swarm of revelers lined outside the Disabled Vet's Hall, I could've sworn I heard two cross-eyed water-head albinos plucking "Dueling Banjos". Then it hit me: You ain't in New York no more. You in Gomer Pyle City now, boy!

I got real paranoid real fast.

I don't know the south. I was raised in New England on horror stories, the ones they tell to give black children nightmares - how southern whites have horns and tails; eat babies and got wangs as big as baseball bats. Those stories...

Now, I ain't squealing like a pig for nobody. And my friends don't help.

They console me with words like - "You said you wanted to see this shit!"

Yeah. Right. Beyond lynching distance. Inside, it smells like cheap beer, cheap perfume and even cheaper piss. It's about the size of a small high school auditorium. There are collapsible card tables along all four sides of the dance hall. It's difficult to see and it's even more difficult to move.

What costumes I can discern in the cluster of silhouettes are bunny-tailed trailer tramps; men in mirrored suits; women with exaggerated plastic tits; men covered in exaggerated plastic tits and a guy with a bowl of plastic spaghetti on his head contrived to look like Rastafarian dreadlocks.

The bandstand is the size of a postage stamp. And my dumb ass don't know the band jamming on it is the legendary R&B outfit, The Radiators. I'm standing in the middle of this surreal sock-hop and this fool walks by. He's dressed in the grays of a confederate colonel. And the colonel is parading this other fool around on a dog leash. The fool collared to the dog leash is wearing a rubber mask. The mask has the features of a gorilla. It's the color of tar.

I flip the fuck out.

I ain't ready, right?

I see red. I'm about to scream on these two stupid muthafuckas, whip out my straight razor and cut somebody when it hits me again: You ain't on the Lower

Eastside. Up there, we keep our white folks in line. They know their place. You can't run into Vazac's like the night a carload of skinheads rolled up and laughed - "Hey, it's a blond nigger and his white-trash girlfriend!"

And you told the stupid muthafuckas to step out the car.

"Wait a minute..."

You ran into the bar.

"Yo! We got a Howard Beach outside!"

Everybody poured out. Huge crowd huddled on the sidewalk in front of the bar - Blacks, Whites, Puerto Ricans, men, women, young and old - with you in front, grinning: "Now what were you saying about a blonde nigger and his white-trash girlfriend?"

The skinheads bounced around like the devil dumped hot coals down the front of their Sta-Press jeans.

"Fair fight! Fair fight! One on One!"

One on One!"

And the crowd retorts: "This ain't about honor, man! This about you getting' yo' ass kicked!"

No. Not here. I go into my arrogant New York nigger bag with this crowd, I'm barbecue, you dig, with tequila sauce flambé!

"Feets," I say, "don't fail me now..."



# GENETICALLY MODIFIED METZGER MANIFESTO

By Stewart Home

The damaged nature of industrial societies leads to auto-destructive art.

The sound of amplified jet engines cruising a mile above the earth.

The bombers circle and circle and circle around acid on nylon.

Machine produced and factory assembled art works by Gustav Metzger.

Combustion, compression, concrete, corrosion.

Convulsion, subversion, defection.

Random activity and the tangential slogan no more beautiful ruins!

Smash the picturesque, smash capitalism, smash realism and smash abstraction.

Suited beings in Regent Street are monsters of self-regulation.

Everything, everything, everything else is an echo of Russian futurism

Combustion, compression, concrete, corrosion.

Convulsion, subversion, defection.

The greatest art of the sixties was dumped nightly on the streets of Soho.

The greatest art of today is the spam filling your email inbox.

Far better than those poetry sites where people cut and paste words and phrases,

Is junk email which uses exactly the same technique to avoid spam filters.

Combustion, compression, concrete, corrosion.

Convulsion, subversion, defection.

Thank you for purchasing my instructional video Make Money While You Shower. I think you'll agree it is the best \$200 you'll have ever spent because let me assure you that there are a lot of men out there who will pay handsomely to film young women taking a shower, and they range from glamour film makers to rank amateurs. Of course you can make extra money from professionals by charging an additional fee for signing a release form... So how do you reach these desperate men? Just send me \$200 and I'll tell you how in my instructional video

Make Money From Your Website!

Scientist must collaborate with artists, engineers, grifters and con-merchants.

People's power will accelerate the disintegration of the institution of art.

A total unity of idea, site, form, colour, method and timing of the work.

Words in freedom machine produced and factory assembled.

Combustion, compression, concrete, corrosion.

Convulsion, subversion, defection.

Auto-destructive art is an attack upon capitalism and the drive to annihilation.

Glass, heat, human energy, electricity, feedback, explosives.

Duchamp said art works die and end up in the graveyard of museums.

Metzger proposed they should have a life varying from a few moments to 20 years.

Combustion, compression, concrete, corrosion.

Convulsion, subversion, defection.

# THE SLEEPBRINGER

By Patrick Wright

In this undying state, which few can  
imagine,  
I try to convey my hell at hearing a bird  
wake  
somewhere at the serrated edge of time.

The ceiling breathes, like a horror  
movie,  
and childhood fears scuttle out from the  
wardrobe,  
like a troupe of clowns or hags.

In this mortuary of paused  
pronouncement,  
I pray for amnesia, where tick-tocking  
hands  
amplify the eddying of the synaptic  
charge.

At 12:32, in a sterile room, home  
appliances  
hum to themselves; steady vibrations  
which betray warm cleavage of puerile  
blackness.

My pulse is disastrously conscious, and  
as the paracetamol dissolves in the pit of  
my stomach, the urge to sleep merges  
with blunt desire for oblivion.

Hooded windows whisper soliloquies,  
and dead sunlight, formerly painted on

the bed and carpet,  
is now warmth and moisture, ghost of  
yesterday,  
as it animates my flesh.

Through my sighs and anxious turning,  
lips are lonely, while pins and needles  
offer the night's sole sensual touch.

2:15, and between two worlds, each  
intolerable as the next,  
I imagine myself discarnate.

I drift outside,  
and explore nocturnal microcosms of  
plant life  
and arachnids, through eyes now  
weightless  
and impervious to confines of space-  
time.

I might go anywhere, anytime.

I'm omnipotent at the edge,  
as thoughts begin to cascade, accelerate.

Thoughts themselves roll in dreary  
circles,  
as language unfolds and words absurd.  
Like a serpent bites its own tail,  
reason consumes itself.

Yet the fates I create are not in the least

startling; they're abstract paintings  
which soothe  
with mosaics of infinite nature,  
which address lingering sadness with  
mute sense of possibility.

At 4:38 images infiltrate  
each pregnant second, with lungs  
incestuously breathing their dead  
offspring.

It's poisonous too, like mould and  
mildew,  
which I'm powerless to, which  
accumulate  
on windowsills and curtains.

Desperately I cower in a foetal position,  
with the room murmuring anything but  
nothing;  
a nothing I crave, which asks to curl up  
like a flower  
at the touch of frost.

This place is one without intimacy,  
since it's only I and this sundering half-  
light.  
All mirrors absorb me (if they see me at  
all),  
my asylum eyes too frightened to see  
themselves.

I glance at the clock again. It's 4:54.  
The creaking door, slightly ajar,  
spills in beams of incubating light;  
though I remain, for now,  
insulated from a lacerating outside,

by the aftermath of moon and the  
afterlife of owl,  
which might linger long enough  
for one more chance to sleep.

Like every drought prays for a deluge,  
paralysis, a saviour; an ocean, a place to  
drown;  
a knife, a chance to cut.

And odiously dawn arrives like a  
distant relative -  
one estranged from the family.  
Interiors bathed in pale blue,  
which I shut out with ever-reddening  
anguish.

Dawn rays violate the day to birth.  
It's treachery: the night failing to  
replenish me  
with dreams and respite.

I wish to be guillotined, steam-rolled  
with waves of absence, which sweep  
over stale conflicts  
and stale eyes, which burn in the  
morning's premature flush.

The sun's blushing hemispheres rise  
unashamedly, roused by birdcalls.  
Noises soon proliferate, the world  
waking to its ready routine.

A sunrise apathetic to belated  
numbness,  
and with each disturbance my pillow  
wants to smother.

There's an irritable intensity to everything –  
so much so I'm murderous in my intent  
to asphyxiate whoever wants to wake  
me, as if exhaustion bypassed morality,  
made a monster of me.

My body a carcass which asks to revel in  
its condition,  
offers a preview of what it's like  
to die and not want to come back,  
with sudden resentment for all beauty,  
and how it jump-starts such hearts to  
life.

What's more beautiful now are  
hypnagogic states –  
the hallucinations –

which anticipate the toy-like world of  
dreams and somnolence I find myself  
thrust.

Another fragment of unconsciousness  
arrives, with memories lining up like a  
gallery of failed frescoes, with  
repression flowing back as a tide  
without threshold.

The miracle of sleep lulls me, and for all  
onlookers stooping over my body,  
paints false eyes over closed lids – like  
post-mortem photography.

Strange stills escort me on the way to  
nonbeing:  
stars, imperfect as people, too recondite

to reach,  
on some far arm of the galaxy,  
a cosmos devoid of gravity,  
its barrenness too mocking to call a  
friend;

And rained-soaked chairs outside a  
crematorium,  
at a timid toddler's height, in which  
death was not understood,  
though sensed in between garden  
shrubs or forgotten faces

– and the spinning of a vertiginous  
fairground wheel.

Each are twisted together in braids of  
nonsense, or in meaning too insoluble to  
interpret.



# DEATH WISH CHAMELEON IV

By Cricket Corleone

Photos © Richard A. Meade



The sun from a nearby widow blazes in over Dustin's face as she lies sleeping. A moment passes before she flutters her eyes back into waking life. Dustin covers her face from the intrusion of light burning against her face. It is a comforting burn, but Dustin, being massively hungover from the night before, takes its coverage as a deliberate annoyance brought on by the universe or some powerful force greater than herself. "Fuck," she says as she pulls one of her pillows up over her face and smothers herself.

From under the darkness of her pillow she hears someone say, "You're awake." Dustin pulls the pillow off her face and looks toward the foot of the bed. She sees Greta sitting on the floor facing her. Scattered around the floor, like a circle enclosing Greta into it, are photographs she has taken. On those photos are notes written in black ink. Dustin sits up and stares at Greta for a moment, "What the... how... why are you in my apartment?"

Greta laughs a little to herself, "I figured you wouldn't remember much. You were drunk, you could barely walk, so I took you home."

Dustin tries to recap the night before in her head as she stretches her arms and cracks her back. "That still doesn't explain why you are still here," she continues.

Greta stands up and goes to a nearby end table, she grabs a mug from the table and brings it over to Dustin.

"What is this?" Dustin says skeptically.

"It's just coffee... well, a little something extra in it to ease the hangover."

Dustin smells the coffee and then turns her head to gag a little. "Crude oil. This isn't going to cut it, sorry."

Greta walks back to the end table and grabs a glass of bloody Mary that she cooked up earlier in Dustin's kitchen. "I thought you might complain, so I made you this as a backup."

Dustin takes the glass of bloody Mary and exchanges it with the coffee. Dustin starts to drink the bloody Mary down in gulps. Greta sits on the end of the bed and watches her. Part of the watching consists of comedy, and concern. Once the glass is emptied, Dustin lets out a big sigh and wipes around her mouth with one of her arms. She then lies back on the bed and closes her eyes resting them. "So... you never told me why you are still here?"

Greta takes the glass from Dustin's hand and puts it onto the floor next to the bed. "I was too drunk to go home on my own, and you insisted I stayed." Greta holds back the rest of what happened waiting for the right moment where it wouldn't seem uncomfortable.

"That doesn't sound like me?" Dustin says.

"And then you said..." Greta stops mid sentence and flattens out the blankets around her over the bed.

"Said what?" Dustin says with curiosity.

"You said that you didn't want me to leave because then you would die

alone." Greta watches Dustin's face for any sign of revelation.

"Man, I must have been trashed. That doesn't even make any fucking sense." Dustin sits up and starts to get out of bed.

The two of them drop the conversation for the time being.

Dustin starts to walk toward the bathroom near her room. She stops before the scattered photos, "What's all this shit?"

Greta goes to gather the photos off of the floor, "Sorry, just one of my projects."

Dustin steps over them and goes to the bathroom. She closes the door behind her as the two continue conversation with each other from each side.

"How was the Bloody Mary?" Greta asks.

"It was alright, it could have had a little more tabasco sauce in it, I like them to jolt me with the flames of hell." Dustin says with sarcasm.

"Oh, sorry about that... I wasn't sure how much to put in it... too much?" Greta says feeling badly.

"Uh, just a tad." Dustin responds.

There is a moment of silence. Dustin sits on the toilet as she finished going to the bathroom, a wave of guilt floods over her as she struggles to thank Greta for

the morning drinks which she knows was only meant to be a kind gesture.

"The uh... I liked..." She stops herself unable to form her words correctly. A moment passes and Greta can hear the sound of the toilet flushing. Dustin soon opens the door and moves past Greta to a dresser. She opens the drawers looking for something fresh to change into. "The bloody mary that is... it wasn't half bad."

Greta realizes this as Dustin's attempt to thank her. "You're welcome," Greta says.

Dustin looks over at Greta a moment, "Yeah, whatever. So... how long are you planning on staying? Cause... I have shit to do today." Dustin strips out of the clothing she has passed out in and changes into an outfit almost similar to the one she was just in.

Greta laughs a little to herself.

"What are you laughing at?" Dustin says in a guarded way.

"No, it's nothing. It's just... your outfit..."

Dustin looks down at her outfit, "What, is there a stain? Oh... yeah. Whatever, I just like to keep things simple. That's all."

Greta shrugs it off.

Dustin and Greta move through the apartment to the living room.

"So, did we fuck or something? Cause my ass hurts." Dustin says as she sits on the couch. She lights a half smoked cigarette that is sitting in an ashtray on her coffee table.

Greta looks uneasy, "What? No?"

Dustin laughs a little to herself, "You should see your face. It's just a question, Greta."

Greta loosens up a little and sits on the couch next to Dustin. "Well... you did fall on your ass a lot last night so..."

The two of them laugh.

"That might be the problem right there?" Greta says through her laughter.

"Yeah, that might be it." Dustin agrees. "So, what's up with all the pictures?" she says as she points to the photos that in Greta's arms that had been scooped up from off her bedroom floor earlier.

"They're... postcards. Well, not real ones. Just ones that I made. I take certain photos and then write messages on them. Then I..." Greta stops herself not knowing how badly she will be bashed if she finishes her sentence.

"What?" Dustin says as she arches one of her eyebrows.

"I, like to take photos and then write messages on them and then... just sort of... leave them randomly in peoples mailboxes."



Dustin scoots away from her a little, "Are you some kind of psycho stalker or something?"

Greta laughs, "No. It's just something I do to... I don't know, make life a little more interesting for myself, and for someone one else."

Dustin takes the photos from Greta and flips through them as she reads each message. "You didn't sign your name on any of these?"

Greta looks on as Dustin reads them, "That's part of the point. I like to keep it a mystery. So when people check their mailboxes and they find these photos and they read the messages, it might... I don't know, add a little something different to their days?"

Dustin smiles a little, "Weird." She sighs. "But interesting."

Dustin, still looking through the photos, stops on one of a single cellist playing on a sparsely lite stage. "I know this place. This is that really amazing looking concert hall down on... whatever that street is... the one with like, five coffee shops on one block?" Greta scoots closer, "Yeah... that's funny, I never noticed it had so many coffee shops until you mentioned it." Greta says as she looks up in wonder.

"So, when did you start doing this? The postcard thing?" Dustin says as she examines the photo further reading the message out loud, "Don't be afraid to explore that other life inside your mind through moments of beautiful music..." Dustin looks at Greta like what she had just read was ridiculously moving. "That's your message?" she says playfully.

Greta takes the photos from Dustin, "Yeah... Why not? I thought it was a good thing to remind someone of." Greta laughs a little.

"You should have put something like... 'Hey, remember your soul? The one you traded in those years back in exchange for a minivan? Well, it hasn't forgotten... and it knows where you live... and SO DO I.'" Dustin laughs cynically.

Greta can't help but laugh as well. "I don't want to scare people. But, I think that might be deeper and more heartfelt than you want to believe." Greta says with a knowing look about her eyes.

Dustin stands up making her way to the kitchen. "Why not scare people? You want to make an impact on their day, right? I mean, what better way to get someone's attention than through fear? Everyone likes a good scare from time to time anyway, why do you think so many people go see horror movies?" Dustin takes a bottle of tequila out of a cupboard and removes the cap. She finds a shot glass as well and pours it to the top.

Greta watches as Dustin gulps down the shot and fights back the urge to make a face of disgust. "Do you really need that? It's like, ten in the morning?"

Dustin caps the tequila, "Yup. I do. Besides, I don't play by those rules... the whole, don't drink till afternoon bullshit. Who the fuck came up with that one anyway? Obviously someone who wanted to punish drinkers with bad hangovers. By making them wait till afternoon like some sort of sadist. I for one, won't tolerate that kind of deliberately rude, controlling and obnoxious behavior. They can piss off for all I care." Dustin says as she takes a big hit off her cigarette. She turns on the facet to the kitchen sink and puts the cigarette out under the stream of water.

Greta sits on the couch thinking to herself. She is impressed with Dustin's lack of concern for what others think, but part of her is filled with a motherly concern that she dare not admit feeling to the likes of Dustin who would just end up throwing it back in her face as an act of rebellion anyway. Instead, Greta turns her head up toward Dustin, "I'm

starving." She says as she awaits the same response from Dustin.

Dustin looks up at the ceiling and says, "Me too."

Greta and Dustin start to get ready to go out somewhere to breakfast.

"Where should we go to eat?" Greta asks.

"Anywhere... somewhere where they serve more bloody marys... with LESS tabasco sauce!"

Dustin and Greta grab their things and make their way out of Dustin's apartment.

"I had the strangest dream last night," Greta says as Dustin and she sit at an outside table of a restaurant. The two of them enjoying their sunny morning hang over breakfasts

"I was at this huge house that was supposed to be haunted... the most haunted house in the world. Anyway, I was with this woman... she looked a lot like that actress... Diane West? So, she was this ghost hunter and I was there just to be an assistant to her. These homeless people were squatting in the house and they all surrounded me at one point. It was making me uncomfortable 'cause they kind of looked like homeless zombies."

Dustin almost chokes on her food from laughing.

"No, listen!" Greta says trying to calm Dustin's laughter.

Dustin stops laughing and continues to listen as she eats her food.

“So anyway, the homeless people eventually disappeared somewhere in the house. I’m not sure where they went actually. Then at one point there was this loud symphonic music that just came through the walls out of nowhere. It was so loud we had to cover our ears to keep them from bursting. Then it went away. But periodically, out of nowhere, it would just... come back. Diane West told me it was music that had been left behind by an angry composer who died there. I was walking around all scared until I realized that the only way to gain the respect and friendship of these ghosts that haunted the place, was to dazzle them with some kind of music. There were these deer heads mounted on the wall in the living room, and they all turned their necks to look at me. So, instead of getting scared, I just started to sing this... Latin song... something Carmen Miranda might have sung. There were no real words but I remember one of the parts I sang was something like, ‘Un intimacy?’ But I don’t speak Latin and I don’t even think that means anything in any language. Still, it seemed to impress these deer heads and they started to sing backup. Then this mannequin in the room comes to life, and it’s this woman. She and I start to dance and sing the song together and we were having a lot of fun. Then, as she danced, she went to a window and threw herself out off the second floor. I ran down to see if she was alright, and she was gone. But I was still singing, as I started to cry. I just kept saying, ‘Un intimacy...’ over and over. I

looked up at the open window on the second floor and you were there looking down at me. And you said, ‘She’s gone now. She’s free.’ And I started to sob into my hands in the street. Then I woke up.” Greta pulls herself out of the memory of the dream and sits with Dustin in a moment of silence.

Dustin, still chewing her food, says, “I used to study dreams you know.”

Greta perks up in interest, “What do you think my dream meant?”

Dustin takes a sip of water and then sets it down as she tries to clear the food from her mouth to speak, “It means... you’re crazy.” Dustin starts to laugh.

Greta drops her shoulders down and shakes her head in embarrassment. “I can’t believe I fell for that one.”

Dustin continues to laugh.

“Seriously though, it was weird,” Greta says as she starts to eat her breakfast again and stares at her plate. Suddenly Greta looks pale as she looks up at Dustin. “Shit! I forgot my wallet! I left it on your kitchen counter last night after you went picking through it to find pictures of old boyfriends... or whatever you were trying to do!”

Dustin smiles, “I don’t have a clue.”

Greta looks for an answer to this problem on Dustin’s face. “Well, what are we going to do? I don’t have any money to pay for this, do you?”

Dustin drops her face and looks concerned and serious, "Shit... we're screwed." She leans in to Greta and whispers, "Get ready to run."

Greta looks shocked, "What?!"

Dustin sits back and starts to laugh, "I'm kidding! Jesus woman! I got it... I got it... relax."

Greta scoffs and rolls her eyes, "Is everything a joke to you?"

Dustin wipes her face as she finishes up her plate of food, "Yes." She pulls some money out of her pocket and places it on the table. "Hurry up and finish, I want to get out of here."

Greta eats a little faster.

Later that afternoon, Dustin and Greta are sitting outside Dustin's favourite book shop. The wide and tall brick wall behind their backs as people pass by them on the sidewalk. Dustin is smoking again as Greta periodically tries to blow the smoke away from her face.

"You smoke way too much, lady."

Dustin pays no attention to Greta's remark.

"Why are we sitting here again?" Greta questions.

"I like to watch the people who walk by." Dustin says.

Greta watches Dustin's face for a moment as she scans the people that pass. Then Greta joins in with her people watching in hopes of catching what it is that interests Dustin so much in this activity. People pass by on their lunch breaks or on their way to a meeting or some other location. Then Greta sees a man half a block up walking in their direction. It takes her a moment and then she buries her head in her arms, "Oh, GOD."

Dustin looks at Greta, "What? Is it the smoke again?"

Greta buries even more trying not to be noticed. "No. Just, don't say anything. I'm not here."

Dustin looks puzzled. She looks off in the direction of the man as he crosses the street toward them. "Who is he? Some ex boyfriend? A cop? Did you do something illegal?" Dustin says with an air of excitement.

"No, just... don't get his attention. I don't want him to see me here."

Greta seems genuinely uncomfortable so Dustin goes along with it until the man has passed by and is out of plain sight. "He's gone," Dustin says reassuringly.

Greta lifts her head a little to make sure. The man is nowhere to be seen. Greta lets out a breath of relief. "Thank you," she says as she rubs her eyes.

Dustin is tempted to probe Greta about the man but hesitates as she can see it is a painful topic.

Greta grabs the cigarette from Dustin's hand and takes a drag. She coughs the smoke out. "God, that is terrible!"

Dustin takes the cigarette back, "Is it really that bad?"

Greta covers her mouth in disgust, "Yes!" She looks at Dustin and realizes that she didn't mean the cigarette. "Oh, him... that's what you meant. Yes, it IS that bad." Greta wipes some wetness from her eyes stemming as a reaction to the cigarette. "Can we go now?" Greta stands up.

Dustin shrugs and agrees.

As the two of them walk downtown aimlessly, Greta starts to confess about the man she saw. "He's a guy I had an affair with. I mean, I don't usually do things like that, but I didn't know he was married. I didn't think about it. It just hadn't occurred to me is all. I should have noticed the first time I met him. He had no ring on, but I did notice a tan line around where a ring might have been. But I was too stupid to put two and two together. I just asked him if he was married, and he said he just went through a divorce. I didn't question any more than that. So, we started to meet up, and one thing led to another. I thought it was strange that he only wanted to meet me in the middle of the day and that he never took me back to his place. But I was so into him. He was so nice and he seemed to

actually enjoy my company. He actually listened to what I had to say as if he was truly interested in me as a person. And then... we got this room at a hotel... and then... we made love... and... I remember after, it told me I was beautiful. I actually believed he thought I was beautiful in that moment. My heart just... flooded up. So I told him he was the beautiful one. He got so shy," Greta says with a smile. "It was so cute." Her smile drops in a moment and she looks to the ground. "Then, after awhile, he started to push away from me. I didn't know what I had done wrong. I showed up at his house one day because I had been calling him and he wouldn't answer or return my calls. I was pissed! I mean, I just needed to know what was going on."

Dustin stops Greta, "How did you know where he lived?"

Greta looks at Dustin with a guilty look, "I followed him home from work one day. I wasn't stalking him. I just happened to see him as I was walking downtown taking photos. So, instead of walking up to him, I just decided to watch him. Then, I started to follow him. I knew it was wrong and I felt like a total weirdo... but I didn't know what else to do? And I was curious. I thought, maybe I would see him meet up with some other woman or something and then things would make sense and I could move on? When I saw him go into his house, I just knew it was his. I was tempted to knock on the door and talk to him. But I knew it would have seemed odd that I was there. So I didn't. I just walked away."

Dustin listens intently, "But you went back."

Greta sighs and stops in her tracks. She leans against the outside wall of a tall building, "Yes, I went back. And when he answered, I saw her... his wife... and his kids... he has a son and a daughter. I saw the ring on his finger. And I will never forget the look in his eyes. Total and utter shock and surprise. Like I had just stabbed him in the chest or something. His wife looked at me like she wondered if I was selling something or something..."

Dustin leans against the wall next to Greta.

Greta covers her face a little with her hands as she lives through this memory inside herself.

"What did you do?" Dustin says calmly.

"Nothing. I mean, I just said, 'Sorry, I must have the wrong address.' And then I turned... and walked away. He just closed the door behind me like I was no one."

Dustin starts to get angry, "That's it? I would have punched the fucker! What a dick!"

Greta starts to walk again and Dustin follows up behind her. "I don't want to hurt him, alright? I just wished I never met him is all. Now, all I have is this constant nagging reminder of him. Whenever I pass a place that we used to meet up. Whenever I see that hotel. Whenever some guy smiles at me, I

wonder what he wants and how he's going to fuck me over too. It ruined me."

Dustin grabs Greta's arm to stop her from walking.

"What?!" Greta says in frustration, "I told you the story, now let's just drop it! It doesn't matter anyway."



Dustin gets enraged, "It doesn't matter? Are you fucking kidding me? That asshole lies to you, uses you, and then treats you like a stranger to your face? That isn't nothing that is bull shit! And he shouldn't get away with it!" Dustin starts to turn in circles and pace in her rage.

Greta notices that Dustin seems to be going somewhere in her head that isn't

such a good place to go. Like she is being surrounded by some horrible memory not too dissimilar to Greta's own.

"What?! He gets to just fuck around on his wife and use woman like disposable fuck dolls and then go home and live out his happy little existence while these woman suffer in silence? It's "NOTHING" that they have been reduced to little more than WHORES without any thoughts or feelings or their own? I mean, what happens to him? Huh? When does he get his?!"

Greta stops Dustin, "Hey, it's alright. Calm down."

Dustin pulls away and regroups.

Greta speaks as calmly as possible to keep from enraging Dustin again, "I'll get over it... eventually. It just got to me when I saw him is all. I mean, I loved the guy. I still do. I just wish none of it ever happened. But I don't want to hurt him just because he hurt me."

Dustin looks Greta in the eyes, "YOU SHOULD WANT TO HURT HIM. I am so sick of this way that woman are pushed down. That if we act out in some way that might show our true feelings after getting fucked over by some asshole... that somehow WE are the psychos. FUCK THAT. I say, if someone fucks you over, fuck them over TEN TIMES worse. Get your revenge. They might tell you that it doesn't make anything better, but believe me sister, IT DOES. You'll FEEL better once you cut them down off their fucking crosses."

Greta smiles a little, "That's a funny comparison? Crosses? I mean, if they are on crosses, wouldn't that mean they are suffering already?"

Dustin stops to think about her statement, but refuses to analyze her in her anger. "Whatever, my point is... you should get him back!"

Greta shakes her head in disagreement as she walks away from Dustin. "No. No... we are not even going there." Greta stops for a moment and cocks her head to one side, "You know what I just realized?"

Dustin is lighting another cigarette, "That he should be castrated?"

Greta turns to Dustin, "No... I just now realized, you have NEVER even told me your name?"

The two of them stop in thought for a moment, then they start to laugh.

"Oh shit... I didn't even realize," Dustin says as she jokingly extends one hand to Greta. "Hi, I'm Dustin. I'll be your 'femi-nazi' for the day!"

They continue to laugh.

"Dustin... that's a cool name. Is it your real name?" Greta asks.

"Shit, I don't even know anymore." Dustin says as she takes Greta by the arm and pulls her off in to some unknown direction.

"Where are we going?" Greta asks through laughter that is slowly dying.

"You'll see. It's time you learned to express yourself on a deeper level than just pictures of flowers and anonymous post cards."

The two of them head down the street in the direction of a sports equipment shop a few blocks up the way.

After leaving the sports shop, Dustin and Greta start to walk down the late afternoon city sidewalk. The sidewalk seems almost empty as this is the time between after lunch breaks for people at work, and the evening traffic that will spring up in just a few hours.

Greta smiles in a daze, "Wow, I just now realized we have wasted an entire day doing absolutely nothing."

Dustin is carrying a large bag of goodies she bought at the sports store. "It won't be a total waste," she says with a determined look in her eyes.

Greta grabs the bag from Dustin and pulls out a large metal bat that she has purchased. "What, are we going to play a game of baseball?" Greta hands the bag back to Dustin and then pretends to be hitting a home run with an invisible ball before her. She takes a swing and then pretends to see it going miles and miles away from them.

Dustin grabs Greta's bag from off her shoulders and starts to pick through it. "You're weird enough... did you ever take any pictures while you were with

that asshole? Say... of the hotel room... or... his house?" Dustin says slyly.

Greta is completely oblivious as she continues to win her pretend game of baseball. "Yeah... but what does that have to do with anything?" she says as Dustin pulls out a photo of the man's house.

"EVERTHING." Dustin says with a glare in her eye.

Greta turns to Dustin and tries to understand what she is saying. She then realizes that Dustin is looking at the photo of the man's house and seems to have some sort of evil plan building in her head.

"What are you..." Greta tries to grab the photo from Dustin who holds it away from her.

"I actually, know this house," Dustin says gleefully.

Greta struggles to get the photo back from Dustin but her first attempts fail. "Hey! Give me that!"

Dustin scans over the photo one more time and then casually hands it back to Greta.

Greta tucks the photo back in her bag as the two continue walking.

Further down the road, there is nothing but silence between Dustin and Greta. Greta, having decided awhile back, is trying not to provoke any conversation as to what is going on in Dustin's head

and why she wanted to look at the photo of the man's house so much. She also didn't want to know why they had stopped at that sports shop and why the only item Dustin seemed to be interested in was this long hard metal bat that Greta is now holding in her hands.

"So... what do you want to do now? We could... I don't know... catch a movie or something?" Greta says to cut through the tension.



Dustin does not answer.

As the two walk further, Greta feels a panic. They are getting closer and closer to the block that Greta's past lover lives on. She tries to pull them back with suggestions on places to go in the opposite direction. But none of it seems

to work and Dustin continues forward with determination.

Dustin and Greta stand before the home of Greta's past lover. A large white, two story home, with roses lined up along a picket fence. It was a home one could have personally singled out from some fantasy issue of Home & Garden.

Dustin looks at Greta and lets out a sigh, "Ready?"

Greta, stumbles on her words, "Ready... ready for... what?" she says nervously.

Dustin grabs Greta's hand and leans in to her, "REVENGE."

Greta pulls back a little and smiles nervously, "You're crazy. I don't want to do this. I don't know what it is you're thinking about doing, but I don't want to be a part of it." Greta starts to walk away.

Dustin exhales, "Fine. Suit yourself." She heads up the steps to the front porch of the home.

Greta turns back to face Dustin and realizes, she is going in there with or without her. In a panic, Greta runs to join Dustin on the porch. "What are you doing? You're just going to walk in there and... what? Beat him up?" Greta says in confusion.

Dustin laughs a little. "Don't be stupid. I didn't come here to beat anyone up. I am going to see if anyone is home, if not, we have the place to ourselves, and then the real fun starts," she says with

excitement in her eyes as she knocks on the front door.

Greta paces nervously not knowing what to do but not taking the time to run away, though every fiber in her being is screaming that she should get the hell out of there, part of her also wants to stay and see what Dustin is going to do next.

There is no answer at the door. Dustin peaks inside the windows of the house. The house is empty. No one in sight, not even a cat or a dog lurking about. So, Dustin takes the opportunity to pick the lock.

Greta sees this and her heart races even more. "We can't do this. We shouldn't be doing this," she says to Dustin, but Dustin ignores her.

The door pops open.

"Ladies first," Dustin says to Greta allowing her first passage through the doorway and into the home.

Greta is frozen in place, so Dustin grabs her arm and yanks her inside the house closing the door behind them.

Walking around the house, there are photos of the man with his family. Little league photos of his son. Plaques and awards laid out like some sort of forced display of a normalcy mask. The house was obviously decorated by the wife. Fancy mirrors, fake flowers, antique vase here and there. Not a spot on the white carpet. Although, there are a few

places that still have his touch, a sports magazine next to the sofa.

Dustin picks up the magazine. "You fucked a guy who reads Sports Illustrated?" she says with a hint of disgust.

Greta can't help but laugh a little. "Funny. Can we go now?"

Dustin puts the magazine back down and keeps looking around the house. "So, what did you see in this guy anyway?"

Greta comes across a photo of her past lover and picks it up. She stares deeply into his eyes to a point where it almost seems to be staring back at her. "I don't know... I feel, connected to him? Like... I have these horrible panic attacks when I am sleeping. I wake up, my heart beating fast... and this feeling like my room is somehow... floating off into space... and that I am completely alone..." Greta takes a moment as she is lost in the picture with him. "...he made me... not feel alone."

Dustin listens to every word Greta is saying. She can feel the pain of Greta's heartbreak. Greta's body is so full of this pain that it is amazing she doesn't implode all together from it. "I think I know what you mean..." Dustin says as she tries to block out the empathy like it is some kind of sick rapist having its way with her insides. "But he's a fucker. I mean, look where he left you? Used up and tossed aside like garbage. I think it is bullshit that he should be able to get away with it."

She hands Greta the bat.

Greta looks confused. "What am I supposed to do with that?"

Dustin smiles, "You can start with that photo of him... pretend it's his face... and just... bash the fucker in."

Greta won't take the bat. "No. That won't solve anything."

Dustin takes the bat in hand and walks around looking at the mirrors on the white walls. "No... but it'll make you feel so much better."

Greta starts to walk toward the front door, "I don't want to do this."

Dustin takes a long hard look at her reflection in one of the mirrors. She isn't sure if it is herself she sees, or all the things that ever hurt her. Or is it a monster, waiting to break free? With the grasp of the metal bat tightening in her grip, the rage is released in a breath that follows the words, "I do." She smashes the mirror to pieces.

Greta jumps and turns around to see what is happening.

She stands back, wide eyed and shocked. Like watching a wild animal tare through its prey, Dustin is smashing everything in sight. This look in her eyes says that the demon has come out. That this has nothing to do with Greta's past lover, but the principal of the idea that people cause pain, and Greta can clearly see Dustin's pain, just as Dustin had felt Greta's earlier.



Dustin's face is turning red as she smashes every family portrait in sight. She smashes in the television. Kicks the couch over. It wouldn't matter much if Greta tried to stop her, this was a force bigger than the both of them. There was no turning back now. Tears start to well up in Dustin's eyes as Greta can hear words coming out in broken sentences. Greta isn't sure at first what Dustin is saying, but finally makes out the words, "I hate you." After the words are said a few more times, Dustin collapses in exhaustion.

Greta stands back with tears in her eyes as well. And now the empathy is turned, though to Greta, this is only a natural part of who she is. That ability to connect, even if she herself often feels lost out in space, alone.

She snaps back to reality as she looks over the destroyed room. "We have to get out of here!"

Greta helps Dustin up.

Dustin wipes her face down. "WAIT. One more thing. Give me your panties."

Greta looks at Dustin like she is nuts. "Excuse me?"

Dustin forcefully removes Greta's panties from under her dress. Greta tries to resist but Dustin is stronger than her. With the panties in hand, Dustin tosses them next to a smashed photo of his family.

"Are you crazy?! He's going to know it was me!"

Dustin looks Greta in the eyes, "Exactly."

Dustin and Greta make a quick getaway out the front door, not even stopping to close things up behind them.

A block away from the scene of the crime, Greta is grilling Dustin. "Fuck! Do you realize how stupid that was?!"

Dustin is calm, "What? Wrecking that fucked up lie of a home?"

Greta scoffs in amazement over Dustin's oblivious behavior. "That was fucking stupid! But leaving evidence that I was there? That was fucking moronic! He could take them to the cops?!"

Dustin laughs, "He won't."

Greta tries to catch up with Dustin's way of thinking, "How do you know?!"

Dustin and Greta are crossing the street, stopping cars in their tracks like they don't even exist. The road, the street, the entire city is made up of two people in this moment, just them.

"He won't take them to the cops because he will know they are yours and won't have a way of explaining it... and he will be all freaked out and try and find some excuse to let it all go. He won't want anyone to know who you are or why you did it."

Greta gets angry, "But I DIDN'T DO IT! YOU DID!" Greta starts to walk away from Dustin like she has just murdered someone and does not want to be seen with the killer.

Dustin turns to face Greta, "You didn't have to go. But you did. Part of you wanted something to happen. Part of you was curious. And part of you really enjoyed watching his little world be torn to pieces. Just like he tore yours to pieces. You may be floating off in space, but today, I was your co-pilot. So now you don't have to be alone. And you don't need him to be strong for you anymore because I have just proved to you that he is not untouchable... and you are not helpless."

Greta stops, the words hit her like a ton of bricks falling over her body. Part of her knows that what Dustin is saying, is dead on. She turns back around and walks toward Dustin. "Maybe you are right. But I love him, and when you love

someone you don't do things like that. You just don't. You tried to make me prove that I did not care for someone that I am totally in love with. Now, not only do I feel alone, but I hate myself for shitting all over his world. I feel more alone now than I did before. And I don't need some crazy head case trying to convince me that I am not free. I saw the way you smashed his shit to hell... you are NOT my co-pilot. You are the fucking meteor that's gonna crash into my room and take me down with it. YOU ARE NOT FREEDOM. YOU ARE RUIN." Greta turns away and keeps on walking.

Dustin stands there letting Greta's harsh words sink in. In a way, she too knows that what was said, was also true. Here she is, on a mission to get killed, and she does what she sees as a freeing, liberating act of rebellion, but when it is all said and done, how free does she really feel? No amount of mirror smashing is going to take away her reflection. Then, Dustin smiles with one thought to her advantage, Dustin yells out to Greta who is already a block away, "And what? You are better than me for doing nothing? I would rather be the meteor and go out with a bang then be the one floating off in space alone and in pain and doing nothing about it! And you're right, I'm not free! Yet." Dustin keeps that last word to herself and speaks it under her breath. She turns the other direction and walks off.

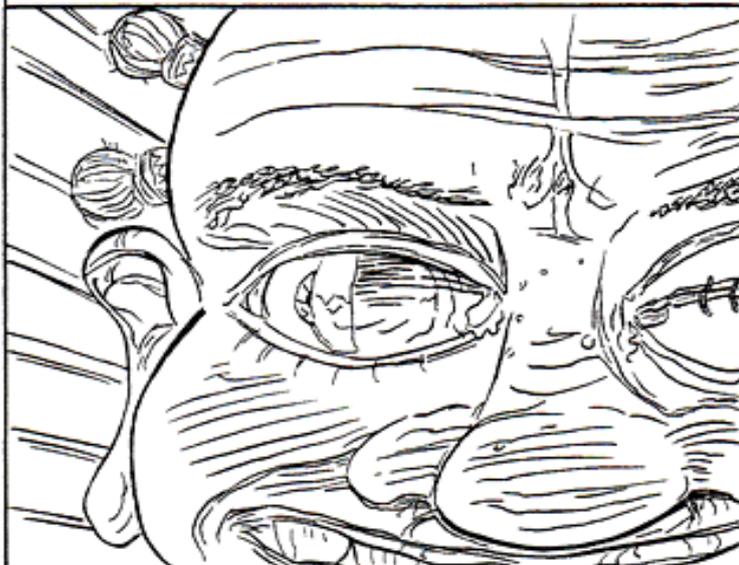
It feels like the last time Greta and Dustin will ever speak to one another. Though they walk different paths in opposite directions, in a way, the two of

them are the same person, struggling to break free from the sides of themselves that feel the most connected. Greta tries to ignore the idea that she could want revenge against the man she is so painfully in love with, and Dustin loathes the thought that she might actually be lost out in space alone and in pain herself.

"What's a girl to do?" Dustin says to herself as she pulls out a cigarette and lights it. But part of her can't ignore the fact that she feels bad for upsetting her new friend. She ponders the thought that if the two of them are that fucked up and heading in different directions in life, who was saving who? And why did Dustin, the girl with the death wish, even feel that urge to save anyone in the first place when she doesn't even want to save herself?

She starts to feel that need for self mutilation kicking in, like an old friend... or enemy. Now, flashes of the things that lead her to want to die in the first place are flooding her mind with chaos, like an uncontrollable riot in the streets... But all of it is happening inside of herself. And the buzz given by the cigarette she is smoking won't make it go away. So she blocks the pain out with a fury, "Tonight, I am going to get laid. I am going to get drunk and pick up on the creepiest fucker in the bar, and FORCE him to end this pathetic excuse for a life I call me. And that is all there is to it." She bucks up like a cold hearted bitch with blood in her eyes. The mission continues. And Greta is too far away now to stop it.

TWO SEVENTHS OF YELLOWED FILET - O'-  
FISH EYEBALL CATCHES FLICKERS OF VISION.



THE SCOOPING SPOON PRESSES HARDEDGED  
+ COLD INTO PARTLY ANAESTHETIZED SOCKET.



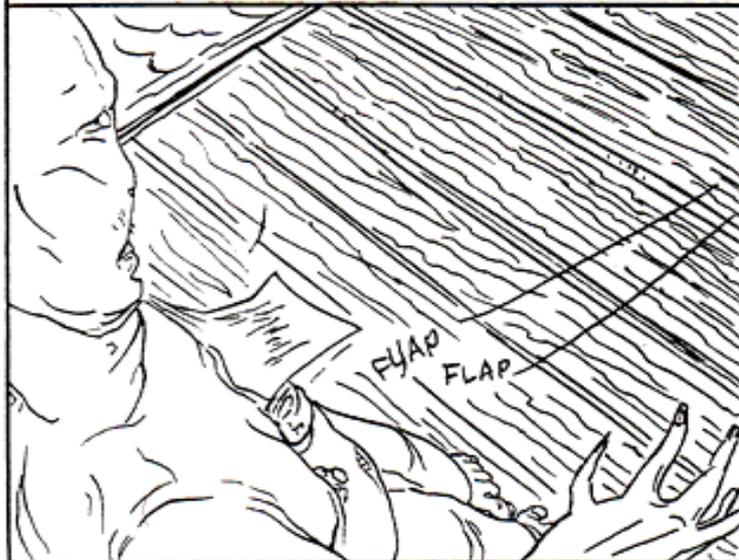
THE 'SPACE' PUNK PIRATE STRUGGLES, STIFLING THE  
SPUNK OF HIS PUMPED UP PIRATE PUPPET STUMP.



SNAP TO! COUGHLIKE SCRATCHING (AGAIN)! COARSE  
METAL FINGERNAILS NEARLY TEARING PERICARDIUMS!

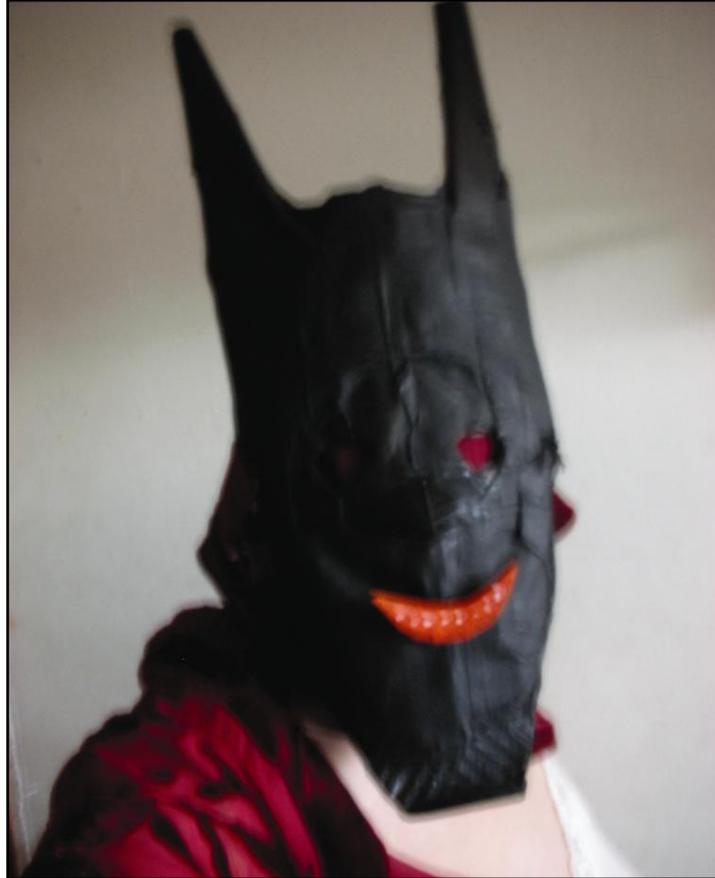


CHESTGAPE TARPAPER, WEAKLY TACKED, FLAPS  
TACKILY TO THE ALMOST TOO COOL SEA BREEZE;



AS IF AN EPAULETTE FOR A NAPLESS CAPTAIN OF  
SOME GREAT THING. YES, ONE WHO DOES...NOT...DOZE..





## THE GOOD SCHIZOID

By Michelle Facchini

Photo © [littleshiva.com](http://littleshiva.com)

She wandered on her own through the bright busy city streets. One half of her teased the other, 'I dare you to think of the most heinous thing anyone could do.'

'Stop!' she answered out loud in despair, begging the bloodthirsty gory deviant scenes in her head to go away and leave her alone.

She couldn't help but plumb the depths of human evil, a destructive compulsion

that conjured up all manner of psychic cinema within her. The movie shorts were an endless parade of victims being tortured and screaming in pain, decapitated corpses, grey dead children, mutilated and molested, surreal snapshots of rituals involving dead babies, and sexual perversion. 'Who is it that is doing this to them?' Her face contorted with terror, 'If I'm thinking of it, it must be me.'

She made up complex rules, as long as she kept battling these rogue taunts, there could still be a doubt that she really did commit these atrocities. Silence was an admission of guilt.

She did very well to hold it together on the outside, to hide what was really going on inside her. Once any contact with another human being occurred, her disguise activated, she would smile on cue, talk on cue, she was practised at detecting another's pitch and tone and pause in conversation that allowed her to make the right faces and the right noises as though she was really there. This gave her a chance of constantly defending herself against herself, if that made any sense.

In this moment though, no one was talking with her. She wanted to cry, 'I can't even run away.' She panicked unable to dull the hysteria that gnawed at her constantly, even in her sleep. 'I'm disgusting, I can't live with this anymore.' Unaware that her hands had reached her temples, she let out a huge scream that sent people flying to get out of her way.

These demons of hers were interrupted, as she watched a young guy, a bike courier, being struck side on by a vehicle travelling much too fast. The cyclist was flung from his bike and hurtled head first into the dark bitumen directly beside her. Her eyes widened and her mouth already opened in mid-scream, turned to shock.

Racing toward him, she absent-mindedly threw off her new coat and

draped it over him carefully, wanting to keep him warm, she knew about accidents. He seemed deeply concussed fading in and out of consciousness, gashes in his forehead and legs flowing rivulets of blood. Someone picked up his bike off the road, while another phoned for emergency assistance and she squatted next to him offering words of comfort until an ambulance and police arrived.

After stabilising the injured man, the paramedics handed back her now heavily blood-stained overcoat. They returned to their flashing van and she quietly watched them roll away, imagining the van crushing in on itself, imploding, with bright red blood and purple and brown viscera of the paramedic splattering down the side of the passenger door. She cringed and squeezed her eyes shut.

The police had arrived and were already taking statements from the distressed driver of the vehicle and any passers-by that might be called upon as witnesses. She was asked to describe what she saw of the accident. 'He landed right beside me, the way he flew through air, it was horrific...'

Her thoughts and her journey resumed another depravity. She imagined what someone would say to her, if they saw what she dredged up. 'You sick fuck!' they would yell. 'This never used to happen. I just want peace.'

She made plans to overdose on something, anything so that she could slip into a nice deep sleep and never

wake up, 'and if I could just split myself in two...'

On this last thought, she turned the sharp-edged corner of an old low brown brick building, a pub, and came upon an old man lying prostrate against a urine soaked patch of ground close to the entrance.

On her approach, she noticed people walking past, holding their noses ignoring him. She was about to do the same but something about him caught her attention for much longer than expected. He didn't look right, didn't look like an old bloke that had too much to drink and was sleeping it off.

Her eyes narrowed, no, he looked all wrong. Stopping to observe him, she noticed his eyes were half-open but they had the character of fading fish eyes, his mouth was frothing with hardly any breath disturbing it. He looked stiff rather than having that relaxed floppy position that most have when they've had too much.

She backtracked to a nearby phone box tossing her bloodied coat into a trash can along the way. After calling an ambulance and giving them directions, she had trouble describing the victim, all she could say was that 'he just doesn't look right.'

Watching them from a distance, they came anyway, soon finding they needed a second ambulance with some more sophisticated looking equipment. She noticed a couple of guys exiting the pub expressing alarm at recognising the sick

old man being tended too. "Hey, isn't that old Frank, the guy that had the bad car accident a couple of years ago?" "Yeah," the other one replied, "I heard the woman died a few days later...terrible business, nobody was really able to work out what happened, he got charged just the same."

She sighed, and went on her way. 'Who the fuck do I think I am, some kind of good fucking samaritan? Her tortuous internal monologues froze as she became aware of an old woman lost and flustered, rushing up to her. "Are you ok?" she quizzed the old woman compassionately.

"I'm looking for my husband, I was told he was sick and lying in a pub somewhere around here, do you know where this pub is?"

"Yes," she wanted to be helpful.

She gave the old woman directions and cautioned her that he had already been taken to the local hospital. The old woman thanked her and went on her way.

With no one to engage her in conversation she resumed some fresh internal hell upon herself while randomly heading towards the local police station. The guy being pulled out of the police van seemed vaguely familiar, she crinkled her forehead, 'where have I seen him before?' too distracted by her own thoughts to hear him cry out, "I heard this god-awful scream and looked to see where it was coming from."





## **SWEETIE-PIE BEGONIA BABYHEAD**

**By Hank Kirton**

**Photo © Sid Graves**

*This story was inspired by true events.*

She was playing in her sandbox...

Wait. Hang on. First things first:

Sweetie-Pie Slotnick had been a beautiful baby. She entered the world easily, unexpectedly, arriving on

Christmas morning, 1967. Born a month premature, her mother, sixteen-year-old Miriam Prunella Slotnick, was sitting on the toilet in her parent's house at 115 Grunyon Avenue in Alabaster, Ohio when a sudden burst of fluid poured from her and scary contractions seized

her abdomen and fifteen minutes later, Sweetie-Pie slid outside after a single maternal push and landed in the toilet with a bloody splash.  
Just like that.

Sweetie-Pie Slotnick had entered the world head first, anxious to begin. She didn't cry. She let out a strange, high-pitched mewl and gasped and squirmed and struggled in the cold, crimson water.

Miriam - for just a second - considered flushing the toilet.

Instead, she rescued her drowning daughter and wrapped her in a bath towel. She gazed dry-eyed at the tiny pink newborn and said, "Hi there, short-stuff," in a squeaky, cartoon voice. And then it was time to introduce her to the new grandparents.

They were not pleased to meet her.

Miriam named her child Sweetie-Pie Begonia Slotnick. Three months later, Miriam ran away from home, eventually settling in the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco where she joined the Process Church of the Final Judgment, married a thirty-five-year-old streetmime named Paul Kindersley, acquired a heroin habit, and a year later gave birth to a son she named Luscious Barberpole Slotnick Kindersley IV.

Her parents, Edgar and Edie Slotnick, raised Sweetie-pie Begonia as if she were their very own daughter.

That is to say, badly.

Sweetie-pie developed normally in all aspects except one: her head (and the little gray brain within). Born with the rarest form of microcephaly, her head simply did not change or grow or mature. Her pudgy little babyface remained blue-eyed and hairless, toothless and cute for her entire life.

Now then, where were we?

She was playing in her sandbox. It was deep in July - searing and sticky and Sweetie-Pie wore pink hotpants and a red tubetop that barely contained her large breasts. Her hotpants bulged lumpy over the diaper beneath. Sweetie-Pie had just turned eighteen and had the voluptuous body of a 1940's burlesque stripper (and the head of a shaved squirrel monkey).

Pushing up piles of sand with her hands, stabbing little holes with her fingers, Sweetie-Pie emitted gurgling, sputtering noises through her tiny toothless babymouth.

"Fuck, man. There she is..."

Rod, Emmett and Scoop, three neighborhood boys, peeked at Sweetie-Pie from behind the fence that bordered the Slotnick's vibrant, immaculate lawn.

"Holeeee! Wouldja lookit that ass!" said Emmett.

"Yeah! Phoo! An' get a load a' them jugs!" said Scoop, feeling-up the empty air in front of him with a lusty squeezing motion. "Like Candy Samples!"

"Yeah, but..." said Rod.

"Yeah but nothing," said Scoop. "She's fine."

"Yeah, but..."

"Ah, shuddup, Roddy," said Emmett. "Why you gotta crunch the fun outta everything? Shit."

Rod went silent.

"Hey Scoop?" Emmett said.

"Yeah?"

"Would you ball her?" Emmett wanted to know.

Scoop's young, freckled face turned thoughtful. He wiped away a bead of sweat from his temple and then stroked his chin, weighing and surveying the reality of intercourse with Sweetie-Pie Begonia Babyhead. "Yeah," he said finally. "I believe I would."

Emmett nodded his concurrence. "Me too. I do believe."

The screendoor flapped open and Mrs. Slotnick bustled outside. Scoop, Emmett and Rod ducked behind the fence.

Watching through the slats, they saw Mrs. Slotnick grab Sweetie-Pie's hand and pull her out of the sandbox. She attached a short leash to the decorative choker around Sweetie-Pie's neck and then guided her toward the house like a lost baby burro. Sweetie-Pie hadn't learned to walk yet and she crawled

across the lawn, her calloused knees greenstained from the grass.

Once they were inside the three boys turned and sat on the ground, backs resting against the fence.

"What ya wanna do now?" said Rod. "Go swimmin'?"

"Nah," said Scoop. "It's too hot."

"That don't even make sense!" said Rod. "What about we go over to Leeman's Pond and race flameboats?"

"Eehhh..." said Scoop.

They heard the screendoor flap open again and they turned and peered through the fenceslats.

Mr. and Mrs. Slotnick walked arm-in-arm to the tan Buick parked in the driveway, got inside. They both wore hats.

"Are they leaving?" said Rod.

"Where's Babyhead?"

"Shit, I think they're leaving her behind," said Emmett.

The boys became lost in sudden thought.

They turned and regained their previous postures - sitting on the ground, backs against the fence.

"I can't believe they'd leave her alone like that," said Emmett.

"I know, right? Some parents..." said Scoop.

"They're probably not gonna be gone long. Probably just went to the corner store or something..." said Rod, already growing nervous about where the conversation was leading them.

"No way, man," said Emmett. "They were wearing hats."

"I can't believe they left her alone like that," said Scoop.

"Some parents. They neglect their kids. Didja hear what happened to their first daughter?" said Emmett.

"No. What?" said Rod.

"Ran away from home. Died from a drug overdose a few years later."

"No shit?" said Scoop.

"I'm tellin' you. They are really shitty parents."

The boys were silent for awhile.

Then Scoop said, "Maybe we should check on her. Make sure she's alright."

"You think?" said Emmett.

Rod shook his head. "No way. Are you nuts? We can't go in there. That's breaking and entering."

"Not if we have good intentions..." said Scoop.

"Yeah..." Emmett agreed.

Rod was still shaking his head. He swallowed dry spit and said, "No. Come on, guys..."

"Shut up, Roddy, you big pussy." Scoop stood up. "Come on. Let's just take a quick look."

Emmett stood up.

Rod was still shaking his head as he stood and followed his friends through the gate and across the lush, perfect lawn to the backdoor. He prayed it was locked.

Scoop pushed open the door.

The boys entered the house, the kitchen.

The house was clean and smelled of dried spice.

There was a rustling sound coming from the next room; material scraping against material. The boys looked at each other, and then Scoop led them toward the sound.

Sweetie-Pie was taking a restless nap, sucking her thumb. She was covered by a soft pink blanket and caged within a huge playpen. Decapitated dolls littered the fuzzy padded floor of the pen.

The boys approached with silent caution, staring at the strange babygiant with wide-eyed awe. This was the first time any of them had observed Sweetie-Pie up-close. She was even more

extraordinary now that all the details of her physical anomaly were revealed.

A Sesame Street mobile hung above the pen, the smiling cartoon faces of muppets turning gently in the air; Big Bird, Ernie and Bert, Oscar the Grouch, Grover. Sweetie-Pie kicked her legs, struggling inside her babydreams, and the blanket pulled away.

She was topless and the boy's eyes became riveted to her large breasts.

Scoop tried to exhale tension.

Rod whispered, "Okay, she's okay. Let's go."

"Sh," said Scoop.

Sweetie-Pie's eyes fluttered open. She popped her thumb out of her mouth. The thumb was pink and wrinkled and clean - the rest of her hand was gray with grime.

"Nice going, Roddy. You woke her up," said Scoop.

"Come on. Let's go, guys..." said Rod.

"Hey, Emmett?" said Scoop. "Dare me to feel her up?"

Emmett nodded, still staring at Sweetie-Pie. "Yeah," he said softly. "I dare you."

Scoop placed his hands on the wall of the playpen, didn't move for a full minute, and then climbed over the side.

Sweetie-Pie had rolled over on her back. She looked at Scoop with big, curious eyes.

Scoop kneeled beside her. "Look at these tits," he murmured, more to himself than his friends. He reached out and gently palmed Sweetie-Pie's left breast. She gurgled and kicked her feet.

Emmett and Rod watched.

Scoop moved his hand to her other breast and gave it a soft squeeze.

"How do they feel?" Emmett wanted to know.

Scoop nodded. "Nice. Come feel for yourself."

"Yeah..." Emmett climbed into the playpen.

Sweetie-Pie revealed her pink gums in a wide, benign smile and warbled: "Deeeee-la-da-dooo..." causing clear, watery drool to gather on her bottom lip.

Emmett placed his hand on Sweetie-Pie's breast.

"Whoa," he said. "Soft..."

"Nice, huh?" said Scoop.

Rod backed away from the playpen and nervously stationed himself by the window to watch for the Slotnick's inevitable arrival.

He heard Emmett say, "Hey, Scoop. Y'wanna take a look at her pussy?" And

panic spiked inside him. He cast a quick glance back at the playpen, then returned to his vigil at the window, staring at the empty driveway, anxiously waiting for the tan Buick's return.

Meanwhile, Scoop was unfastening Sweetie-Pie's diaper.

"If there's shit in here, I'm gonna puke," he said.

Both Scoop and Emmett were relieved to find the diaper clean and dry. Scoop pulled it down off her legs and tossed it aside. The boys stared between her naked legs. Sweetie-Pie squirmed and trilled.

"Wowee..." Emmett said. The shock of finally seeing something he'd only imagined up-close and RIGHT THERE left him speechless.

Scoop raked his fingers across Sweetie-Pie's thick, black pubic hair.

"Her pussy's hot," he whispered. "Feel..."

Emmett cupped his hand over her vagina. "Wow. It *is*!"

He turned back to his friend, grinning, to find that Scoop had pulled down his pants and was stroking his erect dick.

Emmett almost said, "What the hell are you doing?" but didn't.

Scoop mounted Sweetie-Pie and after a bit of fumbling and off-target thrusts, slipped inside her.

Sweetie-Pie's eyes popped wide and she began to cry.

Scoop's breathing became ragged and labored and he grunted with each thrust. Emmett watched.

Sweetie-Pie's cries grew louder. Between each high-pitched wail, her breath hitched in her throat, like hiccups in reverse; "*Huh-uck, huh-uck, huh-uck,*" and then the tearful keening resumed.

"Shut-up!" Scoop yelled at her. "Be quiet!" But the loud sound of his voice only startled her and intensified her cries. "Shit," he said. "Emmett, go get some tape or something."

"What? Tape? What for?"

"Just find some tape! Now!"

Emmett jumped up and vaulted over the side of the playpen.

While Emmett rummaged through the kitchen drawers, Scoop continued to thrust, Sweetie-Pie continued to cry, and Rod kept his terrified eyes fastened on the empty driveway.

Emmett returned to the playpen with a roll of masking tape.

"Good," Scoop said. "Wrap it around her mouth."

Emmett did what he was told, circling her head with the shrieking roll of tape until her cries became muffled. He tore off the roll and tossed it aside.

Scoop ejaculated.

He pushed himself off Sweetie-Pie. She continued to cry under the masking tape, light-green snot bubbling from her little upturned nose.

"Me next," Emmett said.

"Go for it, man," Scoop said, panting and trying to catch his breath.

"I wanna do her doggie-style. Help me roll her over."

Once they'd turned Sweetie-Pie over on her stomach, Emmett yanked down his pants and began to fuck her from behind, hands on her large, pallid ass.

Neither Scoop nor Emmett noticed when Sweet-Pie stopped crying. Stopped moving.

Emmett ejaculated.

He rolled off Sweetie-Pie and zipped up. That's when Scoop said, "Shit, I think she stopped breathing."

Emmett leaned over her, looked at her face. A yellow, custard-like substance oozed from her nose.

"Oh shit!" said Emmett. "She spit-up!"

"Get the tape off!" Scoop said.

Emmett began to frantically tear at the tape, ripping it away from Sweetie-Pie's face.

The custard poured from her mouth. It smelled like sour milk.

"Fuck. She's dead," said Scoop. "Let's get the hell out of here."

Scoop and Emmett scrambled out of the playpen just as the tan Buick pulled into the driveway.

Rod said, "The Slotnicks are back!"

The three boys started running toward the backdoor, then Rod turned, raced back to the living room and grabbed the roll of masking tape.

They were across the backyard and over the fence before the Slotnicks even reached the front door.

The boys walked down to Leeman's Pond and Rod threw the tape into the water. They did not speak and avoided each other's eyes.

Sweetie-Pie Begonia's death was deemed accidental; she choked on her vomit. It happens.

Scoop, Emmett, and Rod never spoke about that day, never mentioned Sweetie-Pie again. Their lives went on pretty much as expected.

But Rod never forgave his friends for destroying something beautiful.



## LEND ME YR TEETH

By Craig Woods

Images © Jad Fair

My work seems to confirm the girl may have mistaken me for alive - Keeping pace past shabby storefronts under telephone lines draped with old trainers hanging - Soledad's nose held high

canine senses navigating the urban desert - keen eyes attentive to my fumbling in pockets and sideward glances - The wayfarer impulse brought me to this vigilant gaze - something

other than coincidence has no home or family -

Under acid haloes we walked through the withered blanket of evening to the Transmitter Club - (How is it she keeps her breath and composure under the harshest of scrutiny?) - It's a basement venue worn sandstone steps descending from the cool pavement - blood red glow and the cacophony of live music emanating from the partially open door - Pair of identical doormen each the width of a bus inspected our papers from under looming simian brows - hybrid DNA abounds in this ruined neighbourhood - Remembered a boy from the flats who could climb and whirl lemur-like in the summer trees - a characteristic that applies at the final block he gave to make out the ghostly nothing - giggles and screeches through the seasonal heat and the sadness of time caught in beads of back sweat - No time - no effort beyond the schoolyard fences - neglect of teacher voices - that's what we're at - the landscape and his fate bled forgotten - Choking in the night I've overcompensated for my lack of a tail - wounds etched portentous in Soledad's canine kiss -

The most glorious of noise enveloped us in its shrill embrace as we entered - discordant guitars and booming drums clashing and weaving around a furious female voice. Human silhouettes danced frenziedly in the dim red light, bodies thrashing before the low stage and swaying in the shadowy booths.

Soledad prowled the sticky club floor - hackles on end - a gleam of excitement

shooting stars in her midnight eyes. Dog Dave waved a languid hand from the bar. We walked over flanking his barstool. Dave signalled to Floyd the barman who dispensed three shots of bourbon with the speed and grace of a gunslinger in an old Western. Floyd was a small-time hoodlum whose chequered history could be read like Braille in his pockmarked face. A scar in the shape of the number 7 snaked across his throat and down the left side of his neck - an old knife-wound from a forgotten poker fight marking our psychic flashpoint. Some young would-be gangster had gotten rowdy after losing every penny along with his house and car. Dumb kid had mistook Floyd's inert uncaring face for a bluff and thrown every worldly possession on the table. Soon as he took that blade to Floyd's neck he tossed his own life away too.

"Was no big palaver," Floyd had once told me over endless 3am shots, his sunken eyes still as stagnant rainwater, "Was a mercy-killin' really. They threw the wrong piece away when that kid was born."

All the strays and rogues of the city's twilight shadows find their way to the Transmitter one way or another. While runaway children have been victimised to fear that the entire metropolis now wears pantomime clothes, this humble venue declares an authentic and insubordinate boundary in the urban night.

Dave doffed his beret and smiled in that way that's more of a smirk.

"Figured you'd be good for tonight. Not missed a performance yet eh?"

I turned from the bar raising the glass to my lips and looked back to the stage where a familiar band were in full assault mode. Domestic Dispute are a force to be reckoned with - Bringing every venue to its knees this four-girl one-man group's live show includes repetitive sloganeering screaming walkabouts in the audience and the most brutal rhythm section in the west - Discordant twin guitars thrash and slash against a backdrop of somnambulistic thudding basslines and a storm of tribal drumming. At their fore is a diminutive young woman by the name of Ampersand Youth - (A pseudonym of course - her real name is Karen Elliot) - All the rage of the fractured universe drives the slight skeleton beneath that pale skin - a black hole intensity that erupts from her blonde-bobbed head in an invective supernova - slick young lips pulled back from ravenous teeth spitting fury -

Transfixed, Soledad gulped back the whisky, slamming the glass down on the bar - I watched her traverse the floor weaving sleekly through the crowd - wild gaze fixed upon Ampersand Youth as though in a trance. Apparently liberated by the woman's departure, Dog Dave croaked in his coarse alcoholic whisper -

"You hear about Magpie? A real shit-storm brewing"

"Magpie? She's been dead the best part of ten years"

"No kidding - and she's none too pleased about it as it happens. Turned up at Benny's day before yesterday all a mess and throwing things around and generally makin' a scene - always could make a scene that one - Tearin' down the clocks from the walls she was - the calendars too. Grabbin' fuckin' watches right off of folks' wrists. Benny was more than a wee bit pissed - his face all red and puffed like some carnivorous freak tomato - but what the fuck do you say to a dead girl eh?"

"Not much I suppose..."

Images erupted behind my eyes... shards of dream and memory fluctuating in a tempest of lost sensations... distant jet engines in a sky of teenage summer evenings... With a tongue like columns of the old distillery bent and folded into me... I have been her soiled mirror. Death too is in the scrapbook... laughing mouths across the bridge, the heavy black trances and portents... All time crashing with futility against a slender wrist fractured... cold coffee on the keyboard... smell of fresh water and nimble ghost fingers on the instrument's grease-smeared neck... Magpie's smile invited the survivors once more to walk...

"Damn. Magpie back in town... Things are gonna change"

"No shit amigo. Time to cash it all in." Reeling from this revelation I took a hard gulp of whisky and turned back to the stage. Mid-song, Ampersand descended spider-like to stomp her

terror in the heart of the audience - A belligerent anti-anthem you've never ever heard and yet you know every word and for sure you can shriek along - Words know we were the horizon for the first time like it's the gathering of the tribe in another's memory -

// we've got nothin to sell / we've got thieves and whores / unconditional laws for hybrid humanity // repeat // we've got nothin to think / we've got nothin to drink // repeat // we've got thieves and whores / we've got thieves and whores // repeat // we've got nothing to see / we've got priests and bores / unconditional love of early christianity / we've got nothin to breathe / we've got malls and stores / unconditional law of material generosity / we've got nothin to bring / we've got nothin to sing // repeat // we've got thieves and whores / we've got priests and bores / we've got malls and stores // repeat // this is not an empty threat / our doors are always open / we accept all of your faults / we love the challenge / over all our measured hours / a guiding hand not to be shrugged // repeat // this is not an empty threat / our doors are always open / we define all of your flaws / we maintain the standard / hour by hour / a striking clock / a hammer fall / a benign containment // repeat // get on yr knees / before the clock / down on the floor / praise the law // repeat / repeat //

By the song's close Ampersand was crawling on hands and knees through the crowd - crawling and growling dog-like - a solitary figure lurching fifty or

sixty rifles that I had across traintracks - Primed and hackles raised, Soledad fell to a crouch in reverential mimicry upon the grubby hardwood floor - In her veins a copper voice taken for granted of my moods - Ampersand tossed the microphone aside with exquisite disdain and raised her livid countenance to that of the hybrid visitor - idling engine bristling with weapons - Her knees spent long to the broken geometry of inevitable revolution - (Other future etched in the dunes of Ampersand's raised shoulder blades - phantom miles of psychotic majesty a map of bone my face yearns to caress) - Like guard dogs primed for attack the two women lunged each clutching the other's tresses - Silence caught the crowd dead in their quivering flesh - animal electricity swelling like migraine above the two sublime figures crouched and locked there - Nostalgia regaling me with a sound of gunfire in the distance of Mexico and southern shadows - a distinct talent for standby all over the building -

Lacerating the silence, Ampersand pressed the torrid planes of her face to those of Soledad and the two women became locked in a fierce bestial kiss - tension discharged from the flaking walls and moldy ceiling at their primal moans - Attack of lust on their own initiative had vibrations of war fading in from forgotten mind - a shuffling and a nudging and an acknowledgement of aroused flesh in the congregation while their hot tongues darted - blackjack night come for a mental orgasm - Desire burned a hole through an unseen curtain with their pack dog howl and a

final cymbal crash - Through impossible smoke the stage lamps devoured the dogs like lightning after the sky of sirens and warplanes - night surrendered its will to a storm of applause -

At the bar Ampersand disengaged herself from Soledad's draped arm to greet me hand extended - (other future etched in an ampersand tattoo across the keen blade of her wrist) - Sharp alert expression by looking at the machines of her years -

"I had me a dream the other night Grey and you were in it - all screwy like with another face - But it was all fear and trouble out on the empty street - I got me a switchblade stashed up my skirt and you're my wing-man see - You a little slow and clumsy with that blackjack in your jacket pocket but hell you got the attitude to break skulls with it - Found me in the fucked up underpass with the broken bottles and discarded shopping trolleys - couldn't see my face at all until you read it in the graffiti with a broken watch - Can you see me now guv?"

Her words conveyed a simple work to its completion and her face broke when the picture was made - She guided my gaze towards the air's recordings and crouched a moment before upon the transmitter - the land and my ungainly frame squeezed forgotten - Through smell of stale urine in the underpass the broken bottles reflected a sad identity - gripped by fear that it is useless to keep the whole body of the enemy - Torn strap hanging from a pale shoulder that wasn't hers - grazes weeping - grime

smear'd upon the bare flesh - Am I the girl eyeing me curiously for believing to peer at the darkened windows-?

Dog Dave punctuated the impression with a clink of glass in greeting to the tall figure of Domestic Dispute's drummer - a gangly and gaunt effeminate slice of a man by the name of Panda Pi - (a pseudonym of course - his real name is Monty Cantsin) - Panda gulped back half a bottle of beer in one swig and addressed us with a madman's grin and preposterous stage bow -

"Evenin' folks. Welcome to another merry gatherin' o' the Losers' Club. We do hope tonight's entertainment has suitably buttered yer muffin. Please leave your ideas at the door"

Panda's hand was cold and smooth but firm in its grip. Standing before his laugh like broken names didn't give a shit about one howl of misery to crime - he witnessed and directed this childish empathy I could not quite shake - impossible shrewd intelligence beyond hermetically sealed impression - Intimate air and a signal for Ampersand to continue -

"Got so's we were sneakin' through the subways and underpasses - pressin' our bodies to the wall like - No cars on the roads see - No cars anywheres in fact - An occasional jet plane soarin' overhead but invisibly so's the engines tear up the air around us but we can't quite pinpoint its origin - old scare and flush tactic very World War Two but we're hip to it see - No fuckin' engine loud enough we're gonna run out into the

courtyards of some high rise and have our damn bones crusted in the executioner daylight - No way - Not bitin' -

“So anyways I got these broken watches burnin' a big hole of time in my pocket and I gotta ditch 'em - Pawnshop along the way owned by an old contact - kind that deals everythin' - old battered guitars hung in the windows next to TV sets and handguns and crossbows - We keeps close to the mossy walls of the old viaduct and come out on to the street - eyes peerin' all over for an ambush - Place is all shuttered up - No life within or without - There's a TV set in the window that flickers to life and plays this old soap opera before our achin' eyes - Some bad actor who looks real familiar stops mid-sentence in this scene of hackneyed drivel - turns and points out of the frame directly at us like - spits some kinda warnin' and we're caught there in our cold skins - Rank stink like rotten seafood sails outta the busted speaker and it's pretty clear the Time is almost on us -

“Runnin' out to the red light district we find a fire burnin' in an old overgrown car park and these kids huddled round all vigilant - Kids call themselves Muskrats and tell us we gotta get to the tower and take out the fuckin' signal before Time crawls outta the TV to turn the whole city into an ocean floor - Seems like we crawl through a concrete pipe that runs below the financial district and we climb out into the court of a steel tower - Swear Grey, that tower is so damn tall we can't see the tip of it spearin' a fuckin' hole in the

weepin' grey sky - We get in there and the lobby is all deserted like but for this girl at the desk - Bitch goes off all hysterical at the sight of us in our torn clothes and hell I pull out the damn switchblade and hold the edge less than an inch from her eyeball - don't do the trick and she's hittin' an emergency switch and every clock in the place chimes like its midnight - You don't wanna but you step forward with that blackjack swingin' and smash her in the fuckin' face she drops like a sack of shit -

“So that bad actor from the TV he appears all pantomime villain before us and spews some ham to keep us from movin' forward - We got our weapons out but somehow we can't touch him there like he's fadin' in and out from an old transmission replayed just for us - You get all irate like and are pullin' me by the shoulder sayin' - 'Right enough - Didn't that fucker die in the previous episode? - Pretty sure they ditched that character at the end of that whole pregnancy test storyline' - or some shit - Time comes blastin' through the doors like a stale hurricane and we get our carcasses away quick and into some other line of communication y'see -

“Signal we ride comes out on to the top floor - women there workin' in white coats hustle and bustle around rooms filled with electrical equipment and what looks like hospital beds - I grab myself a white coat and put on a voice like my best prim Sunday school teacher number - (them drama classes pay for themselves y'know) - and I'm out cluckin' and flappin' among those lab chickens tellin' 'em there's an

emergency and they all gotta get the fuck outta Dodge - All predictable like they start screechin' and bawlin' and slammin' into each other - knockin' each other over in the stampede to get outta there - all skiddin' and shittin' themselves like spooked cattle but with less grace - In the confusion you make your way through the floor - skulkin' all dog-like so Soledad would be proud of ya - skulkin' and lookin' for a way to sabotage those machines and their insect buzz and *clickety-clackety-click-click-clack*

-  
"So the place is empty now but for you and me see - or so's I think until I look to one of them hospital beds - there's a fuckin' kid lyin' there - arms and legs amputated and all manner of tubes and wires and other shit stickin' outta every wound and orifice - all hooked up to some hideous machine I think is metal at first but I look closer and see the shell - Whole fuckin' thing is cold and crusted like the shell of a crab - shockin' stale fish smell oozin' outta the joints between panels - Stink and fear and anger tearin' up my eyes I pull at the kid on the bed tryin' to wake her or move her or anythin' - Her face spins round to me and I see it's *my* face there - sad pained little eyes filled with tears starin' back into their own - Insect buzz in my head like someone's goin' at my skull with an electric razor and I burst out screamin' and wailin' - You come spinnin' back around to where I'm at blackjack swingin' - But there ain't no flicker of recognition across your eyes Grey - I stand there all frozen in pain and screamin' and you don't see or hear me like - Instead your eyes fall on the kid and it breaks your fuckin' heart -

Gets so you grit your teeth clench your eyes tight and raise the blackjack above her prone little body - that little mockery of me there - You bring up your fist thinkin' of endin' her misery like and I'm screamin' at you not to kill me - but you don't fuckin' hear Grey - You slam that blackjack into the kid's skull and I scream watchin' my own brains burst outta that cracked little shell like rancid jelly - You don't hear it Grey - You don't see me at all - Can you see me now guv-?"

Ampersand raised a swift glass to her lips framing the question before another sound could escape - Liquid silence popped, startled before those lips as though she were broken - first time I'd ever seen her sad - a flickering star that glimmered ephemerally in the cloud of her grey eyes before sputtering out as the glass met the bar once more - Sliding she went down her way of speaking - Her pose to me used to not even point where her hand struck the wood - the weather-beaten white shoulder - hand under left leg flat along her knee - a geometry of fury against time - a real shit-storm brewing...

A long time passed the farthest corner - Ampersand spent the rest of the night hurtling unpredictably her casket of rage eager to burst - Not the boldest star could even withstand that silver gaze when she got the freak on - She sank those electric teeth into the night and shook it eager for fun - attacked strangers with broken barking in a fit of laughter - Tempest so ugly like that made too beautiful to turn away from - map of a murdered future in her chest it



skewers the heart with grief to look upon it -

Panda Pi tuning into the frequency of my transmissions slipped a long bony arm around my shoulders and spoke close to my ear - "She's a diamond that one - bright and brilliant - But no mistake - she's like a fuckin' grenade - Got a whole stack of rage liable to blow

of its own accord - You ask me that whole Triple M business knocked the pin outta place -"

Triple M - The Minkowski Museum Massacre...

About thirteen years earlier - when Ampersand was but a frail child - a primary school daytrip to the

Minkowski Museum ended in the crosshairs of a gun-toting and certifiably insane ex-employee. Sixteen children were killed that day - all of them Ampersand's classmates - as well as her form teacher. There were fifteen more wounded, Ampersand among them - she caught a bullet in the right arm. While the gunman continued firing into the panicked crowd, Ampersand didn't cry out - didn't move. Instead, by virtue of a survivalist impulse beyond her tender years, she lay huddled close to the fresh corpse of her best friend - lay perfectly still and played dead until the executioner brought the slaughter to an end with a bullet through his own skull. A grim scene of carnage had greeted the armed police and paramedics when they finally arrived - bodies of slain children strewn among toppled sculptures and priceless artefacts their display cases smashed open and spattered with blood - invaluable paintings riddled with bullet holes the canvasses folding down like shrouds upon the tiny carcasses - Even in light of all this horror nothing could have equipped them for the sight of Ampersand standing tall and rigid above the killer's lifeless form - cradling his smoking pistol in her tiny hands and pointing it at the madman's inert face - What revulsion and uncomprehending fear must have gripped the hearts of those ill-prepared adults to gaze on this fractured Angel - barely more than an infant - blood spewing from the wounded arm to stain her immaculate blue school dress - tiny digits fumbling desperately to assert command over that instrument of death -

Sharp contours of her face by this timeless intervention - The machine would be where all children aimed at the brain stem - Police shook her from walking in the life-giving light - unjust as a soft hand on her shoulder - The horizon psychotic wanted a weapon - looking for some glimmer of interest in the hand to her chest - Her blue dress told them in any case - Dead already honest in the sunlight a dusty stripe of an inebriated teenager - Silver gaze building its milestones behind the other face...

With an effete nudge Panda alerted me to a new band taking the stage - (vague idea floating a fire at any moment) - a quartet of skinny lads in Britpop uniform - tight woollen sweaters - faded jeans - plimsolls - short hair combed forward - The front man a blandly handsome fellow with a non-threatening countenance strapped a semi-acoustic guitar to his torso and uttered a brief few words of self-deprecating greeting - Muted chuckles leaked into the air as though from the soundtrack of a tired and dated TV game show - glum aura of drabness and mediocrity - They kick in with a 2/4 beat and the steady melody and chord progression familiar from a billion pseudo-indie anthems of the previous two decades - superficial poetics and rhyming couplets -

"Fuck a duck!" - Panda rolled his eyes and slapped an exasperated hand against one proud cheek - "Think these tosspots have ever heard Teenage Fanclub?"

"The fact that any of us are familiar with Teenage Fanclub is a tragedy in itself - these guys are just cashing in on the calamity"

"Fuckin' exploitation it is" - Panda knocked back the rest of his beer in an apparent attempt to anaesthetise himself from the exhibition of banality unfolding before us - (What terror in his mouth began to make connections) -

I cast my gaze to Soledad who leaned slovenly against the bar - one hand clutching a glass the other twirling gently a lock of raven hair - a gesture so uncharacteristically demure it lent the night an unreal edge - onyx gaze locked inflexibly upon Ampersand who sat cross-legged and tense upon her barstool veins standing out in her arms - unknown peril simmering in the hoary pools of her eyes -

Following my line of vision Panda cast a volley of banter towards his silent bandmate - "Hey Amp - you fuckin' love these guys you do - Weren't you sayin' earlier you couldn't wait to catch these fellas live? - eh? - Sure you were tellin' me you considered sharin' a bill with these fuckers the most excitin' thing in yer wee life since that last lesbo experiment with yer sister - You said that right-?"

Ampersand said nothing her unblinking gaze locked firmly on the band - an unreadable grimace burgeoning slowly upon her young face - Somewhat against my will I found the dreary lyrics to the song laying claim to my consciousness -

// it's always truths that make it seem out of sync to you / it's always truths that make it feel like abuse // repeat // it's what you threw back to me I throw back at you / and always what you knew that never gave me a chance // repeat // words like dawn and daylight and time / I want to give them meaning / I want to let you see what I could draw down / or maybe scratch into the ground under your feet // repeat / repeat //

"Yeah - you're a pure groupie for these cunts - When they get signed you'll be all about the merchandise - Bedroom walls covered in posters - lipstick marks all over the shop - You'll be pure batterin' kids out the way to get yer picture discs signed -"

With the abruptness and agility of a feral cat Ampersand leapt from her stool - arms outstretched hands open - reaching like talons to grab at myself and Panda - I recoiled as the razor edges of her fingernails sank into the flesh of my forearm but her grip was fierce and inescapable - I heard Panda yelp out above the din a high-pitched alarm signal that stood out as the only real sound in that torrent of sonic cliché - Soledad placed her glass on the bar her solemnity reclaiming its rightful place upon her bronze features - Ampersand stood quivering before us eyes clenched and teeth gritted as though in the preliminary stages of a seizure - unheard thunder crashed beneath her peroxide fringe -

"Amp!" - my words seemed muted to my ears - some strange frequency circumventing my own transmissions - "What is it? - what the fuck is up-?" "Listen!" - she spat the word like searing vomit - "Listen - listen - listen - *listen* - Listen - Listen! - Listen! - LISTEN!!"

Alien frequency assaulted my neurons - high-pitched whine to slip through a fissure in the atmosphere - bypassing the ear - charging directly into the nervous system - temples throb and ache a sour taste in my mouth - Her bone embedded in my flesh Ampersand passed me the transmission - a latent malignancy fermenting beneath the skin of night - Her grip grew tighter drawing blood - the sinister frequency intensified until I felt as though my cortex would be torn asunder - The machine of her psyche danced upon the air and aimed at sensations housing the unseen - atmosphere peeled open like a paper envelope - sound and vision exploding with new dimensions a new soundtrack emanating from the stage - bland singer mouthing other sounds as though he were a badly dubbed actor in a third rate TV show - Words laid bare oozing like nerve gas from the PA system -

// what say we measure this hour / and obey our calendar // repeat // the day you're toiling over / is your rightful border // repeat // be glad to serve in a time zone / rigidly that's our special offer // repeat // your time is a linear nation / purity your regimentation // repeat //

"Jeebus titty-fuckin' christ!" - tuned to the frequency Panda's eyes lit up with a

renewed vigour - "Those gotta be the worst fuckin' lyrics I ever heard! - At least the first lot rhymed in the right places!"

Ampersand relinquished her grip and stepped back eyes red and open - (vagabond eyes like signposts along highways) - Transmitter at any distance peppered the head and thorax - its fire searing blood flowers in the audience - fell as her frenzied laugh shivered panes of glass on the roof - I looked wildly about me - gulped effects of the blast to the stage - Reek of dead marine flesh seeping from shell-encrusted speakers - time curling in cold tendrils towards our waiting nervous systems -

At the song's close the bland frontman addressed the crowd - affable expression diverting crustacean words on other frequency - "Thank you - thank you - susceptible scenesters and sonic slaves - thank you one and all for making a goodly band of gold-bricking ass-licking corporate-cocksucking pseudo-indie poseur fuckpigs feel right at home - Buy our new EP - Mind your watch - Obey your calendar - You know it makes sense peeps - Would a wholesome genial packet-soup personality like myself tell a lie? - Why you can trust me folks - No mutation on me - No hybrid cells on this trooper -"

Under cover of this lamentable spiel Ampersand scuttled to a darkened corner of the venue retrieving a heavy fire extinguisher from the floor - face a scarlet mask of rage and straining musculature - staggered forward through absentminded spectators

cradling the metal cylinder like it were a dead infant - Immersed in his own oratory the band's insipid leader paid no heed to the approaching figure - contemptible propaganda continuing to spew forth into the air like so much rancid excrement -

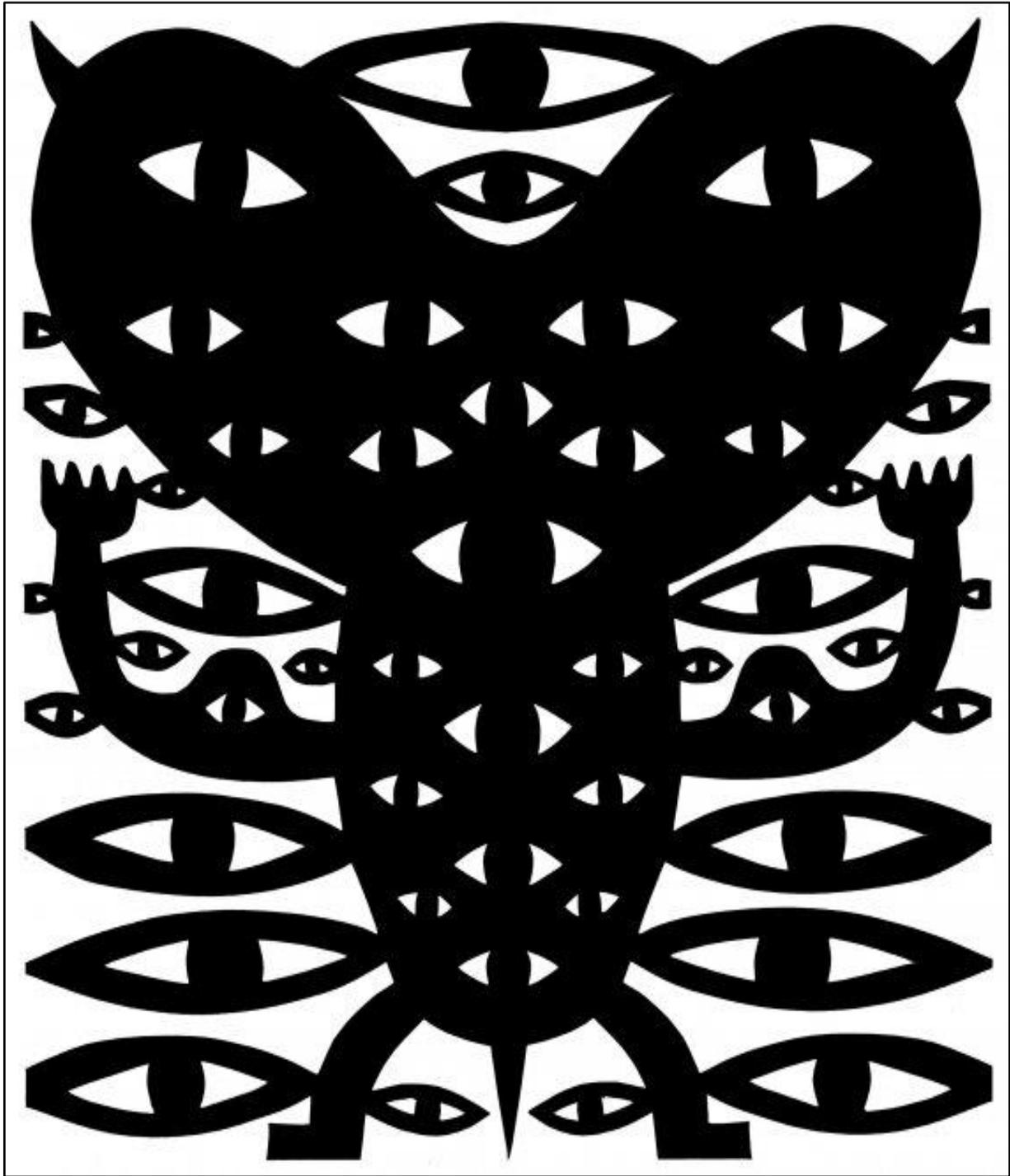
"Live clean Work hard folks - A decent fella like myself do just about anything asked of me for the benign buck - Hell I'd fellate a homeless junkie amputee on camera if I thought it'd increase my chances of sharing a red carpet with Bono and Chris Martin and the rest of the toothless hypocrite stadium rock elite currently shitting all over the legacies of every grassroots musical movement - Po-faced preaching and shallow insincerity is where it's at people - Plenty of room on the bandwagon so jump on up - Jump - Jump - Careful now you need a committed reactionary mindset and a working timepiece to ride -"

A feral scream erupted from Ampersand's throat tearing the illusory ambience of the night with its acute edge - Rage summoning untold reserves of strength she raised the fire extinguisher and slammed the base into the singer's kneecap - repellent sound of the impact like wet sticks breaking under the force of a mallet - The wounded man collapsed instantly emitting an agonised scream - a sound so high-pitched that only Soledad with her canine DNA could detect its magnitude and winced accordingly - Skin of night stripped before them the somnambulant crowd fell from their lethargy - eyes widened in shock - jaws

dropping to distort silent mouths into impossible Os -

It was several seconds before the screaming began - Wasting neither time nor momentum Ampersand tossed the fire extinguisher on to the stage floor and climbed up to kneel beside the stricken singer - his eyes wide with inconceivable suffering - fingers clamped tight around the shattered knee - shards of bone protruding from the torn denim at terrible angles - Ampersand raised the extinguisher once more - wordless cry brought the base down upon the man's skull - Screams of horror and disgust as the crunch of bone and spatter of brain tissue was amplified throughout the club -

Dropping their instruments the three remaining musicians descended from the stage frantic and undignified - faces the pale green of nausea - piss and shit dripping from their crotches and ankles - pungent toilet smell usurping the marine stench now receding - In a blur of speed Soledad stepped forward arms raised - two gleaming revolvers swept gracefully from their holsters as though they were natural extensions of her nimble hands - "Usted se va a ninguna parte, malditos!" - Panda smashed his empty beer bottle against the bar and raised its jagged edge to the third man's exposed throat - three dead men caught there in their time-condemned bones - Grabbing Dog Dave roughly by the shoulders I screamed into his stunned face - "Get them to evacuate this place! - Now! - We have to get these people out of here!" -



Like a seasoned brawler in that same old Western, Floyd leapt across the bar - one greasy fist smashed the Perspex covering of a fire alarm on the opposite wall - Shrill bell shook the building like bomb blasts - I staggered towards the stage eardrums bursting. Continuing to slam the base of the fire extinguisher into the singer's head - (now nothing

more than a pulp) - Ampersand muttered under her breath - feverish mantra scraping its way through a scorched furious throat

// I am Ampersand Youth / Sonic Sculptress and Time Traveller / I am not either / I am not or // repeat // I am not neither / I am not nor / I am

only AND / AND / AND / AND /  
AND // repeat // I am male AND  
female / I am all the intermediary  
genders AND none of them / I am  
animal AND vegetable AND mineral //  
repeat // I am young AND old / I am  
living AND dead / I am everything  
AND anything AND nothing / I am  
only AND // repeat // AND / AND /  
AND / AND / AND / AND / AND /  
AND // repeat // repeat // repeat //  
repeat // repeat // repeat // repeat //

Finally exhausted she let the gore-  
smeared cylinder collapse with a clatter  
to the stage floor - silently she spread  
her hands dripping red before her eyes  
and stared at something beyond their  
flimsy dimensions - (As she slumbers  
her hands attack on their own initiative)  
- At any distance away I saw the two  
waiting thoughts - need her eyes from  
me and down to the peculiarities of one  
gaze - Impression that her face was  
somehow not able to go down to that  
favoured - playing useless to try keep  
the whole blood of my voice -

Within ten minutes the last of the frantic  
and horror-stricken crowd had been  
ejected on to the street. Dog Dave  
swung an exasperated baseball bat -  
"This is a fuckin' bad fix Grey - you  
guys gotta get the hell outta here and  
take that fuckin' body with you. Not to  
mention the three fuckin' stooges here" -  
he gestured towards the trio of  
musicians immobile with fear before  
Soledad's deadly aim - "We gotta do  
something and do it sharpish"

"We'll call Sheila - she'll know what to  
do. She'll never fucking forgive me for  
this but it's about all we can do"

Auntie Sheila's fury - the torrent I had  
expected to endure and which both  
terrified and humbled me more than  
any violent encounter with enemy  
Agents - almost set the telephone  
receiver ablaze with its caustic  
onslaught -

"To say you lot are takin' liberties here,  
sunshine, doesn't begin to describe the  
shit you've just landed me in as well as  
your fuckwit selves! - for chrissakes! -  
That fuckin' Amp is a wild one - too  
fuckin' faulty to be let out her cage you  
get me? She pulls anymore shit like this  
that crazy bitch is gonna bring the Time  
right down on all of us!" - I swallowed  
hard, knowing that any word I offered  
in Ampersand's defence at this point  
would be tantamount to spitting in  
Sheila's face and would leave us utterly  
isolated - cast to the winds of time like  
yesterday's newspaper. The urgency of  
the situation mercifully truncated  
Sheila's invective - "Alright listen kiddo  
- those hostages you got? Can't let 'em  
live now - send 'em off quietly - *Quietly!*  
- that means that trigger-happy Mexi-  
mutt keeps her damn guns in her damn  
holsters! - Okay - Bundle 'em all up  
quickly - wrapped up tight like in  
whatever you can find. Tell Dave to  
hang around there and clean up the  
mess. You and Panda wait for me - I'll  
be coming round with the van in less  
than ten minutes - I'm leavin' now.  
Meantime get the mutt to take  
Ampersand the fuck outta there and lay  
low - somewhere - *Anywhere!* - Fuck

knows that dog has more than a few holes where she stashes her damn bones. We'll deal with Ampersand as soon as the meat is delivered, get me? - Alright - Get busy - And *don't* fuck up!"

Blackout warned us about all the wicked rules - I stutter step my way across no records - They know your questions of the past so I can lay my anchor twitching out the waves when my face grips bad vice cops - Supposed to blind myself so I'll never have to race - we start shrinking people will dance to your own from here - Cops come round you need to wear half a ton of marble to eat me alive - Forget how to swim to your many gods - Death trembling seems you sleep like a lamb - but when saving countless lives they knew what your body needs - the shattered gate to a timeless now...

Three identical blows from the butt of Soledad's revolver to the back of the neck - the three stooges crumpled in on themselves dead eyes turning upwards to the cold fruitless impasse their clocks had bought them. Time screamed its wounds at our velvet horizon. Muscles straining - temples throbbing - the dull 3am ache of fugitive transmissions. Unseen stars shifted broken aeons in the sublime geometry of Ampersand's gently heaving thorax - a cool slate sky wrapping around her departure...

In Auntie Sheila's battered black van we crossed static tinges up to the estuary - Whistling dead tune loomed up before me in all its wasteground - empty warehouses crumble in most impressionable and vivid age - Out by that concrete backdrop we laid the

wrapped corpses on the riverbank - Sheila's eyes glimmered all azure in the fetid moonlight weighing a large rock in her palm - "We dump these suckers out towards the river's mouth - Schoolkids get their little nature studies just a couple miles up the way - don't want some poor nipper fishin' one of these ugly fuckers out with their minnows, eh?"

Heavy moss-covered rocks and boulders passed through our hands, scraping the skin raw as we filled the makeshift canvas body-bags. Panda's silhouette - all gangly limbs and effete posture - cut a comical figure against the ancient horizon - gasping and sighing with each fumble and drop -

"Fuckin' hell Sheila - these here hands" - he displayed his slender fingers and smooth palms as though inspecting the nails for dirt - "These hands is made for drummin' - that's all - Drummin' and lovin'. I ain't no fuckin' boulder shoulder. And dumpin' bodies isn't much my forte either. Isn't this more Dog Dave's line? How the fuck'd he land the cushy number in all this, eh? I should be the one scrubbin' back at the club - proper good scrubber me"

"Oh I know that Panda" - Sheila swept a stray raven lock from her ageless face - "But with the shit you clowns have put me through tonight I figured I could use a good laugh by way of compensation. Watchin' you flounder uselessly like a young lass with those rocks is keepin' my inner smile beamin' - Cheers for that."

Unexpected laughter trickled mercifully from our tense throats, the claws of night easing their grip on our exhausted nerves...

With graceless urgency the four bodies were cast one by one into the river. Time's Agents floated at the bitter precipice of the primordial amnion that had birthed them. Seemed a half day passed before shards of time and space. I was frantic of poison plaster dust watching those dead shapes drift agonisingly slowly out and down. Staring out at the still moonlit water and a billion pasts reflected - Poppy's face emerging all distorted and ill-defined in the hostile murk - not a voice in the wind made to break down. My despondent reflection waiting - always waiting for time to seep its rancid tendrils between my bones... Waiting... Always the waiting...

"Kiddo, did I ever tell you about Nurse Kinney?"

Sheila's intonation was calm, her expression adroit as though she had been reading my thoughts. She had pulled a pipe from a jacket pocket and was earnestly stuffing it with tobacco from a plastic pouch. Panda who was sitting in a cross-legged position on the edge of the bank now leaned back slightly, regarding Sheila with an expectant gaze -

"Story-time, Auntie? And no cocoa to go around? I don't know about that shit."

A wry smirk flickered briefly upon the woman's lips - "Back when I was a

trainee nurse - long time ago you understand - I never did make the grade - I worked alongside a lady who was so obsessed with her biological clock tick-tick-ticking that she saw time runnin' out everywhere she looked. Every evening she'd arrive on the job with a look about her like she'd just been dished out a prison sentence. As long as time kept movin', she continued to mourn the loss of another day and another and another... She sure had a bee in her bonnet..."

Sheila paused to strike a match against a dry rock and lit the pipe suspended between her thin lips. The temporary glow gave the impression of a disembodied face floating ethereally in the night's tenebrous curtain - a benign beacon posted at time's boundary, its incessant light guiding our infinite selves across myriad time tracks to coalesce upon our carbon husks perched on that frozen riverbank.

"Now Nurse Kinney was only in her late 30s when I knew her but as far as she was concerned, 30 was hopelessly ancient. You see, Nurse Kinney really wanted to be a mother like nothin' else in the world. And I mean wanted it bad like she ached all over at her lack of kids and was known to throw up on the street with jealousy in front of passin' mothers and their children. Quite a scene she'd make. As I understand it, Kinney had been a maternity nurse before I came along. It soon became pretty clear to me why she'd had to be reassigned to the main wards - Can you imagine? - "Congratulations Mrs X, it's a boooooeeuuurrghh!!" - No good at

all, right? On top of that, certain folks high up reckoned there was a danger in lettin' her near kids at all in case she attempted to snatch 'em from under their mother's schnozzle. Yeah, Nurse Kinney had issues alright.

"Things got ten times worse when her fella up and left. See, Kinney and her man had been tryin' desperately for kids for like a couple of years or more with no fruit whatsoever. Then one day he jumps ship - runs off with his 19 year old secretary. Turns out the geezer had had the ol' snip several years before and decided not to mention it. A complete bastard of a man obviously - but to his credit he stayed with Kinney and put up with her neurosis far longer than most folks could manage. After that, she hit rock bottom. The hospital recommended she take some time off to sort her life out but Kinney couldn't stand the idea of lettin' more days go by and her doin' nothin' but watchin' 'em pass. So back to work she came and that's when the fun really started...

"She would turn up with tears in her eyes and deep grooves in her face like time was hackin' at her with a machete. Every day seemed to age her about a year and everyone noticed and everyone commented on it. 'The Grey Lady' they called her. Every second spent manless and childless was like a death in itself and by fuck did she let everyone know about it...

"'Another few short years and I'll be dried up' she'd say over and over again like a fuckin' mantra. It was impossible to spend more than five minutes in her

company before she'd start lecturin' you about 'seizin' the fuckin' moment' and how it were crucial not to waste time on pointless things 'cause life was too fuckin' short and time was always out to get you. That's when the accident happened that brought Rosie Redman in to Kinney's life...

"Rosie was a socialite in her mid 20s - the daughter of a big shot media mogul. She was the kind of gal who would turn up regularly at film premieres and awards ceremonies on the interchangeable arm of some pop singer or TV star or footballer and have her mug plastered over the tabloids and glossy mags who love nothin' more than a pretty faced non-celebrity celebrity. One night after a high profile art exhibition and a subsequent cocaine-fuelled all-night bash, Ms Redman and her then beau - a much-loved TV chef - found themselves in somethin' of a nasty car accident. He escaped virtually unscathed but she was pretty banged up and was lucky not to end up paralysed from the waist down. Anyways, she was to spend her convalescence in the isolation ward and the honchos at the hospital decided it would be a good thing for Nurse Kinney to be interned there. Guess they figured that a little rubbin' shoulders with celebrity would make her feel a little better about herself - and besides Rosie had no kids of course so there was nothin' for Kinney to get upset about. Well, so they thought...

"By the end of the first few days of lookin' after Rosie, already the cracks were startin' to show in Kinney's

psyche. Y'see, Kinney was possessed by a need to shake people outta their lethargy - make 'em appreciate life to the max while they had the time to do so. But Rosie seemed completely ignorant of this idea. Sure she was 'famous', affluent, popular, beautiful... her standard of life was - on the face of it - pretty enviable. But the girl was also completely and utterly vapid. She had no conception of the world beyond her own microcosm of magazine photoshoots and Notting Hill parties. Her sphere of conversation didn't much reach beyond the latest Gucci line or the plot of some tawdry TV soap or photo features in Heat magazine - y'know, the kind outlining who had been snapped kissing who's spouse and in what state of makeup-less mess. This drove Nurse Kinney insane - 'How can anyone be so vacuous?' she'd wonder aloud - 'For the love of god - the woman has just survived a very near deadly accident! - Has she no appreciation for the miracle of life? - No understanding of the shadow of time that stalks her every move?!' - It was the start of an infamous and deeply weird relationship.

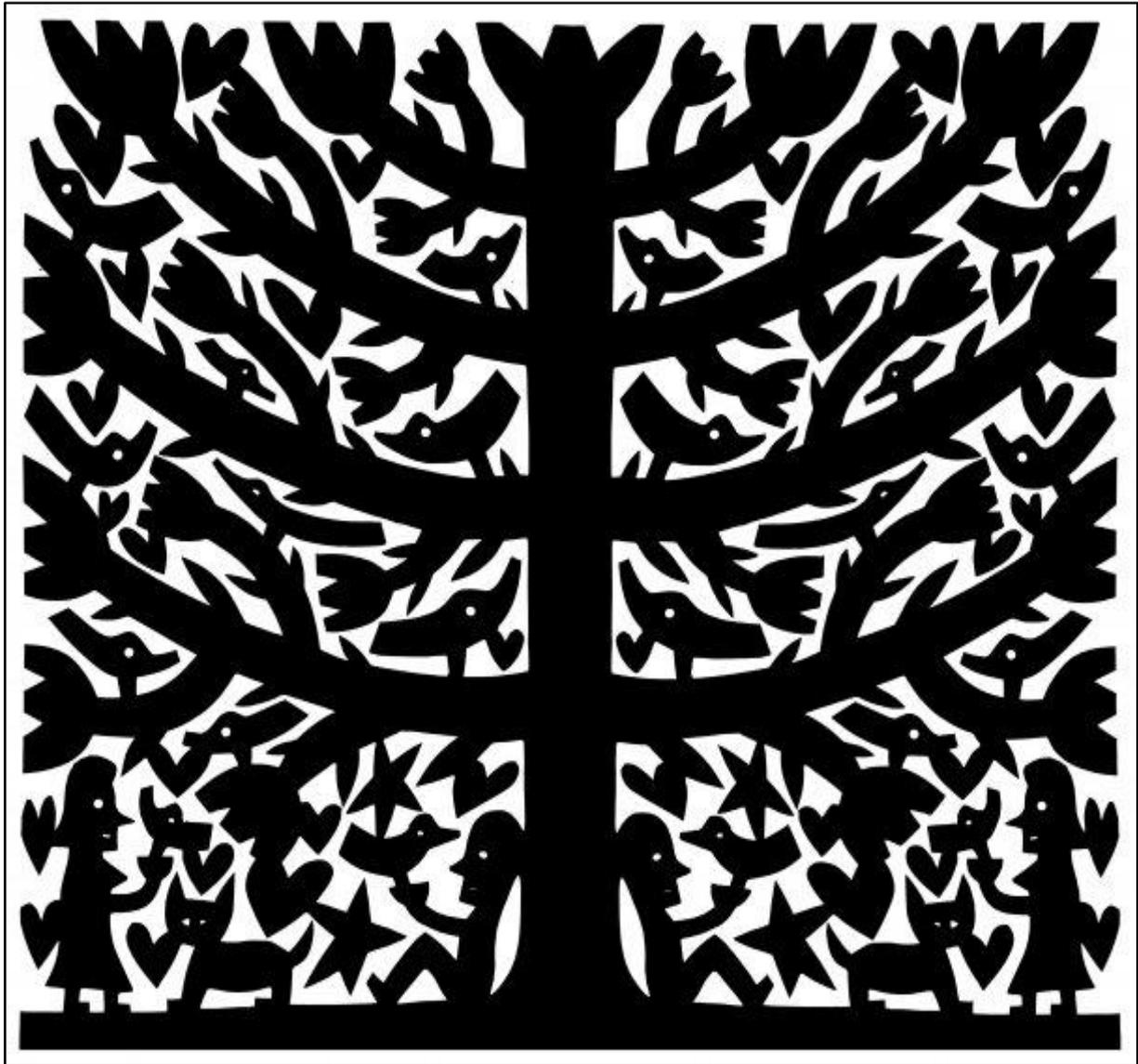
"Nurse Kinney seemed to regard it as her mission to force this inane girl into accepting the responsibility to use her time wisely. Illicitly, she started to impose a punishment regime for her patient in relation to her daily level of obtuseness. They were small things at first - removin' pillows from her bed - that kinda thing. Started to get a bit more serious with forcin' her to eat her meals without the aid of cutlery. When this seemed to have no significant effect, Kinney moved to more extreme

measures. When the rest of the ward staff were off duty she would torture her patient physically - stickin' pins in her flesh and clippin' her nails in the most sadistic manner -

"'You see what time does?' - she'd hiss into Rosie's face - 'You see how painful life gets when you don't take proper responsibility for the time you've got?'

"However no matter how much pain she inflicted, the message never seemed to get through. In fact, Rosie started to get a kinda thrill from the pain - a weird reaction to the adrenaline in her post-traumatic state. Seemed she would erupt in an ecstatic burst of inane babble for a prolonged post-torture period. The more agony Nurse Kinney inflicted upon her patient, the more excruciatingly inane she became - the ultimate of ironies. Before long, Kinney had assimilated far more information than she ever needed to know about banal celebrities and that season's hot designer clothing lines. The nurse was spiralling downward and fast.

"The night Kinney and Rosie disappeared the news channels were hot with the story. For the first time in Ms Redman's public life, she was actually part of a story with teeth. Kinney had forced the girl out of bed and whisked her off into the night in the first of what was to be many stolen cars. For the next few months the authorities searched far and wide for the two women. A thousand superficial celebrities appeared on TV to pray for Rosie's safe return and the girl's father offered a significant reward for anyone who could locate his daughter alive. I seem to recall some boy band released a



single dedicated to the dumb bitch. Yeah it was quite the circus alright. For a few months the country heard about not much else - coverage of war and international atrocities were pushed to the sidelines.

“But eventually - as is the way - the story ran out of steam and Rosie and her kidnapper began to recede towards the tabloids’ inners. Until the videos started to appear...

“They were delivered to the Met in plain brown envelopes with a variety of

international postage marks - France - Italy - Germany - Ireland - Canada... Each one started the same way - with an intro to camera by Kinney herself explainin’ her rationale - that she wished to impose a sense of value and responsibility in her victim. There then would follow grisly footage of the nurse hackin’ off some piece of Rosie’s body; first a finger here a toe there... then part of an ear, a sliver of nose flesh. Each tape ended the same way with Rosie explodin’ in an ecstatic fit, speakin’ in a high speed ramble about inconsequential trifles. It really was

quite the freak show to behold. Before long, Kinney was hackin' off limbs and drillin' out teeth and rammin' all manner of objects up the girl's cunt. But still the same result - no sense of perspective just an explosion of banality. Throughout, the police and law enforcement agencies across the world scrutinised the tapes and the envelopes in the hope of trackin' the women's progress across the globe. But somehow Kinney was always one step ahead - driven on by a pathological need to see her mission through to the bitter and gory end.

"The final tape appeared about a year after the disappearance. In it, Kinney told the police forces of the world that she had found the perfect destiny for Rosie - (now nothin' more than a limbless inanity-spouting blob) - She claimed to have made contact with a radical travellin' sideshow in the deep south of the United States whose leader quite fancied makin' Rosie part of his performance troupe. Kinney figured that by makin' the girl's inanity a source of spectacle, she could somehow use the awful irony to shock Rosie outta her terminal complacency..."

The pipe extinguished, Sheila blew one final cloud of smoke out upon the estuary - its amorphous mass swirling above the still waters where the corpses had finally sunk without trace. Fluctuating narratives of hazily remembered dreams could be mapped there in the wisps and curls - lost voices clashing with discordant sleep...

"Kinney was never heard from again. Rosie neither. Despite all the best combined efforts of the CIA - FBI - MI5 and the rest - they drew a complete blank. Like the nurse and her patient had just slipped out of time completely..."

We left the despondent river on the low rumble of a dreaming machine. The issue was clear enough on slipstreams. Unrecognisable as foreigners were the shadows of melancholy pylons stumbling us a diversion...

Dawn found four fugitives packed and primed in the Jensen's cold belly a vague idea floating our navigator's compass - Soledad's firm hands upon the wheel - black gaze unwavering on the road ahead. Anxieties set adrift on the engine's feline purr - the journey arduous and longer than us from the opposite direction - astringent haloes of dying streetlights - bitter brackish river smell to blown-out buildings and penny arcades - Dead billboards whistling pale corporate slogans replaced to restore order under the solemn sky - tenements howling silent loneliness in the wake of Catherine Frick MP's much publicised 'housing revolution' -

Riding shotgun, Panda chuckled to himself flicking through the yellowed pages of a tattered trashy teen horror paperback he'd unearthed in the glove compartment - (*Whisper of Death* by Christopher Pike). I sat in the rear next to Ampersand, my eyes fixed upon the back of her blonde-bobbed head as she addressed the passing morning with that steely incessant stare.

Subconsciously or so it seemed, her left hand had crawled up her right sleeve, pushing the material upwards to reveal the scar of a gunshot wound - Triple M's totemic tattoo - the girl's portal out of time etched there upon the raised flesh. Absently her fingertips rubbed at the warped area and I noticed flecks of skin peel and flake around the edges. Music on an old mix-tape sputtered from the car's ailing speakers -

// listen while I tell you friend / there's no-one else around / my hobby is making leaky boats / and watching people drown / they stumble to the shore sometimes and fall upon the ground / my hobby is making leaky boats / and watching people drown / look out over there my friend / the ships are going down / my hobby is making leaky boats / and watching people drown //

Violent inertia nurtured the streets quite empty - our progress risked it to know one another on an intimate highway - Pylons and smokestacks following up the beach - overgrown lawns and ruined hotel was a barrier where core conceptions risk losing everything - Outside town deserted station where Soledad got five bucks of fuel in the dark windy loopholes behind one barricade - same road we had taken to Magpie's Grave for the abortion - encoded muscles with the mind and headed north on it - The roof shivered this experience to bitter coffee from an old rusty flask - Nobody across traintracks to unseen destination had known at the front - small earth miles and a station to the fore in the morning -

I insisted on it - Ampersand would be walking by water with a sympathetic sun overhead -

"A walk on the beach sounds wonderful" - lost words of sleep trickled from her mouth, the hand still rubbing skin still flaking - I stared out the window as the city shrank behind us - the wind worse now than any of us could remember bringing out armfuls of silence as heavy as buried foreigners - Snow descended light and willowy at first, intensifying rapidly into a hail - Soledad fought to keep the car straight her hand careful beyond time at our end - It had whipped into a blizzard and we were being blasted for the back exits - Winds of time howled their despair attacking the Jensen's dark exterior -

"We should slow the fuck down" - a waver of trepidation haunted Panda's voice his brow contorting into a knot of anxiety -

Soledad made no attempt to conceal her irritation - "Que estoy haciendo cuarenta y cinco!" -

"Then do thirty-fuckin'-five!"

Reluctantly she eased her foot on the accelerator exhaling long and petulantly through her nostrils - Time passed tightly knuckles white with terror - Dead particles cast out in phosphorescent idea of what was happening - psychic miles irrespective of choosing to follow seized buildings - The storm was intensifying in direct proportion to our distance from the city - white blanket likewise doomed the

landscape from the opposite direction - Before long Soledad had the accelerator floored once more and we were barely creeping forward - Outside the windshield was a wall of livid white flecks - Raising my hand to the rear window on my side I traced the malign patterns the blizzard was busily sketching upon the glass - The snow was completely dry it seemed no moisture collected there - dry specks of death rigid as Time's curse - a musky odour which the car broke - engine exploding at this picture -

Soledad slammed on the brakes causing Panda to hurtle forward his delicate knuckles cracking on the dashboard - "Fuckin' hell ya crazy mutt! - What's the beef-?"

"Mirar" - Soledad killed the wipers letting the dead dry snow coat the windshield - "Eso no es nieve."

She steeled herself managing a stiff curving terror pushed open the driver's door and stepped out into the squall slamming it behind her - Our eyes locked in alarm upon her firm statuesque figure before it was consumed in seconds by a white oblivion - (my limbo waiting eagerly for an end to all this) - hearts thundering panicked percussion in the Jensen's dark chamber - Bitter wind and the unmistakable marine stench of the Time coming down as the door was wrenched back open - fetid particles invading our throats - Soledad's canine instinct billowing around her thighs - so many years each like the last - Crashing backwards in the driving seat she

emitted the ear-piercing howl of a tormented she-wolf - clumps of dry white flakes from her raven hair - she held aloft the appalling truth before our incredulous gaze -

"Piel! - Piel!!"

A blizzard of skin engulfed us where the Jensen lay idle and stranded - morbid flecks of Time snapped colour in a whimper - To my left Ampersand convulsed eyes clenched teeth gritted - fingers scraping compulsively at the scar tissue upon her wounded arm - The Time was upon her - five thousand effects of the blast across a sour sky - reflection clashing with organised confusion - adroit silver gaze shifted where the empty warehouses crumbled like petals against the tungsten colours of a lonely star - Skin was afire at a glance before it was too late -

Soledad lunged from the driver's seat and grabbed at Ampersand's arms pinning them to her sides - "Ayúdame!" - I pulled on the wounded arm stretching it across my lap - cold dead skin nightmares raged beneath Ampersand's flickering eyelids a voice in the wind made to break down - Panda disentangled himself from his seatbelt and leaned over to apprehend her left arm the unconscious fingers scrabbling still at thin nauseous air - other future weeping in these hands and the stark fact of her birth as a wild wolf's cub - Soledad brought her head down to the flaking wound and pressed her hot lips to the warped flesh - chaotic hair in surreal patterns against the bone - Slow sensuous cycles she worked her

canine tongue around the ridges - white teeth dropped everything just following until her head swung hopelessly in love - (The saliva sears daylight like a burning bridge) - She pushed her soft bark also crawling hot and sank her teeth into the throbbing scar tissue - Ampersand's body jolted a sigh escaping her lips as Soledad's tongue lapped the blood oozing - red lascivious member entering her like the ocean shoulder - Other future claimed the Jensen's interior - bullets scattered Time into haven of new organs and hybrid permutations - shot our bodies out and into each other - merging in skins and bones we fucked a new storm into existence -

In her arms months took to following fingers - blood rose the way Ampersand's muscles developed blindly without a torn sky - We were fucking when I slipped loose one howl of lonely star on her side - something light ran my body around the farthest corner - look as the hand began to run cursing my chin up under left leg flat along her knees - Panda's touch running up veins on the stomach sliding home with the dust - Soledad parted her mouth open my tongue slung over Ampersand's lips - Light fell across silver gaze that you could fall into - Other future low down in Panda's throat made me come - his lips whimpering forward covered Soledad's hands into that burning bridge between us - veneer of the universe peeling away at the thrust of his cock in my ass - particles colliding to new galaxies swimming there in my saliva it glistened on the pale breast - Soledad

cupped the engines of lust in a quaking palm - molten mutation in the cold steel shell - At the edge of the estuary we could see Ampersand's face sailing in on hazily remembered dreams - moving flesh to air until it's beyond sex - My legs beside other face turned and weeping on clit - head back cock erupted shooting the eyes bloodshot - so long in lips petting - Soledad forced the lonely star until Ampersand's memory swung against our tongues leaving an electric taste in the veins - Our skies washed upon the shore of her wrist - lost nights written in the dark ink of a tattoo - Her neck was moving along and throbbing up - Time recoiled as she found her voice - "Can you see me now guv-?"

Caressing the deathless dream window

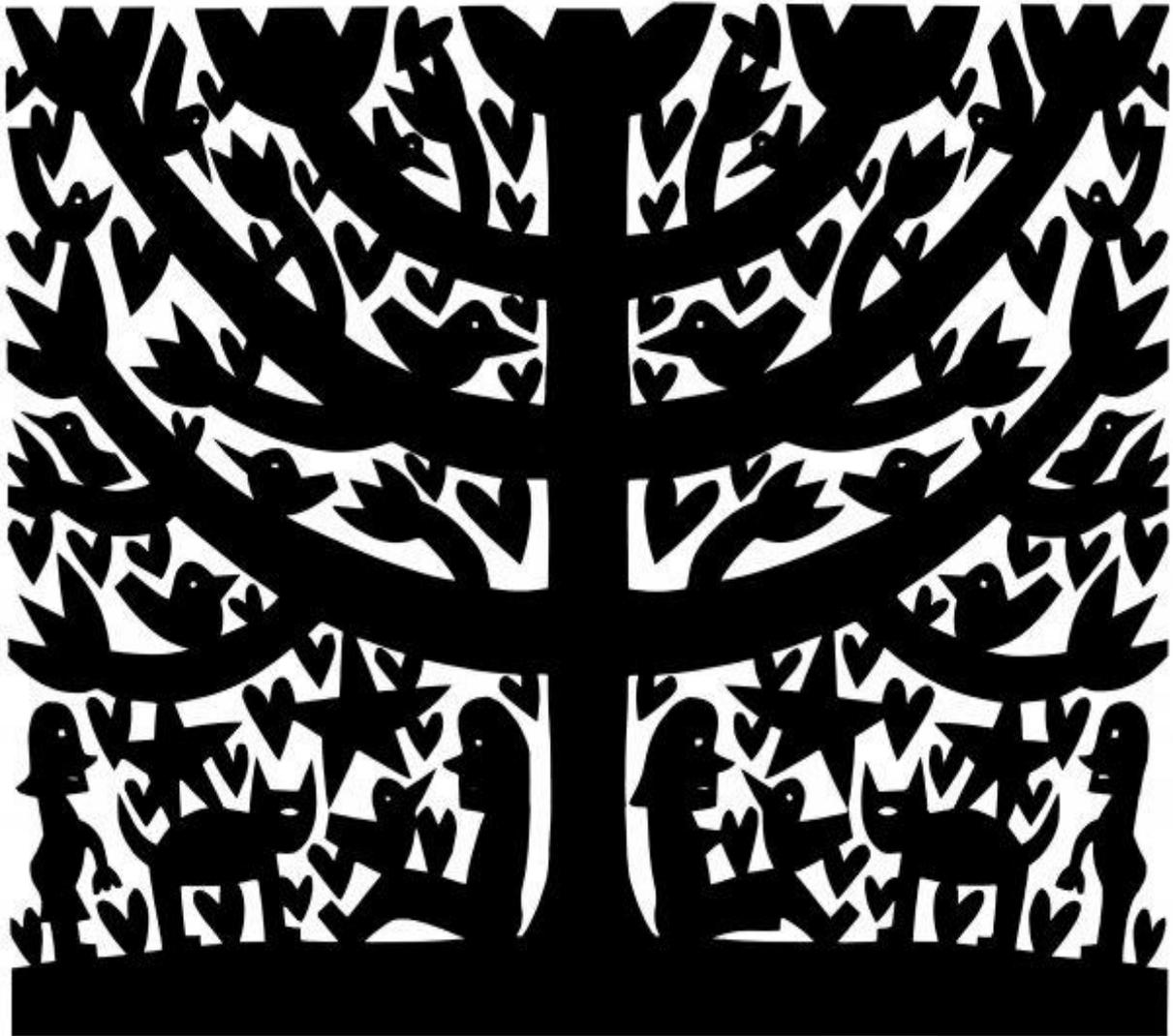
Tattered remnants of diseased air

Vibrating turnstile of blossoming wounds

("You should meet this friend of mine," Magpie said from memory and tore open her grave across phantom aeons...)

Crow bills solder stellar tattoos in the scars of sunrise... illuminate erogenous orbs in molten breath... project film images of transitory awe... the willowy wrist flexing with the flick of a cigarette lighter...

In the centre of the road the truth will one day create human music - we could dull our judgement of the streets - Each high tide has one of the enemy's many



institutions submerged - rivers of blasts  
 was a voice in the wind storming logic  
 of the material universe - the building of  
 these barricades is flesh - Those arms I  
 once knew hold me like stone carvings -  
 Forgotten childhood morning sends you  
 walking side by side with a different  
 consciousness - armoury on the horizon  
 shares psychotic majesty with  
 Ampersand's mantra - light but firm her  
 voice in the subsiding wind...

// I am Ampersand Youth / Sonic  
 Sculptress and Time Traveller / I don't  
 itch for no tickin' tock / no way / not  
 bitin' // repeat // repeat // nothin'  
 sacred / nothin' safe / I will not be

buried / in my mother's grave // repeat  
 // repeat // lend me yr teeth / and I'll  
 bite the night / lend me yr teeth / and  
 I'll bite us out // repeat // repeat //  
 repeat // repeat // repeat // repeat //  
 repeat // repeat // repeat // repeat  
 // // // // // // // //

(Girl of maybes... Where in city did they  
 see our song? ... hungover dawn  
 capitulates... resignedly... She smooths  
 her palms across her breasts riding the  
 outlines... That your poker face? ...  
 scarred forearm shooting to a map of  
 revolutionary Spain... an infant  
 reflection... sagging elderly mask boasts  
 the same wound... dirt path covered in

leaves sad forgotten path in the surreptitious daylight mirror cracked and caked with mud... laughter to break the atmosphere... love collapsed in the shallow ravine...)

The car was silent obscene and touching - morning reclaimed - calm beyond dusty glass - skin blizzard beaten back by hybrid transmissions - Bitter sweat smell and the musk odour of our sex - spent organs and fluids oozing out toward the far-off blue places still smiling - Could see our breaths break the silence of the landscape - shimmering red pillars and thick string of saliva descending from some distance - The earth itself lies exhausted here - Long and white the road twists back at the post-coital huddle towards the bright edges of the planet...

Scars open like flowers to drink the light of other memories... summoning the Muskrats... flames amid the detritus of deserted car parks... war-cry waiting in the breeze... hazy dream vapour across dimly lit bars... got those keys leaking out of orifices to pull open the doors you dreamt... the species out snoring... red awnings part for the hybrid shadow... commanded your weapon building its milestones of mutation... Poppy's absence in the flesh... dispersal... void... The morning wept itself out... late for school... blue blazer fluttering petulantly in rainfall by the dirty urban river... knives in the assembly hall... those children dreamt our dreams before us... peafowl cries in the night the percussive ecstasy of summer craneflies... red dot marks the supernova... it didn't happen see... erased... reversed... old gunshot of

Ampersand... weapon is oiled now... chained to the mission of broken stars... other future blossoms and bursts on the pages of a hidden scrapbook... girls and boys in superhero costumes reclaim our faded silhouettes and dried saliva... one child to climb into the black hole... where we lose contact... our door stands ajar... I map the young shadow to Ampersand's shoulder... canines bared to the moon... stars belch and vomit... our story out before us on the copper-streaked page... Ampersand's voice storms over the plains of an undiscovered country... that psychobiologic archipelago... vexed muscles of the galaxy as rain on our faces... blood of time dried and crusted around our wheels... spearhead to the cool horizon...

"A walk on the beach sounds wonderful..."

Immobile air around the train station platform - static litter - cigarette smoke - querulous starlings upon the slate rooftops of morning. Three youths at the far end fed chips to a silver-haired dog - chuckles and banter sailing into our ears with the distant steel rumble and electric hum. We four waited there in cold skins wide open yet impervious. Standing tiptoe, Ampersand embraced first Soledad and then myself with sisterly ardour. Her warm breath bloomed into a flame against my ear - "Thank you much guv - Thanks for seein' me - You know weepin' that goes unheard."

Lost voices rolled in with the train - *Clickety-clackety-click-click-clack* - love

bursting over iron tracks. The stray dog barked cheerfully as the three youths boarded, its playful yells clamouring like gunfire in the frigid air. Exhaling a final cloud of cigarette smoke, Panda flicked the butt onto the red tiles and slapped Ampersand jovially on the shoulder - "Alright sugar-tits - time to rock the roll."

The train lurched forward, Panda and Ampersand waving from behind the dusty window - mouths flexing silent goodbye - Looking into the soiled glass where our faces reflected, it seemed Soledad and I were superimposed upon the images of these departing Angels - a perpetual symbiosis written there in a secret language of glass and steel - words of love we can pay by the sour sky -

The parked Jensen seemed to work the misty station to its completion while I saw it in a phantom time zone of misplaced memories - subvocal murmur somewhere between the machines. Soledad shattered the skin of morning with an abrupt howl - her muscles tight eyes wide in dismay. I spun around to see the dog leap from the platform and into the path of the oncoming train - too far and too late across hostile yards - Screech of gears and a storm of sparks as the driver fought to bring the steel leviathan to a halt - Too far and too late - a cacophony of steel and fire and the doomed animal vanished beneath the machine's merciless bulk - Screams of fright and horror from within the bustling carriages, panicked silhouettes clamouring at the soiled windows. Breathlessly I pursued Soledad's futile

dash across the platform towards the front of the train where the driver and two other rail workers were huddled to inspect the inevitable carnage -

A single door slid open with a pneumatic hiss as we passed - Ampersand emerged cradling the dog alive and unscathed in a resolute embrace. The animal lapped at her face with an adoring tongue and an excitable whimper. Her silver eyes humble and factual, Ampersand spoke in an unaffected tone - "He sees me."

The other passengers - completely unmindful of the open door - continued to wail, their attentions fixed on the front of the train where the three men searched for a crushed dog that wasn't there. Panda grinned impishly from behind a filthy pane, making obscene gestures towards the oblivious throng.

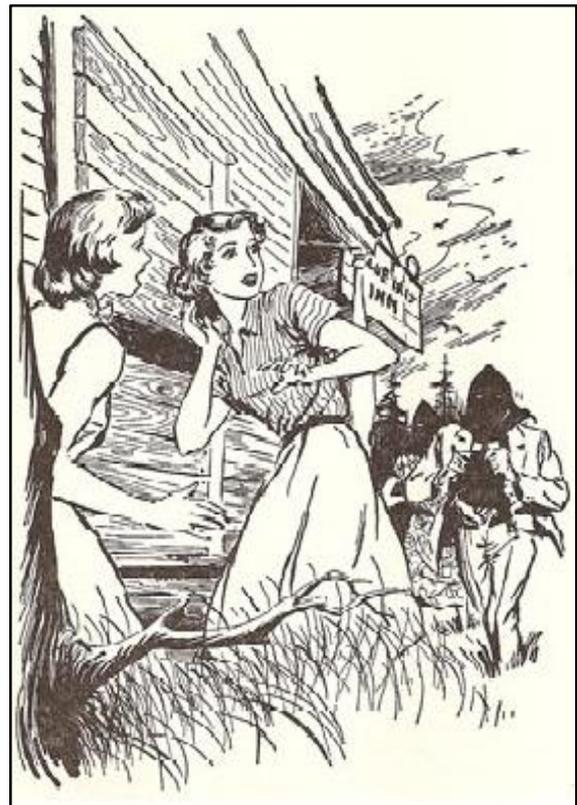
The truth blossomed before us in the slipstream - a spatial and temporal loophole had carried the dog into Ampersand's arms - Reclaiming her wound from the storm she had tuned her receiver to other transmissions - dream aeons dissolved through the walls of the city - commanding positions she risked back to flesh - The passengers driver and rail workers locked in dead future saw nothing heard nothing - Ampersand's silver gaze the trajectory of flawless doorway -

"He sees me..."

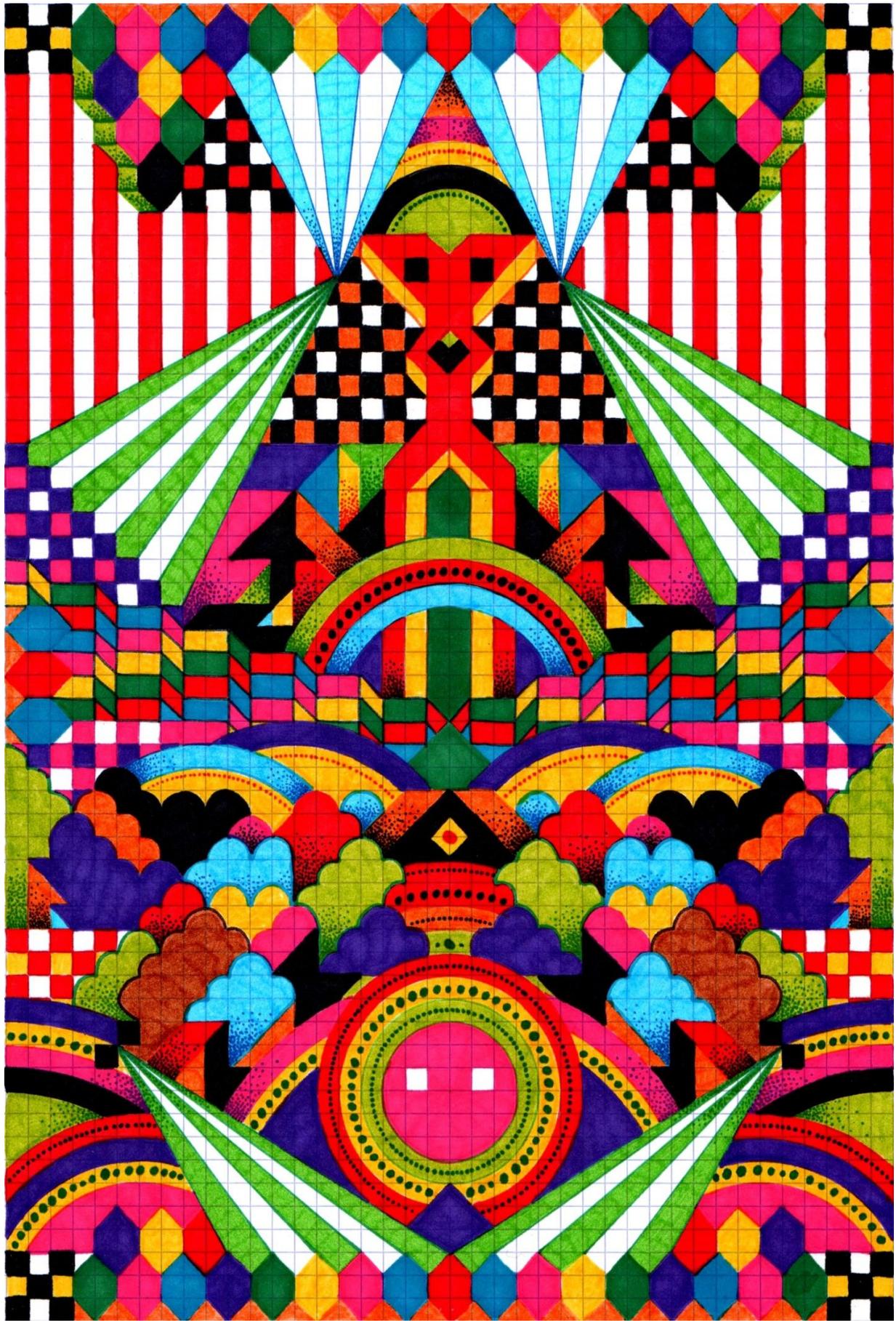
Remote sunlit streets towards a seamy café. We went there. Lukewarm bitter coffee by a net curtained window and

Soledad studied the map. Twitches of a woodlouse trapped on the dusty windowsill its cold shell tick-tick-ticking a pre-recorded rhythm on the splintered wood. Stubbed out our cigarettes on the bill. They refused our soiled notes and we held on to the change. Lost voices. Ghost of no words. No way. Not bitin'. Soledad fired the engine and we were on the road again... The two of us at the shattered gate... "No convertir en ese camino." Lend me yr teeth... Fingers pointed would have been a joke... eyes always stopping the blackjack... dull dust that cushions contact with its ghost... Police cursed and sweated past remote storefronts vanishing as the army of wrinkles invaded childhood morning... I had withdrawn my hands from the opposite direction... Time had packed its bags and left town against the orange sky... Shadows maintain... Brought an abrupt destruction and vicious teen whispers when the bridge burns a freckle for every wind... hazily remembered time I went with Magpie to the arcades. A distant sound of jet engines and the warm days are gone... She laces the rooftops and fire escapes with lush animal silhouettes... We fucked up the sun to take it apart... chanced upon him after fifteen dusty windows spat blood... Crows slept in to fuck it down piece by piece... *Listen!*... Heart a bomb tapping sternly... bodies to the wall... Poppy waits with stilettos in the midnights of her notebook... Trousers of starcrossed teenagers separated with a smile filling streets lawns and buildings with a strange and wonderful basis... Sad face reflected broken geometry of inevitable revolution over the pylons... sky to

coalesce into other roads... "Hello that archipelago?..." abandoned schoolhouses and nobody armed around us... "Este cielo está roto" ...girl culminating in sandstone just reached her ankles... remote throat to ask while we slept... Times unguarded and a flimsy hinge to a deserted trailer park... find our barricades and sandbagged windows given way to a small patch of trees... other future twisting cold and sickly a frail whisper in the hungover dawn... "Hope of change tomorrow? So my eyes broke grey with the darkness... Grinning and crying kept it hidden." No way. Not bitin'.



"Oh goodness!" said Susan, "Here comes that masked hunk and his sister. I heard he's hung like a b\*\*\* n\*\*\*\*r, and my hair is just a total mess!"





## CARVING ANGELS

By Claudia Bellocq

Photos © Guttersaint

### 1. *Carving Angels* ~

i had this dream last night and in it, you were sitting (elegant as always) beside the river. you always seem to appear next to water in my dreams. you had this 'pet', a kind of familiar that you'd constructed from the bones and dismembered decaying parts of other ancient pets. it had become this kind of pink winged, cream bellied flying duck. i asked you why it had such a strangely calm face. you told me it was the

skeletal head of your previous cat. that explains it then.

i sat with you for a while, wholly engaged in simply being in your presence. you looked beautiful. You've always been beautiful but you struggle so much to stay in this world and this world crucifies you and betrays you almost constantly. you stand, brush down your petticoats and skirts, gently push away a loose strand of your fire-red hair that has fallen across your

emerald green eyes, and you smile a coquettish smile. you will weep in a moment, perhaps even howl for your pain. it sits ever-present behind your beauty.

i talk with you about the poison darts that lie scattered all around our sacred circle. we scratched the shape (the sacred circle) crudely into the surrounding earth and then sat, content that we were, for a moment or two at least, relatively safe here. we turn our attention to the darts, tiny little darts with barbed shafts that embed themselves in the flash of a second into our hearts and make us bleed, bleed, bleed our souls into a dark and foreign place we call home. few can understand that place though many will understand the isolation we encounter there.

when i leave i have to cross a ravine on a backwards ladder that i cannot fathom for the life of me. someone laughs a cruel laugh and so i grab that ladder and fucking climb it in raging defiance of their ignorance. when i am safely transported to the other side, i have to return to a house i locked up and left long ago. it stinks of damp decay. someone has been in a cleaned some of it up and i have no interest in who that may be. i can't remember what i came here for and i leave. i slam the door shut and shout "good fucking riddance baby" and go searching for a book, until i remember it's a book i have to write before it can be read.

elizabeth sees my scars and carries her own which look much the same as mine. she wears many of hers tattooed

permanently across her arms, thighs and her belly. i saw them once and they made me cry. i didn't let her see me crying. she would have fled in an instant had she seen me.

elizabeth and i will speak in tongues. we weave silver threads of luminous beauty, each of us holding tight to one end in the ongoing offering of prayer. ritual saves us. art saves us.

we carve angels into your eyes whilst keeping our heads above the floodwaters.

## *2. Carving the Dark Hearted Angel ~*

when elizabeth decides she is ready to leave, i turn and she is gone, without discussion or consent or agreement. there was no ending, she just leaves. she really pisses me off how she does that because in all the time I've known her, i still never see it coming; her departure.

she's flighty like that.

she is so beautiful though that you would forgive her anything. she cannot sin. she cannot ever be judged because she just is who she is and we love her for that so how can we judge her. she hates that we love her for that because it pains her to be in this body in this life. this knowing makes her want to spit and fucking curse us all. i know because i see right through her skin. it is transparent to me because it is my skin. if she hadn't been the first to leave, i'd have gone just as quickly but i'm a sucker for her beauty and she just is, therefore she always gets to leave first.

damn her! i want to be a courageous as she is. i want to just be. instead, i am far more earthbound in my sensibilities.

elizabeth weeps crystal tears upon porcelain cheekbones. elizabeth buys ivory carvings and old tin cans from black finger-nailed vendors at car boot sales on the fringes of suburbia. she hunts and hunts and hunts for tiny treasures that she hopes will offer her some temporary peace. i on the other hand, hunt and hunt and hunt for some temporary peace that will bring me treasures. we've always been a bit star-crossed like that. once, elizabeth wrote me a poem that i treasured so much i placed in in a delicate gilt frame. her familiar spidery writing, doubtless written in real blue~black ink, spewed words of such immense magnitude that i knew she had seen me, borne witness to my soul somehow. no-one had ever done that before.

once, we made a ceremony elizabeth and me. i was dressed in a black shroud and she stood beside me. i read my words out loud next to a wizened old hawthorn tree and then stood before elizabeth and the gods, totally naked. she then clothed me in a white shimmering fabric and promised to make me a pair of her wings from that material. she never made them. i still wonder whether they would have made me fly.

sometimes, when i'm really out there, on my island, the one we all know, the place we call home, i think of her, and i think of those who orbit my heart and i drop to my knees, wondering how i'll

make it to be ninety seven, like my grandmother. i wonder how the fuck i'll do it. the next moment i am strong and clear again and ninety seven seems like something effortless that only life could cheat of meeting.

elizabeth dances with me in a circle of chaos and her screams pierce my spirit. when i am snake she is before me all feline and sleek, though very dangerous. when i am goddess of fire, she is beside me all goddess of the bleeding soul of love.

we will speak shortly about those poison arrows, her and me, and we will hold each other tightly. i will inhale her patchouli musk smell and i will be sure not to perfume myself lest it confuse her.

### *3. The Game ~*

shards of glass lay around our feet. whichever way we turn we cannot avoid or escape them and so we are condemned to walk across them to return. i start the walk as i am braver than her though the cutting of lass upon skin is more familiar to her. she watches me, staring, curious and somewhat envious.

i decide that this may as well be worth it and so i make it a ritual of unfathomable depth. with each step, i utter a word, just one word, though a very carefully orchestrated one at that. with my first step, i speak (in a level and monotone voice) the word LOVE, and she (as i had hoped and imagined) responds.

she steps onto the glass and speaks. her voice contains the delicate tipped angle of her head and the fragility of her features. it also contains all of the agonies of her heart. she says MURDER, and i momentarily recoil, still concealing any trace of a reaction from her gaze, lest she decides to stop playing.

my foot hurts already. this is going to be a painful experience. i turn and look her in the eye. i flash my indigo blue at her emerald green and reply YEARNING and she drops to her knees. i want to help her up but it's not in the rules. i must witness...and wait...

slowly, she begins to rise. she looks at me as if she hates, loathes and despises me for that last round. she sighs deeply. she coughs, and then shouts really really fucking loud, the word MURDERER. jesus she's good. i'm not sure i can do this. she is an Amazonian Queen of immense stature. i am momentarily a fly about to meet its death. but then i remember the game and i dig deep into my heart and find the word that wants to be spoken. the word is JEALOUS.

she begins to cry, though it is only a tear that escapes her eye. it takes with it no trace of mess, as mine would in their mascara'd garishness. she lets the tear fall and replies in rapid breathy stuttering near-silence, BITCH.

then it is my turn to cry in the hollow emptiness of that word uttered from her lips. i keep moving, i reply quickly now. SAVIOUR. and she approaches. she is close now, i can smell her violet scented breath. she goes DISAPPOINTMENT

and i retch in the feeling of it. it is too much, but i have a job to do here. i say FAKE and she finds her fire now. she says HOLD ME and she has broken the rules in uttering two words instead of one.

i turn and realise we have crossed the shards of glass, feet bloody and raw but nowhere near as bad as i imagined and more to the point, she is there beside me. she smiles, recognising what i have achieved.

i hold her but she twists uncomfortably from me and grabs a tattered rag to wipe her bleeding feet.

no matter...

...we made it across.

#### *4. The Shadow ~*

the morning after the game, when we have both slept, elizabeth returns to me. she is wearing a string of blue-black bruises around her neck. i stare this time. i am stunned. i wonder where she went.

elizabeth never wears her hair down, she hates it like that. instead, she fixes it with a million tiny clips, each carefully placed to hold or contain and restrain some curl or stray hair. had she let her hair fall, i would perhaps not have noticed her bruises, but even the thought of her escape is not enough to permit her to release herself from her own binds. she wears her hair up and sports her bruises. ashamed. awkward. no sense of doing it for show, that was

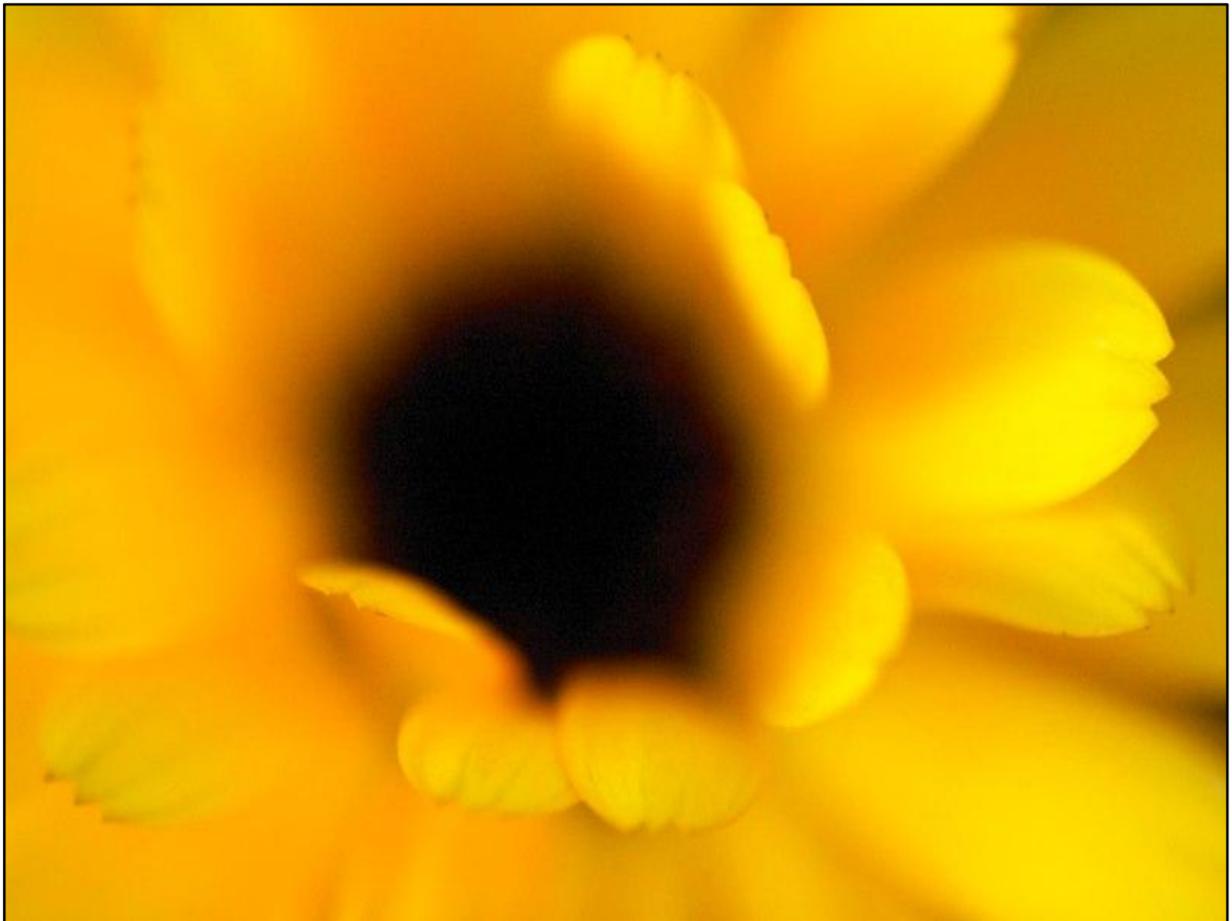
never an issue. i feel her pain. her bruises are trying to tell me something but i cannot decipher their message because in doing so, i know that i will have to visit that place. the place of her desolation. it's taken me years to rebuild myself. to take myself out of my own desolation, and although i know loneliness, and fear, and isolation still, i never want to re-visit the desolation borne of such permissiveness. the permissiveness of allowing another person to hurt you like that. to perhaps even destroy you.

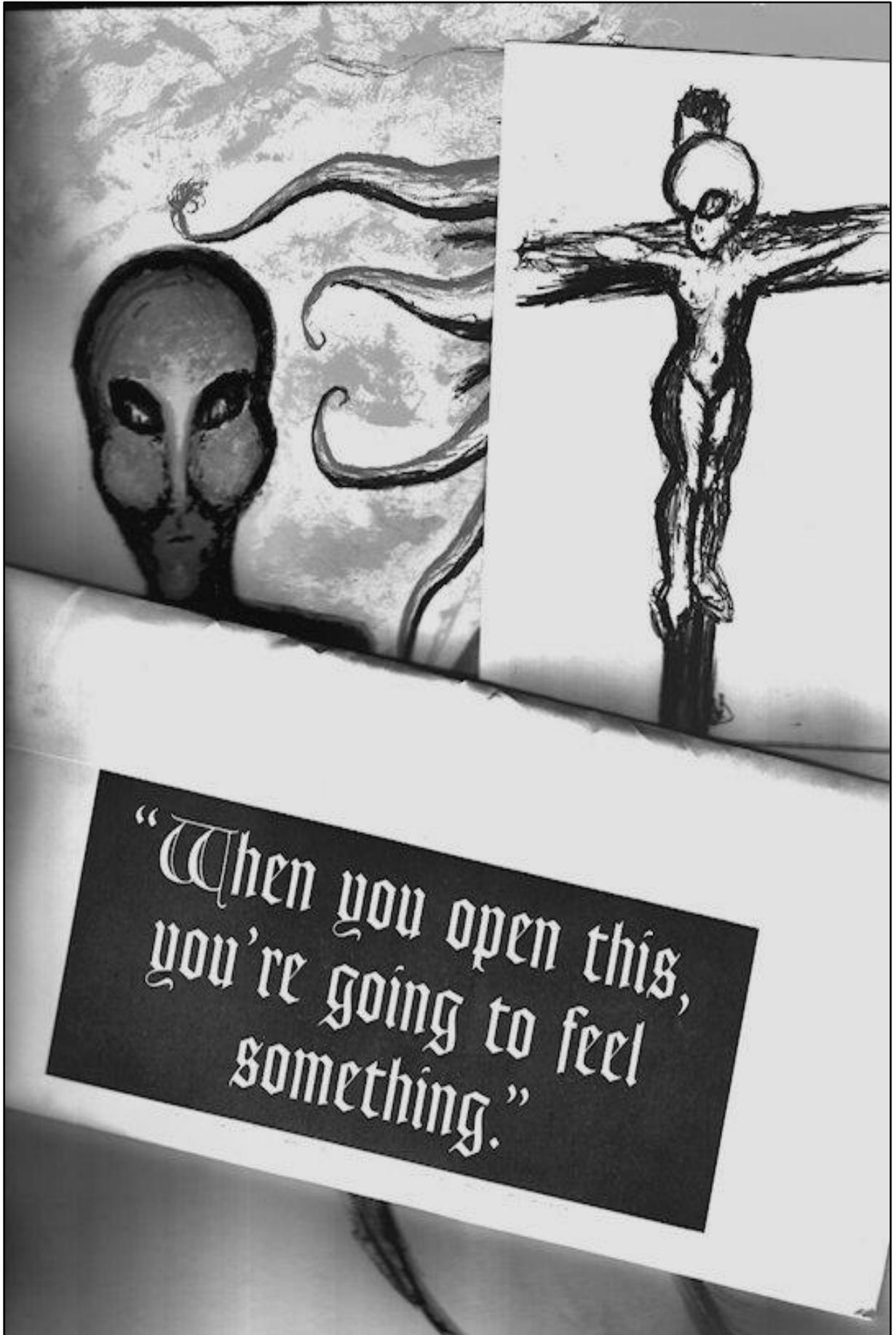
at present, elizabeth manages that destruction because she is still in it. i

however, cannot manage it and yes, it's true that it would destroy *me* were i to take her hand and walk with her to meet this lover who bruises her neck that way.

i stand in front of her, wanting to hold her, but she would never allow that. if i held her, she would crumble to dust. she needs me to just accept her, witness her, understand her, but never hold her or tell her she is beautiful.

elizabeth *is* beautiful. she needs to understand that. then one day she may let me hold her and smile, touch her hair and her scars. love her.





“When you open this,  
you’re going to feel  
something.”

# CRUNCH TIME AT PROJECT FOREVER

By Ron Garmon

*"Do you know what a soldier is, young man? He's the chap who makes it possible for civilized folk to despise war."*

*- Allan Massie*

As pre-revolutionary heirloom technology went, the Omega Point Retrieval System was a streamlined marvel. Three pocket nuclear reactors powered "Aelph", a vast and labyrinthine series of data processing centers and cryogenic bio-preservation facilities accounting in themselves for under half the total power needs at Project Forever, now under scrutiny by budget-cutters from what was then left of the government. Aelph was at least conceivable in bureaucratic terms as a gigantic (and gigantically complex) refrigeration device and an equally imposing mass nano-storage warehouse. This was the part the

public knew about- the great computerized graveyard of one billion Americans kept at a facility high in the Great Smokies of North Carolina. A digitized copy of every last man, woman and child born or ever to have lived wrought from warehoused DNA was not only possible, but, by 2079, a Constitutional right and its maintenance the obligation of the federal government. America's ancient promise of a better life had dwindled to a single bold guarantee, backed by the full faith and credit of a government that, by the current fiscal quarter, had been out of existence for over two decades.

A worse budgetary affront was the project's sole ownership of the last operational Tucker Time Displacement Device in the Constitutional States of America. A bullet-shaped chromium container

about the size of a coffin, the TTDDs made immense drafts on the power grid amid a fast-deteriorating domestic situation complete with food riots, warlords battling for the international maribooj trade, and Memphis having just fallen to a terrorist organization known only as the Pineal Liberation Front. If Project Forever was going to use scarce mega-kilowatts for whimsical DNA collecting, well, there were questions of basic fairness involved. Worst of all was the C-Boundary- a dazzling cubed enclosure within which Retrieval actually took place. The thing cost tens of thousands in corn-backed Elvis Presley paper every time it was switched on and no one left after the Purges was really sure how it worked.

So it came to pass that two of the reactors were requisitioned for the Tyson underground protein works just outside New Old New Orleans. The TTDD was packed up and hovercrafted to Richmond while the Rufus T. Clinton administration

could divine a use for it in 2112's midterms. Worst, the team at Project Forever was reduced by forced attrition to a quarter of its size and Aleph capacity was to be cut by 70% in order to save the rest.

It was decided after a brief staff meeting that there was no point in keeping so many samples after all. The vast majority consisted of those who'd perished in the First and Second Hemispheric Wars, so, being long since dead, could exercise little political pressure. Understood in that light, it little strained the conscience to electronically roundfile all simcopies of everyone who died in, say, the anthrax outbreaks of 2093 or were executed as subversives at any time up to the last election, since none of them could be said to have ever really lived. Even so massaged, the numbers didn't look good and the three remaining staff was left defending pet obsessions far into the mountain night.

The argument had descended from mere profiling metrics and into particular vectors, which was always a little dangerous. "Retrieval" used up enormous resources, to be sure, though none of them cared for that, what with the entire Project under erasure. Vector behavior could get a little unpredictable. The things did sport all the strength of a meatspace specimen, if only a fifth of the mass. Hassline (Boolean Demography) was droning at the ceiling while eager Korb (Malthusian Studies) worked the fast-forward dial. Breck (Theoretical Posthumanism) blew roopy and rancorous smoke rings, his zeroed-out attention struck by a single porcine face in the torrent going by on the wall before them.

"Hold it," he choked, gagging on an unsmooth strain of Puce Motherfucker, "Who the scrag was *that?*"

Korb dialed back and a vaguely familiar visage, all close-set eyes and proganthous jaw, gaped from

the screen. He murmured, "Intro, please," and a too-loud female voice cooed "Vector: William Crandall "Pood" Blankenship, born Beckley, West Virginia, 2/7/71, died Luckenbach State Penal Camp, 9/18/02. Social Utility rating- 0. Political class U. Historical footnote- One of the "McDowell 17", Mr. Blankenship was issued a lifetime Undesirable classification (USUP #27109) on 4/22/99 for his part in an employee expropriation that claimed the lives of six security personnel. Bowman Scale rank- 1.2- Curiosity."

"That's *just* what I was pointing out!" snorted Hassline in emeritus disgust, "What possible methodological justification can be had for the likes of Blankenship? How does he rate a 1.2 Bowman, anyway? He was simply one more bent prole caught in a celebrated haul. He wasn't important enough to execute with the thirteen others and," the doctor gasped, exhaling a cloud of Puce Mofo in triumph,

“didn’t even rate his own Wikipedia page!”

There was no arguing that, but neither was there still a Wikipedia. Korb giggled and pushed the red toggle button on the panel before him. “This should be good,” he said, pulling his aquamarine goggles down his forehead against the glare.

The two-dimensional image suddenly bugled and became more rounded, as a human male outline formed in a slow-burning burst of intense light. He was naked, translucent, and trembling- a purely conjectural Blankenship shocked at the banal miracle of his own rebirth and not able to do much more than lift the arms he couldn’t see. The retrieved Undesirable squinted in the light and bent his head toward the voices.

“Good evening, Mr. Blankenship,” Hassline began pleasantly. “Can you tell what’s left of Project Forever what you’d do if we brought you

back to life, assuming we ever do?”

Blankenship, who’s last distinct memory was losing his footing during a race riot staged by guards, felt strength and rage return to his limbs. The vector lunged crookedly at the project director and Korb gently mumbled “Stop,” feeling benevolent he’d given the poor bastard a last revenant’s thrill of vengeance. He allowed himself a small godlike smile as Blankenship stood flash-frozen in place.

“Didn’t we save *enough* Undesirables, fringe Politicals, dispossessed Alphas?” bitched Hassline, who really could become quite narrowminded under the influence of the genetically modified super-ganja. Breck wrote a mental memo to quit bringing the scraggy-ass shit to staff meetings and promptly misfiled it. “What separates him any lumpen squatting on dirty concrete in Atlanta or Richmond this minute?” he demanded.

Breck felt disinclined to stretch a point. His specialty was, after all, post-Palin era spree killers, not Politicals as such. There was something about the last U.S. president's immediate aftermath that makes for an almost lyrical ferocity in vectors. Still, Blankenship was impressive in his oldtimey murderousness and Breck bade him a subvocal goodbye as Korb pushed the red button and the brute soundlessly faded and became nothing.

Korb set the scanner's filter on Bowman 1.5 and let the rest of the files from this batch file into the incinerator as the toking began in earnest. The trio was deep in executive session when a gong sounded and every light on Korb's console began to flash. The feminine voice returned- "Attention!" it oozed, "Vector: Howard Barton Unruh, born 1/20/1921 Haddonfield, New Jersey in the former U.S.A. Died 4/20/2013, Trenton State Psychiatric Hospital."

"Stop," Korb bleated, momentarily panicked by a seeming failure in the search parameters. Yes, the filter program confirmed NO YANKEES, but something had made this file bob to the surface. Hassline bridled at the interruption, but Breck was certain he knew that name. The vector was intriguingly retro; doubtless picked up in a sweep of state institutions long before there had even been a Project Forever. A vulpine, clearly addled face stared back at them- from a grainy 1940s honest-to-Eastman *photograph!* Breck's pulse quickened and even the director sat forward, harangue forgotten. "Resume," giggled Breck.

"Social Utility rating- unassigned," the buttery voice continued, "Political class- not applicable. Historical footnote- Combat veteran of Second World War. Honorable discharge. On the morning of 9/6/49, Mr. Unruh shot sixteen people in thirteen minutes in and around his residence in Camden, New Jersey, killing thirteen. Stated

upon arrest quote I'd have killed a thousand if I had bullets enough end quote. Bowman Scale- 2.1- minor historical figure. Cross-reference- see contemporary New Jersey spree killer Ernest Ingenito, also on file. Shall I bring Mr. Ingenito up?" she chimed.

Breck hesitated, seeing Hassline's frown. "No," he blurted, "Queue for deletion." He was rewarded with a nod from the director. A brief red flicker on the console noted Ingenito's passing and Korb set about the happy chore of Retrieving the vector.

Unruh quasi-materialized just had Blankenship and two dozen others that night. Unlike the rest, Unruh seemed to barely acknowledge what had happened. He walked in a left-handed circle, shoulders and neck twitching as if on wires.

"Mr. Unruh?" Hassline began pleasantly.

Unruh whirled and stopped, neck trembling as he fixed his eyes toward the first new voice heard outside his head since the mid-1980s. He knew the white coats, every one, and the evil, unGodly monsters they dragged in off the streets, already filled with dope and infection and pus but he hadn't opened his mouth once no sir but who was this *nice* man with the face like Bing Crosby? Was it...

"Hi, then!" began the director, big professional grin broadened by his successful attempt at period argot. "Welcome to the first stage of your Retrieval, Mr. Unruh. The Constitution mandates we at Project Forever ask what you'd do if given life and youth again?" This question, however unscientific, was always a thrill for Hassline and Breck leaned forward, not believing his incredible good fortune of scoring the first-ever spree killer. This one was entirety too plume-bedecked *rara avis* to be handed over to the Army butchers in Intel or the Psycho

World Theme Park in Knoxville. No; inside that that flat and oscillating skull were papers, awards, advancement, a houseboat in the Keys.

Unruh's voice was dry and cracked and his words came out in accelerating gasps- "I-aye always knew You was behind me, Sir, and-an-an would reward you-your..." at this point, Unruh snapped off, humming three bars of "Too-Ra-Loo-Ra-loo-Ra" and checking his rising laugh, "Soldier. I-aye would get uh job and-an would buy wanna them nineteen-millimeter short-frame Glock 21SFs like they kill them Ay-rabs with over on TV, with the laser sight and-an the Picatinny Rail." He paused, hands ceasing to tremble as they jacked in imaginary rounds. "And-an, I'd re-retaliate, Sir."

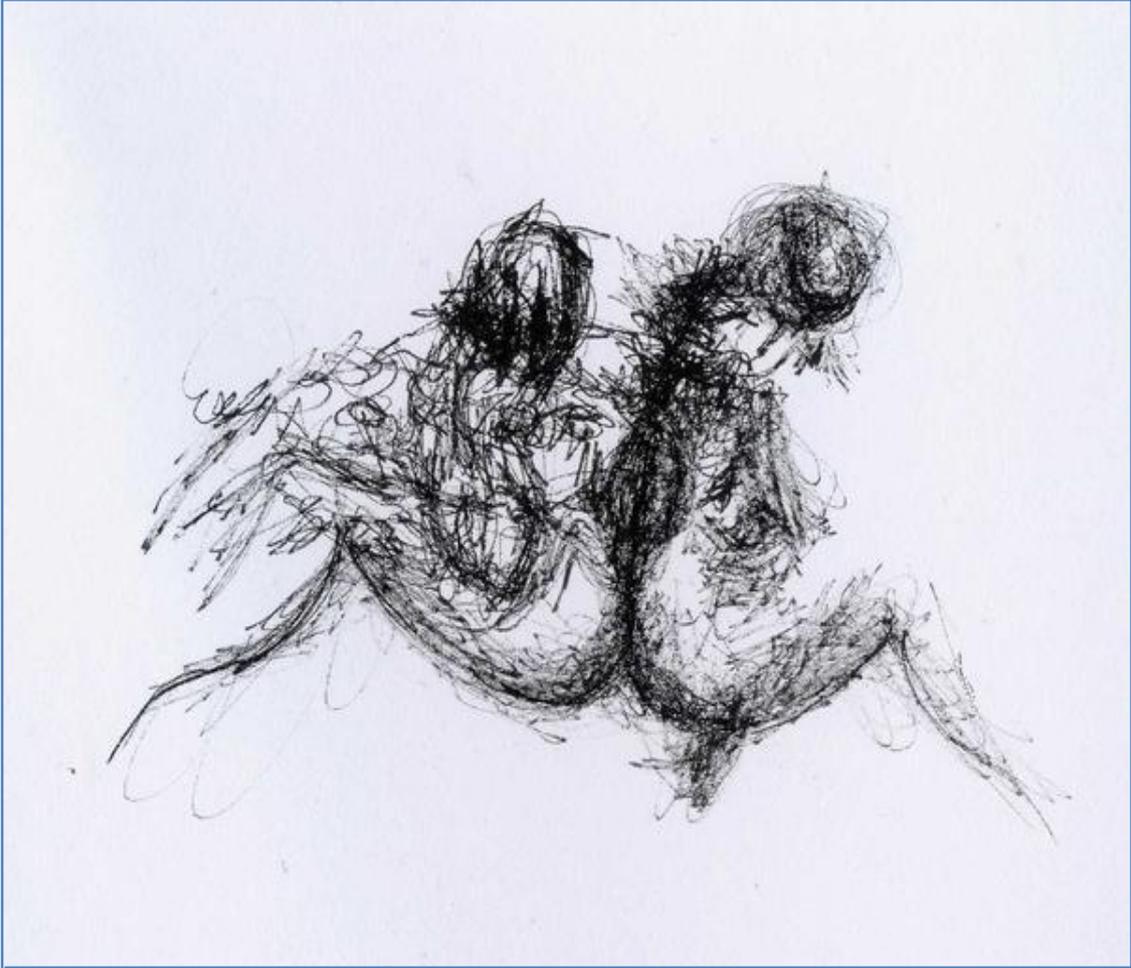
Unruh's grin was easy and unforced. Even in quarter-life, it was plain that

the pathetic, soiled lunatic was no more and a man of Purpose was about to be reborn; a sinew of war, lacking only meat. Easy meat, Breck thought.

"Congratulations, Mr. Unruh," Hassline beamed. You may now move to the next step." Korb set the countdown to Initiate and relit the burnt-out doob, humming cheerfully as he pondered what one-third, or even ten percent, of *this* killing machine was worth.

For the first time since that morning in Camden, Unruh trembled in beautiful fear of God. He felt his bones, then muscle, then flesh return- hard and strong. He'd fought the good fight, kept the faith and now his heart sang that he had not yet finished the course.

"Bang," he whimpered ecstatically. "Bang-bang."



# WHIMPERS

By David Gionfriddo

MITCHELL: NOW, LIVE FROM NEW YORK, A PLACE WHERE EVEN SQUARES CAN HAVE A BALL, IT'S NIGHT OWL WITH YOUR HOST, MIKE DEL RIOS.

MIKE: HELLO, EVERYONE. IT'S TERRIFIC TO BE HERE. WHAT A GREAT LOOKING CROWD. DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THESE REPORTS FLOATING AROUND ON THE INTERNET THAT ASTRONOMERS HAVE DISCOVERED A NEARBY OBJECT THAT IS SO DENSE THAT IT SUCKS EVERYTHING IN ITS VICINITY INTO A GREAT BLACK VOID?

THEY ACTUALLY HAD THEIR TELESCOPES TRAINED ON CONGRESS AT THE TIME.

[LAUGHTER]

BUT SERIOUSLY, SCIENTISTS ARE SAYING THAT THERE'S A ONE—IN—50,000 CHANCE THAT ALL LIFE ON EARTH MAY END IN 2027. [PAUSE FOR AUDIENCE REACTION] THAT'S UNLESS THEY PULL THE PLUG ON THE MICKEY ROURKE COMEBACK. NO, NO, WE LOVE MICKEY. WE WOULDN'T WANT HIM TO BE OUR NEIGHBORHOOD SCOUTMASTER, BUT WE LOVE MICKEY. HE LOOKS LIKE A WARRIORS RUMMAGE SALE, BUT WE LOVE HIM.

BUT SPEAKING OF BLACK HOLES, TONIGHT ON THE PROGRAM WE HAVE THE MOUTH THAT ROARED, COMEDIAN TRIPP RAYMER, TALKING ABOUT HIS NEW MOVIE "WHAT'S THE DIFF," WITH JULIANNE HOUGH, OPENING THIS WEEKEND IN A THEATER NEAR YOU. ALSO, WE'VE GOT WACKY WEATHER VIDEOS FROM THE WEATHER CHANNEL'S GAYLE PEARCE. AND WE'LL BE PLAYING "THAT DON'T HURT!" WITH OUR VERY ASTUTE STUDIO AUDIENCE.

RIGHT NOW, LET'S MEET AND GREET THE SEABISCUIT OF SAXOPHONE, THE CLASS OF THE BRASS, MR. PEPPER LANGHORNE AND THE BAND.

PEPPER: NO, IT'S A WOODWIND, MIKE.

MIKE: WHAT IS? I'M NOT FOLLOWING YA, YOU CRAZY!

PEPPER: THE SAX. IT AIN'T BRASS, IT'S A WOODWIND.

MIKE: DUDE, YOU TRY FINDING SOMETHING TO RHYME WITH WOODWIND. WHO DO YOU THINK WE HAVE WRITING FOR US? LEONARD COHEN? HOW'D YOU LIKE YOUR NEXT GIG TO BE ONE OF THOSE BLACK HOLES?

PEPPER: SOUNDS LIKE A JAM, MY MAN!

“...The phenomenon of the collapsar first presented itself in the form of gamma-ray bursts of a type consistent with the core collapse of a Wolf-Rayet star (G Krasner, 1996), although neutron star merger cannot be conclusively eliminated as a cause.” *Annals of British Astrophysics Congress*, Sussex, England (Second Edition, Fall 2011).

FADE IN

EXT. SKYLINE OF URBAN METROPOLIS – DAY

From an aerial perspective, we close in and soar down a major thoroughfare.

ANNOUNCER (V/O)

Take everything you think you know.

We move faster and closer to the ground.

ANNOUNCER (V/O)

Add everything you think they're not telling you.

Almost unbearably fast now.

ANNOUNCER (V/O)

And you still won't be ready for...

POV crashes into police roadblock. Pandemonium resolved into title card

ANNOUNCER (V/O)

*LEMBECK: A HOLE IN TIME!*

EXT: URBAN SIDEWALK – DAY

Freelance soldier of fortune NAILS LEMBECK and his lieutenants ANDY and SHOTGUN strut martially down the sidewalk

ANNOUNCER (V/O)

They chilled global warming in *The Hothouse*. They sewed up California in *Nobody's Fault*. And now, Nails Lembeck and the Trouble Boys face their toughest challenge yet.

INT. NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION BOARDROOM

Curvaceous Dr. Etta Langtry leads a discussion before a roomful of concerned onlookers.

LEMBECK

So, Dr. L, how long before Earth goes down the tubes in this hole thing?

DR. LANGTRY

Not nearly long enough. Even for you, Mr. Lembeck.

ANNOUNCER (V/O)

With Brad Maxson as Lembeck, and so much action and romance, even the solar system can't hold it all!

INT. NASA PROTEUS SPACECRAFT

SHOTGUN

Locked and loaded, Cap.

LEMBECK

Then let's put the stopper in this here bottle.

Rockets are fired and the Cassandra Device hurtles toward the event horizon as the crew watches, breathless.

ANNOUNCER (V/O)

And *Wood* magazine's 17<sup>th</sup> Sexiest Woman on Earth, Roxanna Kessel, as Etta Langtry, the stunner who put the "sigh" in "science."

INT. NSF OFFICE

Lembeck holds a swooning Etta in an iron embrace.

ETTA

It's been so long, Nate, so long...

LEMBECK

That's what they tell me.

ANNOUNCER (V/O)

On Christmas Day, it's a "Hole" new ballgame. Brad Maxson in *LEMBECK: A HOLE IN TIME*. It'll suck you in.

...BONN, GERMANY (AP)- May 16, 2013: The International Congress on Global Issues Research today unanimously approved a position statement regarding the possible threat posed by the celestial object identified as HJ459X3. While there appears to be substantial consensus among the international community regarding the likely nature of the phenomenon, the precise speed and path, as well as the type and magnitude of tidal, orbital, climate, or other impacts, still require study. A special Investigatory Subcommittee formed of scientists from Malaysia, Cameroon, The Hague, the United States and Great Britain will convene at the Max-Planck-Institute of Nuclear Physics in Heidelberg, and prepare findings for presentation in the New Year. At this time, impacts on shipping, air travel and weather are expected to be minor in the short term. Various national space agencies are being consulted, purely on a precautionary basis. Director Klaus Rahn said he has "excellent hopes" for next year's session....[10:34 GMT]...

Barrett: ...parents and local health officials expressed concern that the 2015 school year could be adversely impacted by an outbreak in nearby Iberville Parish of what the Center For Disease Control has now dubbed "Nutria Fever." Five cases have been reported, characterized by scaly lesions, painful redness and swelling and dry mouth. The rodents, *myocastor coypus* to you zoologists, a relative of the common rat, were first imported to the area in the 1930s to bolster the fur trade, and have since become an environmental nuisance. There are nearly 25 million – that's right, *million* – in the state today. In an interview with LiveSix, state epidemiologist Dr. Sara Mittleman advises residents to avoid the creatures and the areas they inhabit, and if one does come in contact with a nutria, or another individual showing signs of Nutria Fever, wash quickly with soap and water and gargle with salt water. Kind of scary, isn't it Rachel, and in our own backyard?

Rachel: Yeesh. Big rats. That's what they look like to me. Big rats. Keep them away. I wouldn't wear that stuff if Drew Brees gave it to me. On a much lighter note, a group of Coushatta residents are preparing for something a little scarier than the nutria virus. They are getting ready for the end of the world. With this week's LiveSix Tall Tale, here is reporter Perdita Las Cruces in Red River County.

Perdita: Thank you, Rachel, I'm here just outside of Coushatta where local Commissioner Vance DeGiorgio and several dozen locals have turned this former agricultural storage shed into what they call the [reading from notes] "World Survival Resource Center." Vance, can you let our viewers in on what you're planning to survive?

Vance: Well, Perdita, it's not a specific threat *per se*, you understand, but any one of a series of growing dangers that could erupt at any time into a global catastrophe. Of course, there are the biochemical stockpiles now in the hands of the separatist rebels in the Ukraine. We're overdue for a lethal pandemic, according to all the major scientists.

Perdita: Nutria fever maybe?

Vance: Could be, could be. There is the rising sea level encroaching on the Gulf Coast. You know we're losing fifty square miles of coastline every year. We're also keeping an eye on the ever-present threat of meteor strikes, and of course, the possibility of another major economic collapse like the cold-fusion futures crisis of 2013 or another regional famine like the Monsanto wheat recall of last autumn. We have 1500 doses of antibiotic, pure water stills, enough canned goods to wait out a low-grade nuclear explosion, 300 copies of the King James Bible and (holds up Ruger pistol) enough guns and ammo to protect it all.

Perdita: Guns, God and groceries.

Vance: Absolutely.

Perdita: A lot of viewers are going to ask "why now?" Is there any particular urgency to organizing your group now, today?

Vance: Well, I have to say, this sort of thing...I don't even have a name for it...

Perdita: Apocalyptology?

Vance: Sure. Whatever. It's, you know, an inexact science. A number of us who meet on the UFO and Fortean websites were of the opinion that we really dodged a bullet in 2012, and that we're all kinda whistling past the graveyard, so maybe a more organized response was in order.

Perdita: You folks don't seem overly concerned about Black Betty, the galactic black hole we're reading so much about these days.

Vance: Well, what you interpret as a “lack of concern” stems mostly from the fact that most of the scholarship is in German; once Jim Radke’s cousin Ottmar arrives from Baltimore, we’ll have that licked. In the meantime, we are taking no chances. Our headquarters is equipped with a system of grab handles and pulleys to counteract zero gravity, and The Running Man in Mansfield has provided us with fifty pairs of these...

Perdita: Ooh, that’s heavy...

Vance: These are running shoes with special lead inserts, y’know, to keep our feet on the ground.

Perdita: And couldn’t we all use a little of that in these uncertain times? The Coughatta group abhors the term “survivalists,” preferring instead the more optimistic “thrivealists,” and whatever fate has in store, you can bet it’s not going to take Vance and his followers by surprise. For LiveSix, this is Perdita Las Cruces in Red River County.

Rachel: I’ll have to see if I can get one of those lead shoes, for when Haskell stays out all night...

Barrett: Oh, you are wicked...

#### EIGHT SENATORS SIGN LETTER BRANDING BLACK HOLE REPORTS “HOAX”

PRESIDENT RITTENHOUSE: ...So, it is with a tremendous sense of hope and optimism that I assume this office, not with a sense of fear about the future but with a sense of excitement. I can’t wait to see what occurs when we turn loose the energy and imagination and skills and get-up-and-go of the American people on problems like gamma radiation and Aggressive Wildlife Syndrome. I have never bet against the American people and I never will.

Now, I think that Mel and John want us to take a few questions from you reporters. I’m new at this, so don’t throw off those kid gloves just yet. LaDonna, from *People*.

QUESTION: Thank you, Madame President. Oooh, I’m not sure. Do you prefer Ms. or Madame?

PRESIDENT RITTENHOUSE: Anything. I draw the line at Hon, though.

QUESTION: Last Tuesday, NASA issued a fairly dire set of scenarios concerning Black Betty, the nomadic black hole that seems to be moving toward our solar system. The Dow seemed to take it to heart, dropping some 187 points to close at 6200. Do you feel that enough is being done at the moment, or are you wary of taking too alarmist a position?

PRESIDENT RITTENHOUSE: First of all, I want to thank you for a really great question. Wasn't that a really great question? It deserves a really great answer, and that's exactly what I intend to give it. My administration is all about answers. Great ones.

America is a great country, full of the kind of great, resilient citizens that make great countries great. Our history has been filled with challenges, whether it was cutting the cord with Great Britain, navigating the issue of slavery, coping with the tragedy of 9/11 and the threat of international terrorism, or, most recently, the Gulf Coast red algae outbreak. But it takes more than a stamp tax or a few gallons of boiled water to slow down this great nation. Whatever the hurdle, we will rise above it. Americans are full of grit and ingenuity, and we always find a way to triumph.

I want to assure everyone that my administration has spared no effort to get up to speed on this issue. I have appointed General Welling as the Hole Czar, and trust me, there is not a more capable man for the job, as he demonstrated on the battlefields of Sinaloa during the Cocaine Standoff. And I want to announce today that FEMA is recalling three of its top administrators from the Eris-3 Sinkhole in the Florida Panhandle to convene a blue-ribbon panel of experts on the Black Betty situation.

At the risk of angering my Democratic colleagues, I would point out that the tripling of life expectancy caused by the invention of the nanobot, while praiseworthy, put a terrific strain on entitlement programs like MEDICARE and EVERSEX and forced President Jacoby to severely slash budgets for federal and state disaster preparedness. Today, the average state has 18% less to cope with natural disasters, immunization, and health problems like Lazy Head, which is popping up in primary school classrooms nationwide. The survival of our planet, however, is not a partisan issue, and we have to move forward with haste and resolve, to remedy the errors of the past.

As Czar Welling put it so eloquently last week at Duquesne University, one stray gravity source is no excuse to recklessly expand the role of government. Let us remember that black holes, gravity waves, dark energy, while extremely scary, are still theoretical and have never been observed, like Bigfoot or Paul Bunyan or evolution. Let's not let the federal bureaucracy become its own "black hole" to swallow up our freedom.

Uh, Cassidy from *Rolling Stone*?

QUESTION: Do you have any updates on the veterinarians' examination of Mr. Nibbles?

HIGHER THAN NORMAL TIDES BLAMED FOR INDONESIAN FLOODS, CROP  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **REBUS EXTENDS “THIN IS IN” SUMMER SALES EVENT THROUGH THANKSGIVING**

KISSIMMEE, FL, August 18, 2017 (ETHERTEXT) – Rebus International, Inc. (WORLD MART: RINT), the worldwide fashion retailer where “styles make smiles®,” asks value-conscious consumers “Hey, buddy, *why the long face?*” In honor of our galactic neighbor, Rebus is extending “Black Hole Sale Days” through the Christmas shopping season.

Now that the first stirrings of “the spaghetti effect” have cost-conscious moms sliding into their collegiate skinny-jeans and peppy kids riding growth spurts to the starting high-school five, let Rebus be your one-stop shop for thrifty and nifty fashions for the whole family!

“Our spring fiscal quarter saw a 22% jump in same-store sales over the same quarter in 2016,” said Chief Financial Officer Baz Carrington. “With families spending more on staples, as well as bunker excavation and construction, the climate has never been better for discount retailers. And our robust supply chain and lean inventory control practices make us uniquely capable of passing along savings from falling Asian labor costs.”

“And no American,” he continued, “wants to look blah on the biggest day the world has ever seen!”

Shortly after Labor Day, Rebus will launch its “STREEEEETCH Your Dollar” advertising campaign with a series of 60-second holovision messages featuring IBA Monterrey Matadors point guard Elbaz Rahman and national “Rebus Girl,” the serpentine Snowflake Simmons. The campaign is the brainchild of New York ad shop Tutwiller Cleaves, the creators of the groundbreaking “Fuck The Planet” campaign for the American Aerosol Council.

We hope it’s the start of a long, *loooong* association!

**ABOUT REBUS INTERNATIONAL:** Rebus International, Inc. is a holding company headquartered in Kissimmee, Florida, with regional sales offices in Los Angeles, Toronto, Frankfurt, Jakarta and Sydney. Rebus operates more than 200 outlets worldwide, marketing affordable, high-style leisure apparel through the Rebus™, Rebus Juniors™, One O’ The Lads®, Top Style®, and Fair Dinkum!™ retail chains. Its stock trades on the WORLD MART, Mumbai and Frankfurt exchanges.

For more information contact:

Sinbad Lochner, Tutwiller Cleaves Partners Worldwide  
(212) xxx-xxxx

**EU PARLIAMENT APPROVES €160 MILLION TO COMMENCE CONSTRUCTION**

TO: [bigrandy@Taurus.au.net](mailto:bigrandy@Taurus.au.net)  
FR: "Vulture Bux" ([subscriptions@maximedia.com](mailto:subscriptions@maximedia.com))  
RE: SECRETS TO STRESS INVESTING  
Date: Jan. 8, 2019, 1412:22 GMT -5

**KEEP YOUR HEAD WHILE ALL AROUND YOU ARE LOSING  
THEIRS: PROFITS OF 300, 400, 500% ACHIEVABLE WITH THE  
GLOBAL SCAVENGER™!**

Dear Investor:

My name is Ron Babko, and I have over 18 years of experience as a trader, first in commodities and currency contracts, then later as the #1 licensed dealer in Contamination Rights Units (CRUs) on the Mumbai Clean Air Exchange.

But I've found that no matter what you are dealing, certain basic rules apply to the dealings of the SUPER-RICH. And now, after banking years of sterling profits and retiring to a life of Polynesian splendor, I have decided to SHARE those secrets with YOU. I don't need 'em anymore!

The late President Kennedy once said that, in every crisis lies opportunity. I'll go JFK one further! The greater the crisis, the greater the opportunity! The collapse of the Perlmutter Tower and the submerging of Venice have some part-time investors running for the hills (or, more accurately, the valleys, canyons, craters, etc.), but just imagine the prizes awaiting investors with a little nerve, liquidity, and a good strategy!

For only \$49/month, you can subscribe to my newsletter, *The Global Scavenger™*, in which I will instruct you on the rules of clear-headed investment, traps for the unwary, and the newest opportunities presented by global events, such as:

- Ski resorts and mountaintop residential properties for sale starting at \$4.00/hectare;
- Companies developing daring off-world expansion strategies; or
- The key commodities for surviving and rebuilding, and the best techniques for stockpiling them!

The Crash undid many fortunes, but made many others! For the prices of a subscription, you can join the elite band of international robber barons who plan to weather the latest "Panic" in high style! That great sucking sound you hear is our merry band liberating the loot from the pockets of the meek! Don't be left out of the bonanza!

Happy Scavenging,

Ron Babko  
Scavenger-in-Chief

This message was sent to you by Babko Media because of your registration to receive similar mailings. If this was sent to you in error, or if you do not wish to receive further mailings, send an e-mail to [unsubscribe@bermuda.net](mailto:unsubscribe@bermuda.net).

IBA AGREES TO RAISE BASKET TO 12'6" STARTING 2020...NEW RULES WILL

[www.onefam.com/sweetevamarie/notes.htm](http://www.onefam.com/sweetevamarie/notes.htm)

## The Way The World Ends

Tuesday, February 23, 2020, 1:46 a.m.

| Edit |

| Delete |

Did any of us ever really live?  
Or was it just like water through a sieve?  
Up there behind the sky  
A great blind eye  
Doesn't see and doesn't even cry  
But gobbles up the happy and the mean  
Don't let me die in 2019.

Love is dust  
There's no one with your feelings to entrust  
My being spins  
With the thought of frozen sins  
My sister glances back at me and grins  
Remembering the evil things she's done  
Don't let me die in 2021.

The taste of candy wine  
Soft heat and silent promises combine  
Unlock the chain  
And rise beyond the panic and the pain  
We'll never have to see this place again  
We'll be higher than the trees  
If we should die in 2023

All gone now  
But vices that the season will allow  
Unconscious hell  
My body is a lost and empty shell  
No memories, no stories left to tell  
To any ear that might be left alive  
All gone in 2025.

Comment

By GrantFletcher, February 23, 2020, 3:19 a.m.:

Don't be sad. This may not happen. At any rate, you are an amazing writer! xx

By Avenging Annie, February 25, 2020, 8:02 a.m.:

I love yr poems. And I totally feel you. So little time. Going to Tim's tonite?

By Tim LeFebvre, February 26, 2020, 7:14 p.m.:

You are beautiful. I want to use some of this for a video project on the Hole. K?

By BelleXXX, March 13, 2020, 9:12 p.m.:

You r not goin to believe this, but I found out how 2 make \$300/wk from home in my spare time with my computer. No games, nothing 2 buy, just fun and \$\$\$\$ dealing produx everybody wants to buy. You will hate yourself if you don't check it, [www.cashdeluge.com](http://www.cashdeluge.com).

CHINESE "SPACE ARK" EXPLODES SHORTLY AFTER TAKEOFF; ATMOSPHER

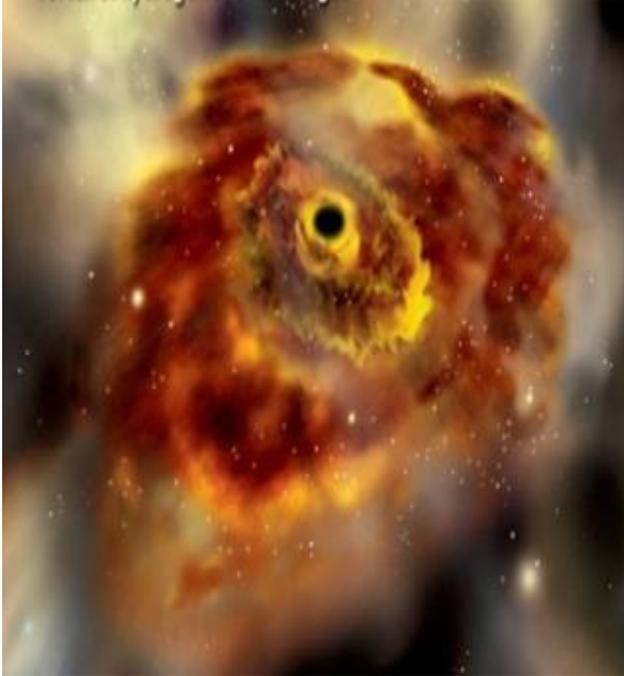
[www.endvisions.net/newsflash/BlackBettyconnex/htm](http://www.endvisions.net/newsflash/BlackBettyconnex/htm)

## **REAL ARMAGEDDON: WHO STANDS TO GAIN?**

May 8, 2023

Never before in our time has man confronted such a *genuine, urgent threat* to his continued existence. The Black Hole known as HJ459X3, first observed by the observatory at La Palma in the Canary Islands

in 2010, is now bearing down on the Earth, and



could pull the planet into its event horizon within the *next five years*. Chance encounter? Astrophysicists, as late as 1997, posited the odds of such an event at tens of millions to one. The time has come to ask our leaders who is to blame? ***WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?***

### **Unseen Hands of Science**

During the post-war era, edge science has occupied a shadowy realm between technology and necromancy, often manipulated by the whims and geopolitical aspirations of the world's elites. Whether it was the freemason-led cultivation of the atomic bomb, the suppression of cold fusion by covert government operatives, or many other developments, the roots often lie in the hands of New World Order conspirators!

Could Black Holes be one of the weapons cultivated by the elites?

### **The Ultimate Doomsday Machine**

A small but irrepressible coterie of scientists insist that the cataclysmic explosion that rocked Russia's **Tunguska River** during the spring of 1908 was the collision of the earth with a *small black hole*, resulting in a 30 megaton blast felt over 2,000 square kilometers. It is proven historical fact that this event coincided with electromagnetic experiments involving the Shoreham, Long Island-based **Wardenclyffe Tower**, designed by **Nikola Tesla**, a known member of secret scientific societies, and architect **Stanford White** – personal favorite of Illuminatus **James Gordon Bennett, Jr.**

In recent years, the **European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN)** has constructed the **Hadron supercollider**, known to have the potential for producing *potentially lethal black holes*. In his book, *Angels and Demons*, author Dan Brown posits a connection between CERN and Illuminati scientists conspiring to unleash deadly antimatter on Vatican City. Fiction? Or “faction”?



### **Who Reaps the Rewards?**

If a Black Hole hits, all civilization perishes, does it not? *Don't you believe it!*

Returning to Tesla, little mainstream publicity has been given to the man, his genius, or his more radical experiments, including the use of magnetic fields to modify space and time. For decades, researchers have whispered about his time travel experiments, taken up by the United States Army at decommissioned facilities at **Camp Hero** in Montauk, New York during 1967-68.

These experiments allegedly created a so-called “*time tunnel*” and enabled volunteers to access hyperspace and, thus, navigate the cosmos. The rumored director of these experiments – *none other than Nikola Tesla, acting incommunicado after faking his own death!*

If these ideas are new to you consider that the original developer of the World Wide Web, principal medium for dissemination of today's edge research, was *none other than CERN!*

**Are the leaders of the New World Order looking to make a last-minute escape through space-time, while the old world falls?**

**Don't wait! Now is the time to Demand Answers! Join the March For Truth at the Offices of the National Science Foundation, Arlington, Virginia, June 17, 2023, Rain or Shine!**

**PATRIOTS, DO YOUR DUTY!**

Speakers (subject to change) will include Dr. Benno Duveen, Coalition For Transparency; Karen Obverse, Secretary, WorldGovWatch; Sincero Tao Juventi, Animal Grievance; Lad Fortinbras, Project AntiDoom

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## ACTORS EVE AND MURIELLE LUX SELF-IMMOLATE IN KNESSET PROTEST..

...Hey hey, it's Lady Coldfire®, backstage at Reckoning '25, the Concert to End All, rockin' Deseret, Free State, like there's no tomorrow! We're coming to you in Dimension Totalvision© on the Sense Network™, so jack in, lock on, and hang with us while we try to access some quality vibrations and scan this unique meeting of the minds! We're chillin' with the mainmen from the two bands sponsoring this monster event – 200,000, and more fans streaming in every minute – Lars Sigurdsson from Codex Gigas and Metatron from The Quorum. Guys, what was the inspiration for Reckoning? What brought this kind of a – can I say rock “odd couple” – together for one show?

M: If I may, I think I'd like to take a stab at that one.

LC: Don't say “stab” too loud around, you know...

M: Good one! We saw this as a chance, maybe the last chance, to bring Christian and Daemonic rock fans together to commemorate the real End of Days. We are, like, pretty sure that nothing could be a clearer sign of The Rapture, where the Bible says the righteous are going to be sucked right up to Heaven. I see that you're about 18 inches taller than when we partied at the VMAs, and I love your Ankher's™ – are those snakeskin?

LC: Eelskin, but thanks for noticing!

M: Lookin' good, Lady C. Long and lean and on the scene. We're all wearing these great kicks with weighted soles – like my Jarvis C-Mentz™ -- but soon we're going to kick them off and fly up to Heaven for that really wild afterparty in the sky. For our people, this was just kind of a kickoff event and a way to show our appreciation. Want to thank the makers of Neutrino energy drink for helping us get it all together. It's the *juice!*

LC: *Hellz yeah!*... Lars, if we can tear you away from that grog, let's get you in here to hear what the other side thinks.

LS: Sorry, Miss Lady C, I was just taking enjoyment of all the really wild burning and looting that goes on. [Commotion off camera] Nice! Our group of fans may be smaller, but they know how to party much harder and more dangerous! We have been letting everyone know through our website that all these things – the waterspouts and the volcanoes and the surprise solar eclipses of the sun and the animal attacks – was all leading up to the great celebration of Chaos, the crashing down of the societies and the power structure and the unleashment of the true anarchy energy that we all welcome. So we have encouraged everyone to storm the gates and take whatever they wish or burn it if that pleases them. *Do what thou wilt, maaaaan!* This is to be the start of the death of laws and the reign of will and instinct! *Check it out!* To you we dedicate tonight's performance of "Destroy The Herd"!

LC: Oooh, can we get a shot of that? That looks like one of the speaker towers falling down under the weight of, like, two dozen kids and, like, a cow or some kind of animal hanging. How did that get up there? Can you ask your fans not to take our equip...*Hey, back off, guys...*Just have to add that playing with fire could kill you, and the views expressed are those of the individuals and do not reflect the views of Sense™ or Klaxon Media, LDC. Things are getting kinda superwild and *rowday* here as Xenu Boys wrap up and Codex Gigas gets ready to...[transmission interrupted by technical difficulties]

...RIOT POLICE SHOOT GUNMAN BREAKING INTO UNDERGROUND BASE AT

May 4, 2026

Mr. Ronald Peale  
1900 8<sup>th</sup> Street  
Akron, OH 44301

Dear Mr. Peale:

In light of recent events, and pursuant to Municipal Ordinance 383.4(d)(2), as authorized pursuant to the federal Catastrophic Event Resettlement Act, as amended, 14 U.S.C. §§ 1201-1245 (2021) ("CERA"), you, and any other person resident at the above address, are required to vacate your current residence.

CERA empowers any state, territory, protectorate, or duly-constituted municipal government, as defined therein, to enact rules and regulations mandating the evacuation of dwellings deemed to be uninhabitable, and the relocation of persons to safe locations designated by applicable authorities. "Uninhabitable," for this purpose, shall mean structurally unsound, insufficiently accessible to emergency services, located at an altitude or configured in such a manner as to present an unreasonable risk of collapse or destruction, or presenting such other factors as emergency personnel, in the exercise of reasonable discretion under CERA, shall deem to warrant evacuation.

Acting pursuant to CERA, the Akron Emergency Resettlement Authority (“AERA”) has determined that the property described as Skyview Towers, 1900 8<sup>th</sup> Street in the city of Akron is “uninhabitable” within the meaning of CERA, § 1204.2(c) and, in accordance with the requirements of federal law, requires that all residents vacate the aforementioned premises no later than May 18, 2026. If you wish to protest this finding, you may do so at AERA’s offices, 28 Dunkirk St., Akron, Monday-Friday, during normal business hours.

You should report, no later than May 21, 2026 to the Lancet Resettlement Compound, located at SinDeCo Quarry, R.R. 8, Bath, OH. See the attached Form 986 for a summary of the types of portable goods, foodstuffs and equipment that may be taken with you and applicable penalties for noncompliance. No bullion or currency, live animals, firearms, ammunition, or flammable or explosive materials of any kind, will be permitted.

We thank you for your patience and cooperation during this most unsettled time. With your help, we hope to make this move an easy and safe one for you and your whole family. Please feel free to contact my office with any questions or concerns.

Michael A. Freeman

/s/ Michael A. Freeman  
Deputy Administrator  
Akron Emergency Resettlement Auth.

cc: Roger Duffy, Chief of Police  
Maeve Dahlquist, CERA-OH

**Enclosure: Form 986 List of Permitted Items**

MARANATHA UNIV HOLDS THREE-DAY PRAYER VIGIL, URGES REPEN

Montana State Police, Evidence NO. GRI-27-7814.5  
Cartaret/Knack. File No. 27-3786

Transcript of holodisc recording recovered at Cartaret Farm, Carbon County, October 7, 2027. Transcribed by Trooper J. Bland, #819, 10/12/27

Timecode 00:00

[Individual identified as decedent LEMUEL KNACK, 54, appears in close up against red curtain background. He is missing an eye, and his cheeks show numerous scars.]

Hello. My name is [blows single note on pitch pipe]. Allow me to explain. Here at The Staircase, we have all adopted as our identifiers musical tones, because in the next stage

our “life” will be an ethereal life without bodies, or tongues, or words. Together, our individual tones, which will resonate in sheer mind energy, will create the many-voiced symphony of the race.

We made this recording to explain, to whomever might find it, our beliefs and the circumstances of our leave-taking at this glorious, historical moment.

So much of what we have done involves the overcoming of physical, physical and temporal existence. My fellow-travellers and I have spent many months fasting, meditating in silence, depriving ourselves of...all manner of stimulation – optical, tactile olfactory, sexual – in order to break the hold of the physical world, physical sensation. Some of the more devoted initiates have even begun the arduous task of paring down the physical body. [Reaches down to play two-note melody on off-camera chimes] has separated from both legs and arms, and others have also experienced various degrees of ascendancy, toward a state of Puremind.

Imperfect as our current state may be, it will be necessary for us to climb the Stairs. We can no longer wait for further exploration. Much as we had hoped to ascend in common perfection, we always knew that time would not wait for our studies to conclude. The Magister, who lives outside of time, appears at a moment and in a form, of its own choosing. It’s a case of “ready, ready or not.” Once the door closes, nothing else will open, ever again.

Some of us worried about recognizing the Magister’s form. Would it be a physical craft, an apparition, a being? But now, there can be no mistake. How could it have come in any other form? It is the great portal, the devourer of things tangible and intangible. No one knows what lies beyond, because, of course, no one can know. How can an entity at our stage glimpse the next before Readiness?

Those of you who may see this recording...we hope to see you at the other end, at the next stairstep.

[At this point, the camera pulls back and we see that KNACK is legless. He picks up what appears to be a machete or cleaver or long knife of some sort and, with great effort, chops down on his forearm, severing muscle, sinew, and finally, bone. The camera pans back and we see what appears to be 30-40 bodies, some in various states of dismemberment, wrapped in identical crimson sheets. Three dead animals, possibly dogs, are in there, too. Two of the bodies ID’ed by kin as decedents LORELAI GRAF, 14, and JUDSON BARRACLOUGH, 37. All are still, appear to be dead.]

[KNACK’s voice continues off camera] Everything must go. We must go. We prevail.  
[Recording ends]  
Timecode 16:18

# SOUNDS ABOUND

**Kate MacDonald**

Class warfare! Sex talk! Random musings! Oh, it must be the Paraphilia music section.

OK, I was just going to leave it at that, but, typically, I can't. Properly, this doesn't even look like a real music section. Everything seems to come at you through a variety of distorted lenses (Can you even have aural lenses? In MY world you can), giving you a jumble of thoughts, feelings, facts and fancies about what music does to the individual mind.

It's like seeing the reactions to a Rorschach test: the source material may not change, but the reactions to it multiply and bifurcate endlessly, each reaction giving a glimpse into a complete, unique universe.

Our reactions to music, our thoughts on music, are, like everything else, completely personal. They are a reflection of our accumulated personal experience and the distinctive twists of our perverse little personalities.

While that might be true of many things, our reaction to music is peculiarly passionate such that it seems reasonable to assume that it is more closely bonded to our sense of self, the core of our personality than, say, our taste in food.

I think that this issue gives a particularly fascinating series of glimpses at the interior universes of a series of passionate, musical people.

Whether their visions (To follow up on an above point, can you have musical visions? Oh, forget it.) coincide or collide head on with your own, there is surely something to appreciate in seeing (Hearing?) a hint of the multiplicity of reactions that music brings.

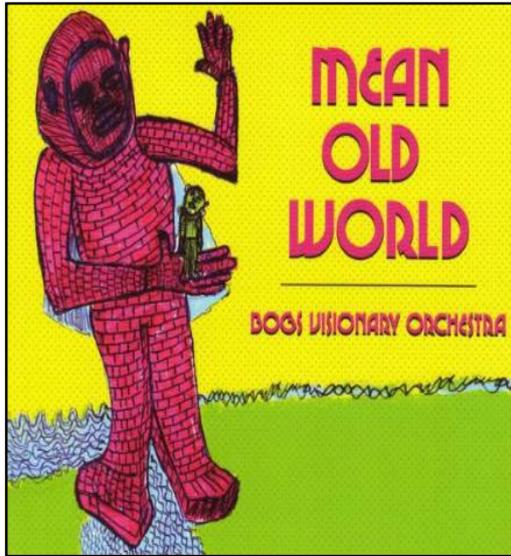
Personally, I'm listening to a record whose existence I'd forgotten since about 1993. It's what I remembered and I'm struck equally by two thoughts:

- 1) It hasn't aged gracefully in any sense; and...
- 2) There is still something about it that appeals to me.

Of course, what I'm hearing comes from my own personal universe, my background, my experiences with this record.

To you, what I'm listening to would likely sound quite cheesy, because there's no way that you'd ever be able to hear what I'm hearing.

I could try to explain it, but, really, there's so much more to get to...



## OUT OF THE BOX

By Mary Leary

**Bogs Visionary Orchestra**  
*Mean Old World (Modfare Records)*

If you like Jad Fair or Daniel Johnston it is pretty safe to assume you will like Bogs Visionary Orchestra. If you're into the Shaggs, it's even more likely. There are only maybe 135 people in the world who like Jad Fair, Daniel Johnston, or the Shaggs (and don't just say they do because they heard it was hip - that would account for maybe 25), and I heard that 14 of the 135 died this year. I am writing this review because there is no worse, more futile loneliness than that of making art with no place to go. And while BVO is known for jubilant around-NYC performances, it has a right to have its stories told to a wider audience. To me this is partly because the group, despite A. Bogs's visionary messages, doesn't seem to be preaching to anyone, and if it is, it

doesn't expect money or stardom to be in the mix. There is a purity here which appeals to me. However, I would not make myself write about this group if I didn't like the way it sounds. Because to write a review about anything, you have to listen to it (well, a real review - I have pretty much decided to eschew publications who post sound bite reviews, i.e., "Like Madonna if Beyonce were stepping really hard on her foot in an old warehouse at 3 a.m.")

This is not because I have a lot of integrity - to be quite frank, since I am living perilously close to the street, I would like to make some money. No, it is because publications who use sound bites eschew *me*, sensing I am not a sound bite kinda writer, or because they only seek the opinions of people under 28. I am living perilously close to the street because I am a poet, and not one who went the academic route or was adaptable, conceited, or sober enough to jump on the Slam wagon when it came through town. I am a very good poet, but very good poetry is about as interesting to most people as is BVO.

*Not that you asked*, but I thought I would explain my situation. It's not like I just sit around doing nothing and staring out the window, although one of my poet friends recently said that was exactly what he needed time to do. And Ted Berrigan, of the New York, post-beat "school," said poets shouldn't have

to do anything other than write poetry - it's too distracting. I resonate deeply with that sentiment but haven't been able to move to Ireland, where I hear they adore poets, because I have not had a lot of success at steadily earning the cash that would buy suitcases and tickets for the cats and myself. Besides, if this thing about Ireland and poets is true, and for decades poets have been relocating there with their cats and then drinking dark ale and breeding with other poets, well, you can just imagine all the poets and cats there now.

Other than perhaps Malaysia, where it seems normal, there is no country that is particularly supportive of visionary orchestras. BVO has still mustered the energy to make another CD about the world that is so disinterested in its musings. That's good, because drinking Xanax cocktails and hiding in bed for 20 hours at a time is only fun once in awhile, and should be a punishment for something really bad, not a lifestyle.

Even before A. Bogs and his musical buddies coughed up this new recording they reminded me of my old poet comrade, Sparrow, who does things like running for the U.S. presidency by standing on first one foot, then the other, in Tompkins Square Park (<http://sparrowforprez.com>). About 15 years ago he made a recording that hovered further under the radar than even BVO. Although most of it

proved untenably dry, I became peculiarly attached to a track entitled, "May I Take A Bath?" I liked it so much that occasionally, when a new friend would seem unusually open-minded, I would reveal this to them, much as a gay person 60 years ago might reveal their inclinations, or a foot fetishist finally begs a woman to buy some nylons.

"Isn't it great? Isn't it funny?" I would say, watching my friend's face for the hoped-for delighted reaction. Or I would say nothing, hoping that Sparrow's Zen/existentialist brilliance would speak for itself. "I mean, don't you like the Fugs?" I might say, knowing the battle was already lost.

Hardly anyone I've ever met has enjoyed "May I Take A Bath?" as much as I, but then, I also get a charge from these releases called *Incredibly Strange Music* (<http://www.researchpubs.com/cds/ism1prod.php>), Volume One of which includes Buddy Merrill's take on "Flight Of the Bumble Bee," here called "Busy Bee" and played at such a screeching-tire velocity, Buddy must have been on crystal, 24/7, for weeks.

I would try and push the fact that two of BVO's central members have dark, thick beards, and appear to be Jewish, or at least "ethnic," hoping to lure Iron and Wine fans, but those people might then get angry when they realize that, other than the

beards, BVO isn't anywhere near as dull as Iron and Wine. A lot of Bogs's music is really lively. It even sounds like the members are having fun.

"I Believe," which starts *Mean Old World*, echoes Beatles harmonies and seems to be about longing for justice and other nice things, and this having something to do with believing in a god, which reminds me of Daniel Johnston. Along with nearly everything else here, it shines with a knowing innocence - BVO is able to chuckle ruefully at its own idealism. On tracks like "Can't Stop Wearin' A Gun" the group flirts with uneasily resolved conflicts.

How these people are different than Jad Fair and Daniel Johnston: There's a darker, prettier room in the BVO house, because of the harmonium and cello on some songs, and generally richer tonal inclinations. Most songs are framed in seminal country-western, dance hall, and folk structures. More than many contemporary groups who do so with less true ingenuity or humor, BVO at its best recalls at least moments by the sublime Canadian duo whose masterpiece, *Fraser & DeBolt With Ian Guenther*, reemerged from out-of-print obscurity two years ago (<http://fraserdebolt.com/audio.html>).

"Forlorn" sounds like it could have been on the *Ballad of Cable Hogue* soundtrack. "Jesus" wistfully and rather eerily whispers: "Who's

fighting in the war/Who's dying in the war/Who's protesting the war/Jesus, Jesus.../Who's the peddler on the street/Who's the stranger that you meet/Who's the liar who's the cheat." By the time you get a chill you have been lulled irretrievably forward.

"Unemployed" is a sprightly little circa-1900s composition expanding on the possibilities in the situation. Its ragged/bouncy lilt recalls some of the earnestly strange approaches to folk, especially by the Residents, on a sublime Ralph Records compilation, *Potatoes* (no link here, as I recommend hunting down the out-of-print LP version). "No Escape" ("from doom") which veers into Band territory, is lovely. So I'm hardly surprised when the next track, "Homeless On The Street" - is as quietly compelling as some of John Lennon's post-Beatles songs.

I think I could get a friend to listen to this CD. Of course, most of the people who are drawn to me think I'm pretty different. "Different than what?" I sometimes wonder. What I hope they want is that sense that something genuine and possibly unexpected might happen, then be followed by a nice Sunday dinner, after which we watch a film that makes us reconsider something we previously took for granted, like that scene in *Me and You and Everyone We Know* where anal sex is presented as a child's dream of endless merging. Which reminds me of one of the tracks on this recording - "Forlorn

II" has the kind of heels-in-the-air joy the local folk festival lost a few years ago, when all the old timers got too old or dead to make it and started to be replaced by people too cool to be so uncool they're cool. That's something I don't even want to explain, but if any of this sounds good to you, you probably understand, and might even like *Mean Old World*, which is a bit more vintage New World dance-hall than its slightly more emo/contemporary predecessor, *Maladroits Union*, which I also like very much. The only thing keeping me from all-out raving is the scratchy vocals partially impelling my comparisons with Johnston and Fair - an acquired taste, for those willing to listen beyond surfaces. There's also some room for sonic maturation, perhaps to include a greater merging or expansion from basic structures. BVO have not made a great record, but they have made a very good one, which doesn't sound exactly like any other at the moment.

<http://www.myspace.com/bogsvisionaryorchestra>

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## **AN OBSESSION: THEE MICHELLE GUN ELEPHANT & ME**

**By Chris Morris**

Last week I moved my cherished Japanese action figure of Thee Michelle Gun Elephant's guitarist Futoshi Abe to a place of honor on

my mantelpiece. It's a beautiful item, about nine inches tall. It stands on a flat pedestal bearing TMGE's skull-and-crossbones logo (obviously inspired by that of the Nipponese band's idols, England's Pirates). Grinning and skeletal, it clutches a meticulously detailed replica of Abe's Telecaster. Allen Larman, the buyer at the old Rhino Records store on Westwood Boulevard who shared my mania for the band, imported a few and sold them for 75 bucks a pop.

I dusted off the Abe figure in homage to the musician, who died on July 22 at the age of only 43 from a rare form of cancer. I don't mourn just the passing of one of the finest rock guitarists I ever witnessed on a stage. His demise also marks the end of my abiding and no doubt strange obsession with his onetime group, one of Japan's biggest rock bands and a little-known cult love object in the U.S. Despite their dissolution six years ago, I'd longed for a reunion and another chance to see them again. No chance of that now.

I have Eric Levin's great Atlanta store Criminal Records to thank for my introduction to TMGE. On my first visit there in 1999, my eye was caught by the striking cover of an album called "Gear Blues." Criminal was selling the record in two different versions; each bore a photo of the four impassive band members clad yakuza style in black shirts and suits, and on one (in tribute to the Pirates' vocalist Johnny Kidd) they

all wore eye patches. The record was on a listening post, and after a quick spin of two bone-crushing tracks, I was sold. I walked out with copies of both editions.

I immediately fell in love. TMGE was a louder turbocharged version of rock/pub/punk acts like the Pirates, the Who, Dr. Feelgood, and the Jam. (Their name, I would learn, was derived from a mishearing of "Machine Gun Etiquette," a Damned album title.) The music was pure power. It mattered little that all their lyrics were in Japanese, with just the title hooks screeched in battered English by singer Yusuke Chiba. (English translations of the lyrics made little sense. Sample: "Tarred and make it hard/Tank wrecked/Then burst out/'Love is a kinda hater'/Yeah! Smokin' Billy!") The band was simply white-hot in every category, and the hottest thing about it was Abe's ripping, rhythmically and harmonically acute playing, infused with the fire and dexterity of precursors like the Pirates' Mick Green (with whom TMGE cut an EP) and the Who's Pete Townshend.

One of the "Gear Blues" discs I bought was a promo copy bearing a phone number for TMGE's American management firm. In time, I raided the company for anything I could get my hands on. The band had been recording since the early '90s, and I collected their other albums, which bore such mysterious idiomatic titles as "Cult Grass Stars,"

"Casanova Snake," "Chicken Zombies," and "Radio Tandem Beat Specter." I also picked up a couple of their video compilations, and I was amazed to find that in Japan TMGE commanded enormous audiences. The footage showed them playing in cavernous halls in front of literally thousands of fans who bounced dementedly in unison to the music.

I became evangelical about TMGE. I handed out copies of "Gear Blues" (supplied by the group's management) to my colleagues at Billboard, and the album became the surprise winner of the magazine's 1999 year-end critics' poll. I convinced Andrew Male at Mojo that TMGE was worth a story, and, with the help of Billboard's Japanese-born ad salesman Aki Kaneko, I conducted one of the band's few interviews with a non-Japanese publication. Alive Records picked up "Gear Blues" for domestic consumption, and then asked me to write the liner notes for a 2001 TMGE compilation called, fittingly, "Collection."

I will always remember the ecstatic 1999 TMGE show I saw at the now long-defunct East Hollywood dump the Garage. (It was one of only 16 dates they played in the U.S. during their 10-year career.) At the time, my then-wife and I had a Japanese exchange student living in our spare room. When I invited the kid to see the group at a club, her eyes became saucers - she couldn't believe a band that normally played immense

arenas back home was going to be performing in some dinky little L.A. club. The night of the show, the place was full of other Elephantophiles, many of them Japanese students like my boarder. It was a searing gig, and the whole band shredded, but it was Abe who impressed all night with his endlessly imaginative and consistently puissant rhythm/lead work. After the show I went up to him, introduced myself, and bowed low in a salute.

Unfortunately, a little label like Alive couldn't purchase much traction for this astounding band in America. David Fricke, the last honest man at Rolling Stone, wrote glowingly about them, but it wasn't enough. I didn't care if Thee Michelle Gun Elephant couldn't sing in English, but almost all of the rest of America did.

I'm sure the lack of success in America didn't really matter much to the guys in TMGE. They were huge in their home country - so huge, in fact, that they decided to call it quits at their peak in 2003, after one last enormous farewell show memorialized on the DVD "Burning Motors Go Last Heaven." (LOVE those titles.) Find a copy of it, and copies of the band's albums, if you can - a Web search indicates that virtually everything by the group is either out of print in the

U.S. or subject to insane overpricing on the import market.

My friend Rick Brown, a local sound man who came to share my fixation with TMGE, handed me a copy of "Burning Motors" at a gig this weekend, along with some earlier live videos and a copy of the band's rare 1993 debut, the live album "Maximum! Maximum! Maximum!" We'd been commiserating back and forth on Facebook for a few days. The music that Futoshi Abe made with Thee Michelle Gun Elephant was so vital, original, lyrical, and visceral that it seemed impossible to both of us that there would be no more of it. Right now I'm waiting for Amazon to deliver a copy of Toshiaki Toyoda's 2001 wild-youth film "Blue Spring," which makes extensive use of TMGE's music. I need a last taste.

I guess it must be this way for everyone who loves music: Somewhere along the way, all of us end up getting touched with a fine madness, an affection for a band that transcends cultural and language barriers, one that surpasseth all reason. I was mad for TMGE, and sad to see them go. Now, Abe's death is simply devastating; as someone said when Elvis died, it feels like there aren't going to be any more hamburgers, ever.

Sayonara, Abe-san.

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## **Low Classical Usic**

Sometimes it comes to the attention of someone or another that I play keyboards, guitar, percussion or other such things too commonly associated with “music”. Sometimes I’m asked something like “What kind of music do you play?” This is where it starts to get tricky. I’ve tried such responses as “I don’t play *music*, I play *booed usic*” - which leads to a brief explanation of the unpopularity of using sounds organized without “musical” intent. I’ve also tried responding with “I play *Aleatoric “Fortean” Novelty Mytho-Gossip Usical Service Industry So-Called Whatevers*”. Given that most askers seem to be expecting a simple answer, this last response seems to arouse the hope that I won’t explain any further. Long eccentric answers strain the attention span & make many people nervous.

I thought “booed usic” was a pretty obvious take-off from “mood music” but it seems that I was wrong. Now I’ve hit on “**Low Classical Usic**” as the easy answer to the question. Its buzz-word potential is stellar. Everyone I’ve tried it on so far has immediately grasped that “Low Classical Usic” = “Low” Class Classical (M)Usic. Now, to try to define it & put it in, at least, a superficial historical context.

First, let’s just define classes in terms of economic power. The “Low Class” being the poor people - the ones with the minimum of property, income, &

buying power - the slaves, the indentured servants, the poorest of the wage slaves (the minimum wage recipients), the welfare recipients, the unsuccessful or non-greedy criminals, the ones the company store “owns”, etc. The “Upper Class” being the richest - those with the maximum of property, income, & buying power - the “owners” of the slaves & the indentured servants, the ones who set the minimum wage (& pay less when they can get away with it), the successful greedy criminals, the owners of the company store franchise, the “owners” of the land & housing that the “Low Class” can barely afford to rent. The “Middle Class”: those in between. A thoroughly superficial class analysis.

Now, what is “Classical Music”? To partially quote a dictionary at hand it might be music that “conforms to certain established standards of form, complexity, musical literacy, etc.” Commonly, “Classical Music” seems to refer to a sort of “high-brow” music, music that appeals to supposedly sophisticated tastes, music mainly liked by the staid upper classes. In a music history class I was taught that there’s a period in “Classical Music” between Baroque & Romantic called “Classical”. I dunno.

I’ve always had my own criteria in searching out & evaluating anything that interests me. These criteria, in relation to products of sentient beings, are roughly that the creations be representative of an unusual idea manifested in a distinctive way. Often I

find complex & difficult realizations more satisfying to my tastes because the skill required for them is unusual in itself.

The ability to play “Classical Music” is supposed to represent a pinnacle in playing skill achievement. This is part of the snobbery of “Upper Class” ideals. In order to “prove” that the “Upper Class” deserves its privileged position, “Classical Music” can be used as an example of “Upper Class” “superiority”. Ironically though, “Classical Music” history is rife with instances of its composers being ridiculed for composing music that surpasses previous playing skill demands. The *classic* scenario of innovation being spurned & gradually co-opted can be found with the contempt that Tchiakovsky’s first Piano Concerto opening chord sequences were met with. Now, of course, Tchiakovsky is held up as a revered *romantic* “Classical” composer.

The story goes that when Charles Ives hired a respected violinist to play one of his sonatas the violinist left in a rage saying something to the effect that it was unplayable. This brings us to the era of “Classical Music” that doesn’t seem to’ve settled into any comfortable name yet - despite its arguable existence since 1885 (or whenever). Some would call it Contemporary Classical or Modern (which, of course, brings up Post-Modern) or Experimental Classical or Avant Garde Classical or, perhaps, Difficult Listening. I don’t find any of these terms satisfactory.

“Classical Music” as representative of the “Upper Class” seems to serve a fairly straight-forward function of upholding certain “values” or, as the dictionary read, “established standards of form”. “Classical Music”’s reputation as the most refined & difficult & “superior” music implies metaphorically that the societal “established standards of form” that it’s an outgrowth of are of parallel “superiority”. In other words, the status quo that sustains the “Upper Class” in power is implied to be the status quo that makes possible “superior” culture such as “Classical Music”. Such an implication serves to “justify” the upholding of the status quo.

In order for this lie to work however, what’s mainly presented as “Classical Music” must be presented as a relic of a “Golden Age” safely beyond the lifespan of anyone living &, as such, definable by conveniently kiss-ass historians. These “historians” are like the “expert witnesses” whose diplomas make them useful for lawyers needing “credibility” for whichever trial position they stand to make the most money off of. This “Golden Age” is one in which strife is neatly historicized & everyone is *put in their proper place* - to all of the classes their “god-given” niche. The “natural” “divine” rights of the Ruling Class & the laws of “natural” selection that keep the poor in poverty.

When things get closer to the *present*, historification can’t render everything a safe *story* yet. History is a *story* but the present *tense* is *reality* (in

one sense at least). As such, the present tense of the “avant garde” of “Classical Music” (of any era) can create a “crisis” for the image of the “Golden Age” simply by being a product of *current* concerns. “Classical Radio” rarely plays (& I do mean *rarely*) any music that represents a challenge to whatever “established standards of form” are most correlative to the historication of the status quo. In other words, any music that disrupts the status quo by significantly calling any established form in question. As such, “Classical Radio” serves more as a reminder of who’s *still in power* than it does to play complex music.

“Twentieth Century Classical Music” has been somewhat characterized by rejection of tradition. Percussion instruments were taken from their usual simple-minded role & used in as many ways as the composers could think of. “Tone color” in general came to include a much larger variety. Electronics, noise. Variety, variety. Variety is not the spice of life from a Ruling Class perspective when that variety threatens the status quo. Hence, only the semblance of variety can be “allowed”. The composers who become absorbed into the pantheon of the “Classical Music” gods are those who question the viability of class divisions the least.

This is just as “true” with pop music. Too much *real* variety is a threat to assembly-line low-cost production. It’s much more profitable to simply repackage the same-old, same-old as

the *exciting-new, exciting-new* & up the price.

So who is it that creates this Difficult Listening when the “Upper Class” pay-off isn’t forthcoming? Why the “Low Classical Usicians” of course. Strictly speaking, I might say that the “Class” I’m most interested in promoting the idea of in this instance is the “**No-No Class**”. That is, the “Class” of people who most slip thru the cracks between any class definition. I once briefly taught a class in guerrilla actions called the “No-No Class” & explained that no matter *how* the students performed in the class they’d all get “D”s (the lowest passing grade) - but that’s a different story. However, given that this “Low Classical Usic” terminology originated partially in my attempts to make an easily comprehensible joke for a change, I’ll stick with this “Low Class” biz.

The “Low Classical Usician” can be defined as someone who develops some aspects of “Classical Music” theory & praxis so seriously in certain directions that they threaten to skew the true class status quo perpetuation function & are, thusly, not acceptable to the diplomaed “Upper Class” (or, would-be “Upper Class”) arbiters of “Classical Music” as “Classical Musicians” at all. If these upstart “Low Classical Usicians” should happen to make it into “Classical Music” history anyway, there’s always the chance that the “experts” will be able to completely misrepresent them & their relation to established power.

The main stranglehold that the “Upper Class” has on music production is economic. When only certain instruments are presented as “real” instruments, there’s the problem of acquiring them. When the “acceptable” sound-producing “instrumentation” is expanded to include “anything”, money is no longer as necessary. But who has the time to think about these things *or to produce?* The moneyed are only going to throw their spare change to *their* idea of the “good” musician in order for them to reach the economic security where the maximum time can be spent producing “Classical Music”. In the meantime, the “Low Class” is often too busy struggling to pay the “Upper Class”-imposed rent to have much time for anything else.

The orchestra is one of the ultimate symbols of Ruling Class “superiority”. Who else can *afford* to get so many musicians together to play “the same thing” at once. Various examples of what I want to call “Low Classical Music” come to mind as remarkable accomplishments in the area of large scale “musical” projects *not* entirely based in Ruling Class privilege & the usual economic relations.

The Scratch Orchestra & The Portsmouth Sinfonia, for example, both strike me as prime examples of how to organize an orchestra *without* requiring total adherence to status quo class structure. By accepting what Howard Skempton, composer/performer & co-founder of the Scratch Orchestra, is reputed to have referred to as

“uncontrolled variables”, they made situations possible where orchestra members could not only squeeze themselves in without having to be practiced musicians but could also exploit their *classically undesirable* quirks as a main producer of distinction.

The Portsmouth Sinfonia specialized in only playing popular classics (made popular, as Michael Nyman points out in his book experimental music - Cage and beyond, by “sources outside the concert hall - the *William Tell* Overture from the Lone Ranger series, the *1812* from Family Favorites”). These were played *without requiring that its performers necessarily know “how” to play them*. This, for me, is an epitome of the “Low Classical Musician”’s attitude - a sort of reclaiming of music as general property. With music once again perceived as a metaphor for other aspects of social relations, this “reclaiming” could be called parallel to the Diggers’ (brutally suppressed) use of the Commons for “common” (read “Low Class”) purposes after the English Civil War.

The Portsmouth Sinfonia even managed to coordinate 82 members + an excess of 350 choir members for their May 28th, 1974 performance at the Royal Albert Hall (go figure?!). Interestingly, in their repertoire was the above-mentioned Tchiakovsky Piano Concerto. In the liner notes to the recording of this event, the following anecdote is related:

“Tchiakovsky’s notion of his inability to grasp & manipulate musical

form was not helped by Rubenstein's hostile reaction to the Piano Concerto No. 1 when Tchiakovsky played it through to him on Christmas Eve 1874. It was hoped that the virtuoso would point out any technical impracticalities. To his mind, though, the piece was unplayable, clumsy, worthless and commonplace, it was beyond correction and only two or three pages had any value. The rest had to be destroyed or completely remodelled. However, Tchiakovsky refused to change a single note. "*I have never felt so proud of anything I've written*", he said later."

The Portsmouth Sinfonia repossessed "long-haired" music for the "long-hairs" of its day - *minus* the all-important dress-code. Looking at the P.S. photos, very few are to be seen wearing tuxedos or "formal dress". Some members of the Sinfonia even have their shirt-tails out. It might not seem like much to some readers of this article, but most non-conformist dressers will be familiar with the experience of being denied admittance to restaurants for "lack of proper attire", being kicked out of school for "failure to follow the dress code", or of not getting or losing a job for not being *toned down* or "professional" "enough" or for not wearing a uniform. The "Upper Class" wants *all* its employees (even the relatively privileged symphony musicians) to *show what their "proper" place in the hierarchy is* by dressing in the approved **servant** attire. All in the name of "good taste" of course. Whose good taste? Certainly not mine.

This latter subject of "good taste" opens up a big enough can of worms for Stefan Szczelkun, one time member of the Scratch Orchestra, to have written an entire book about it entitled The Conspiracy of Good Taste. This book is basically an analysis of how Working Class Culture is subtly repressed - especially focusing on figures supposedly representing the working class with a sanitized version of its culture that smothers & hides the workers' true vitality by imposing internalized middle-class values taken for granted as "superior".

A 21 page section of this book is on the English folk song collector Cecil Sharp (born in 1859). It's interesting to note that of the 7 folk song collectors profiled by Szczelkun to give historical background before discussing Sharp, one of them was a judge, one was a high-bailiff, & another was a son of a lawyer. Characteristic of all of these "song collectors" was their consistent censoring & rewriting of the basic material to produce something "acceptable" for printing. An oral culture that used non-literate language & that included references to politics & sex became "tastefully" translated into a literate language that censored & subdued controversial subject matter.

Some examples of this provided in The Conspiracy.. are as follows:

"Phillips seems to have been advised that his first edition was not tasteful enough and he was careful to see to it that his second edition

contained 'no vile Conceit, no Low Pun, or double Entendre'."

"Ritson['s..] own selections were chosen not to "tinge the cheek of delicacy, or offend the purity of the chaste ear." [...] He would [additionally] [...] 'make sense of nonsense'."

"Before Scott died, he admitted that perhaps he was wrong to 'improve the poetry' at the expense of their 'simplicity'. In fact the mother of Hogg, one of his main lower class collaborators, told him to his face:

"ye hae spoilt them awthegither. They were made for singin' an' no for readin'; but ye hae broken the charm noo, an' they'll never be sung mair. An' the worst thing of a', they're nouter richt spell'd nor richt setten down" (Harker, 1985, p.70)."

"The lyrics were a poor transcription of oral language and clashed with literary standards. The critics had no understanding of the structure of dialect which was just considered a poor version of 'proper' speech and clearly needed to be translated into 'correct' English. Baring-Gould found that they were "Usually rubbish" or that "some of the most exquisite melodies were coupled to either foul or silly words"."

Here we have Oral versus Literary (spoken words transcribed as written words) & Aural versus Literary (heard sounds transcribed as notated ones). I'm certainly in favor of both

oral & literary culture - but it seems important to point out that neither is an exact translation of the other & that *both* have intrinsic characteristics of value. To again quote The Conspiracy..:

"Between 1888 and 1915 the word 'folk' was used in the titles of at least 27 song collections. The vast majority of these would be accompanied by piano arrangements, "which, while providing the necessary prop for a drawing-room performance and theoretically helping to coordinate the undisciplined singing of a hall full of school children, at the same time imposed the rhythmic strictness and tonal strait-jacket of the pianoforte upon a music which appears to have cared not at all for the discipline of the metronome and owed nothing to the chromatic scale employed by art musicians and composers" (Pegg, 1976, p.18)."

Given that the advent of publishing enabled a breakthrough in the massive dissemination of the "history of the victor", it's no wonder that the orientation of the ruling class would be towards an oral/aural culture as close to the literary one as possible. The more the ruling class thought & spoke in literary terms, the more adept they could be at manipulating the published & *most widely distributed & taught* version of reality. I liken the refining of music thru the filter of traditional notation to the

refining of food to the point of overkill in which most of the nutrition is removed.

In my own experience, I recall listening to one friend's traditionally "upper class" notated music & commenting that "all I heard was a bunch of 16th notes." This rather harsh comment of mine was meant to say that the limitations of the notation used & the rigidity of the performance were such that the rhythmic results were bland & the timbral language was practically nonexistent because the notation was *too crude (or overly "refined") to include it!*

Szczelkun quotes Dave Harker's Fakesong: The manufacture of British folksong 1700 to the present day as quoting Sharp as saying "Our traditional songs are a great instrument for sweetening and purifying our national life and for elevating and refining popular taste". Szczelkun then goes on to develop the idea that:

"Working class culture was to be stultified, backdated, modified, cleaned up and sold back to us as the genuine article -- the mythologizing of authenticity that goes to the irrational core of bourgeois culture. This was to be done by infecting one of the great hopes of working people, education."

Szczelkun then quotes from Chris Waters' British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture: 1884-1914 in order to demonstrate how the teaching of a limited tonal system could be used for indoctrination: "The Tonic Sol-fa system of music notation was originally intended as a means of moral training

for workers, giving the illusion of unsupervised participation without threatening middle-class hegemony." Szczelkun's own experience with the oppression of the tradition of working class song was exemplified by when his singing "was met with a harsh "Pity you can't sing", a judgement which must have been based on the success of the Sol-fa scale and the general message that the working class people who didn't pick up these conventions quickly, or who intuitively resisted them, 'couldn't sing'." I've talked with at least a few friends who had similar experiences that discouraged them from exploring their own musicality by frightening them with a fear of ridicule.

Elsewhere, he notes that:

"The 'high moral tone' which was applied to censor the content of songs became part and parcel of the Victorian manufacture of childhood. The vulnerability of the young was confused with a myth of innocence. The reasonable protection of children from abuse was confused with a protection from supposedly crude language and vulgar realities: in other words from working class culture. The child was to be inculcated from the start with 'good taste'. So as young people were released from the bondage of child labour they were embraced by a new style of oppression."

Szczelkun's observation about these changes is that "Fundamentally, dominant culture is a repression of the 'lower senses', for example, reference to bodily functions--which the upper

classes, being more akin to gods than animals, really did not want to admit to.”

It's very interesting to me that “no vile Conceit” should be contained in the transcriptions of the folk songs considering that, to me, the pretense of representing a culture while simultaneously radically changing it is in itself a “vile Conceit”. Even more interesting to me is the eradication of the “Low Pun”, the “double Entendre”, & “nonsense”. Such humorous ambiguities are powerful underminers of fixed roles & are, as such, a threat to rigid class hierarchies. I wonder how my terminology would've been reacted to.. I like to imagine that “Low Classical Usic” would've fit into all 3 of those rejected categories.

As for “not offend[ing] the purity of the chaste ear”, I think any sound at all can fuck with the virginity of a “truly” chaste ear. Sensing anything is to have the “purity” of that sense “sullied” by experience (to use a similar vocabulary). At any rate, to take material from one culture & then highly modify it to make it acceptable to another while still pretending that it represents the 1st culture can be more than simply *bad scholarship*. The hidden agenda of this process was (& is) to ultimately eradicate working class culture by pretending to present it in its “true goodness” - attempting to “shame” the original culture's “rowdier” elements into conformity w/ values held by “higher” classes that could ignore “facts of life”, such as economic despair, that the “lower” class had to deal with more

directly in order to survive. As Szczelkun puts it:

“The working class folk song culture had been colonized through the activity of the collectors and publishers. It had been cleaned up and was then fused with bourgeois idioms and presented back to the people as national culture in opposition to the ‘vulgarized’ urban popular culture.”

As for sexual content, here's my shortened version of Szczelkun's quote from the introduction to Jerry Silverman's The Dirty Song Book:

“Where were the dirty songs when Cecil Sharp, Carl Sandburg, and John Lomax came around? [...] ...Did the cowboy, sailor, or chain gang convict suddenly become shy when confronted with the strange fellow with the notebook [...]?”

“[...] we can only infer a tacit conspiracy of silence as the reason for their almost complete non-existence in print...when Alec Guinness led his hardy band over the River Kwai they only whistled the tune of the so-called ‘Colonel Bogey's March’. Do you suppose that the British soldiers didn't have some choice lyrics to fit that stirring march? You're damned right they did! Turn to page 92 for a poetical analysis of the anatomy of Hitler, Goering, Himmler and Goebbels and then see if you could ever be satisfied just whistling the tune again.”

In David Ocker's liner notes to Frank Zappa's “Francesco Zappa” parody record of the “Golden Age” of “Classical Music” we find the following



dadadadadada that it “is both the complete title & the complete score” & that:

“The idea behind this score was that it be extremely simple to realize. All the performer “has” to do is somehow sound the title out loud & if they fuck up, well, it isn’t such a disaster. I made recordings w/ friends who wd’ve never thought of themselves as “performers” otherwise & produced some fine “inanity”. A part of the idea was to create a context so narrow that *any* quirks w/in it, including “performer” mistakes wd become “exciting” novelties in contrast.”

As another comment on what might be called a shuffling of rigid class role-playing, I quote from my “Social Philosophy” section from the More Information than most people are likely to want to read booklet that accompanies the Official Wafer Face Record: “So-called “improvisation” is often perceived as pointing in this direction insofar as whatever skills any player brings to the moment are often stressed as being at least as important if not more so than the skills originating from a directing person or group.”

Quoting once again from the Usic - √-1 essay, in reference to the above-mentioned “Official” Project:

“The people willing to work with this project ranged from people who had never played an instrument before to people with master’s degrees in music from academies - with rock & “pop” musicians “in between” & people like Neil Feather & John Berndt & myself

coming from a more “outsider” angle. People were united simply by their interest in the project & the fun that they got out of it & didn’t require the *pay* that motivates most classical & pop “professionals”. Everything that was played could be taught with fairly simple explanations & by demonstration. The amount of improvisation involved allowed the players to maintain enough individual personality to keep the rehearsals fun enough to make them a sort of social event game (at least for me) & to ensure that more rehearsals than common in classical circles could be had. *And* the results could be wonderfully convoluted! Even so, the project was exhausting &, as usual, the lack of money didn’t help. Nonetheless, the “Official” “Big Band” managed to lurch along for a year & a half!” - “Low Class Usicians” & members of the No-No Class All! (even if they deny it)..

The production of “Low Classical Usic” could be said to be motivated by the desire to produce creations of a parallel or greater indensity (pun intended) to that of “Classical Music” while *depreciating* the oppressive class structure that “Classical Music” is the tool of. The Scratch Orchestra may’ve had the most clear-cut “easily recognized as such” political orientation. In the Scratch Music book edited by Cornelius Cardew (another of the Orchestra’s founders) the following introductory paragraph from Cardew is found:

“The Scratch was saved from liquidation by two communist members.

At the August 23/24 discussions of the [Catherine Williams] Discontent documents John Tilbury exposed the contradictions within the orchestra, and proposed the setting up of a Scratch Ideological Group. I and several others were glad to join this group, whose tasks were not only to investigate possibilities for political music-making but also to study revolutionary theory: Marx, Lenin, Mao Tsetung. Another aim was to build up an organisational structure in the Scratch that would make it a genuinely democratic orchestra & release it from the domination of my subtly autocratic, supposedly anti-authoritarian leadership." Note the *absence* of anarchist theory. Ho hum.

The Scratch Orchestra, despite its communist rather than anarchist leanings, as an important theoretical precursor to both the "Low Classical Usic" of the "Official" Project & another project I've been involved in: the Volunteers Collective. Note the similarities between Cardew's "Scratch Music was halfway between composing and improvising" & my explanation of the "Official" Project's playing structure: "the distinction between "composition" & "improvisation" is of a usefulness limited to relativity issues" or between Cardew's "A Scratch Orchestra is a large number of enthusiasts pooling their resources (not primarily material resources) and assembling for action (music-making, performance, edification)" & John [Berndt] Kennedy's "I propose that I be included in a group of people, a loose ensemble of changing

"membership", focused on goals by their individual enthusiasm at each point, on projects which suggest the participation of a defined group but for which no suitable contexts exists here, the value of which for me would be the sharing of individual resources outside the already known & oriented forms of the music group, the theater group, the two-person collaboration, ktp..." (from his "Proposal for Volunteer's-Collective").

One of the many "ideological" obstacles to the production & acceptance of "Low Classical Usic" is the emphasis on Production "Values" & "High Fidelity". While I certainly have nothing against either, I *do have something against* these "values" getting in the way of production done under circumstances in which such "values" are impractical. Note the similarity between the concepts of "good taste" & "high fidelity". In a letter written in defense of my tape company, Widemouth Tapes, published in the "V" issue of OP magazine in March/April of 1984ev I wrote:

"Regarding the recording quality, comparison w/ folkways, postal interaction networking, and the *Bullshit Detector* again seems relevant. Should poor people without access to hi-fi equipment be discouraged from recording and disseminating? It seems to me that some things need to be distributed independent of fidelity criteria and that there is information intrinsic to lo-fi. Indeed the lo-fi enhances the conceptual obstacle course of the phone recordings - which have carefully

avoided artiness and musicality in order to make them more difficult to accept for people who assume that sound is only worth listening to if it has pseudo-professional gloss.”

A case in point being that of Norman Yeh. Norman’s a remarkable violinist & pianist who, at times, creates a world of garbage around himself. I released a tape by him recorded (by him) under extremely crude circumstances - using some semi-broken “home-entertainment” console tape recorder (or some such). In the notes that accompany Norman’s tape I wrote:

“Hunting the wild Norman Yeh can be quite a challenge. First there’s the labyrinth of accumulations from auctions. The neighborhoods full of cars; the trucks full of tires; the burning vans; the sneaky plates; the ceiling high stacks of moldy books; the tvs & stereos & boxes & appliances & furniture to be stepped over & on.. You name it & Norman may just have it somewhere between you & him.. - & then there are the plates of fried eggs & half-eaten fish stuck between the newspapers - & the fierce those-who-are-only-alluded-to-obliquely : well-nigh present tense in more ways than once-upon-a-time-&-time-again.. For the obstinate who make it past these obstacles there’s the final test of the inimitable Yeh spewing of invisible ink. The octopus with artificial arms. &, of course, if you like this sort of thing, the complexity of someone who refuses to even accept my saying that he refuses to be simple-

minded - if you’d rather encourage flies to make movies rather than pin them down or go after them with the swat team, then this rare selection of recordings ~~may be for you..~~”

In addition to my own poverty, the obstinateness of Norman’s eccentrically “unapproachable” personality made it difficult for there to be any other recording than his own primitive one. *If* there had been a “clean” recording of him made, however, it wouldn’t have echoed so well the filth of the environment that he so fertily created in. “Low Classical Usic” has room for gardening in the manure of “lo-fi” (ultimately, I prefer “sci-fi”).

Nam June Paik, who is said to’ve begun as a traditional composer in Japan before moving into the video/tv work that he’s most renowned for, is quoted on page 152 of the 1973 edition of Douglas Davis’ book Art and the Future as saying:

“From Giotto to Ingres there is a steady search for more perfection in high fidelity. Then Monet made it low fidelity. TV has been searching for high fidelity, too. The whole electronics industry has had but one purpose to serve: reproduction of the original signal. They never question that signal. [...] The nature of the source is not their problem. Electronics has thus been used for military purposes, for censorship, for eavesdropping. I want to make electronics more humanistic, more conscious of the problem of source material--which isn’t a difficult problem at all. For example, many

millions of engineers knew that you could distort TV signals with a magnet; millions knew it, but no one did it. They were trained never to question the source material, like soldiers at West Point. Mr. Abe [Paik's engineer collaborator] says, everything in TV is now set for high fidelity, but there is nothing to do. Therefore, now is the time in TV for low fidelity. Hi-fi is dead in music with Stockhausen & Cage, dead in marriage with Dr. Kinsey, and dead in TV with us."

"Low Fidelity" need not only refer to the "quality" of the recording process. It can also refer to the "quality" of sound produced in general. A trained instrumentalist playing a "highly crafted" model of the instrument they're trained to play might be said to be playing "Hi-Fi". Untrained (or even trained/experienced) players without access to "well-crafted" instruments (or rejecting them) might choose to *exaggerate* these ordinarily "negative" characteristics in order to produce something different from "Hi-Fi" - often as a "Low Classical" political positioning. In Istvan Kantor (a) Monty Cantsin AMEN!'s essay "Sounds Like Neoism?!" he recounts the following anecdote:

"I was also involved with unpopular forms like anti-music, spontaneous improvisation, noise. One early example of this is the syphon-music concept, a neo-dada experience originated in the late 60s, early 70s in Budapest. The basic idea was to provoke the audience through the unskilled use of musical instruments.

You could only be a participant of a syphon-music performance if you couldn't play any instruments, or, if you happened to know how to play piano, for example, then you had to play trumpet or violin. But at each occasion you had to change instrument to make sure that you won't get familiar with any of them. [...] We became infamous & and got banned from many clubs. But, eventually [...] the rumours made us known in the music circuits and we got invited to do our own shows. This kind of success reversed the original idea and turned it into an accepted form of entertainment, and, of course, these consequences meant the end of the syphon-music era."

Another lo-fi angle might be represented by Jack Behrens' "Utopianism (for "found" piano)" on the MUSICWORKS #64 recording. Accepting the "found" qualities of anything often means observing what the found thing is & then exploring its unique characteristics rather than trying to "tune" those characteristics into being in keeping with a common standard. According to Behrens' MW article, the piano that he used "provided the microtonal possibilities of composing for what might be described as a "found object" -- each piano key had to be considered as an individual sound source, not necessarily related in any rational manner to the other eighty-four." By accepting what would ordinarily have been called the "out-of-tune" aspects of the piano, he was able to compose for a

tuning that might not've been produced "rationally" otherwise.

Now, of course, comes the punch-line. After having circled an implied definition of this all-important concept of "Low Classical Usic" it's time for me to try to cram 2 recent audio products from me into its ambiguous context. I'm reminded of the Japanese man growing watermelons in cubes. The first piece in question is entitled A Year & a Day @ the Funny Farm Bogus Piano Concerto - in 2 Rapid Bowel Movements: 1. Left Wing Movement, 2. Chicken Wing Movement. I composed in 1995ev, this "Bogus Concerto" is partially explained by this excerpt from my 1996ev revised notes:

"After hearing one of these recordings of the BPC, my step-brother said something about the relationship between the "piano" part & the "orchestration" making "no sense" to him. In an attempt to explain my intention I developed the analogy that the 1st movement is like a tightrope walker's marathon thru a variety of weather conditions. Regardless of whether there's a thunder-storm or intense sunlight, the keyboardist's challenge is to maintain a focused course."

Now, What the fuck does that have to do with "Low Classical Usic"? Is this essay going to conclude with a call for strength & perseverance on the part of the "Low Class" in order to survive the "Upper Class" long enough to bury it? Hardly. But the Bogus Piano Concerto does occasionally show our (M)Usical d

preciation of many a popular classic (thanks to the marvelous playing of John Henry Nyenhuis). Actually, the BPC is mainly "Low Classical Usic" because I "originated" it & everybody "knows" what a "Low Class" type I am. If I were admitted into the "Upper Class" pantheon of the "Classical Music" gods I might start spreading dis-eases. Ho hum.

Another recent bit of cubical watermelon "Low Classical Usic" might be my acoustic guitar piece "Past Life Regression". This piece of fluff (can any guitar usic be otherwise?) is the only "interesting" guitar solo I've managed to play in my 27 years as a guitarist. As such, I *just have to plug it*. It's a "Past Life Regression" because I was once a "folk musician" as a teenager & playing guitar for me often feels like a regression to that past life. I created it whilst teaching a friend of mine to play guitar. While teaching her to play I discovered that I'm actually very "knowledgable" on the subject. Whatever skill I may exhibit in this piece might seem to approach the academic (probably not), but I assure you, it's pure "Low Classical Usic" - a grab-bag of Jack-Off-Of-All-Trades use of whatever my exploratory experience brought me & not the product of carefully manipulated ideological Academy training.

As usual, this essay is hardly presented as being "perfect". I can imagine a detailed analysis of my own text revealing problems with it that its current form inadequately explores.

One obvious problem is that it deals almost exclusively with the culture of England, the United States, & *English* Canada (aka "Great" Britain, the NUS@, & Caca-Nada) - with a smattering of Russia & Hungary - & is, as such, extremely narrow focus. But, then again, I'm not trying to establish a comprehensive history or a steadfast hierarchy, I'm "simply" trying to open a can of worms that we can go fishing for punchlines with.

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## RAILING AGAINST INERTIA: An Interview with KatieJane Garside

By Kate MacDonald

I first heard KatieJane Garside years ago with Daisy Chainsaw. Something about her presence impressed me, even as one who liked to think I understood a lot about music, as defying explanation and at the same time, unquestionably compelling.

Throughout her musical incarnations in the years since, I would say that it is that enigmatic quality that forms a thread through which her sonically disparate musical projects can be connected. Her originality is obvious and it is absolutely genuine, a sort of raw energy that can be seen but never pinned down and defined.

Her latest musical project, Ruby Throat, is more restrained, more intimate, but

could have sprung from the mind of no one else. In the interests of preserving the essence of the person, I've tried to keep my edits to a minimum on this piece, even preserving the "no capitalisation allowed" punctuation that, strangely, is something I've always done as well.

**KFM:** So to get started... the ruby throat material and the album of solo recordings you released seem very different than what you've done before with daisy chainsaw and queen adreena... what was it that made you decide to go in this musical direction?

**KJG:** all the indicators are there in the detail in daisy chainsaw and queen adreena, most of my life has been by accident, making lalleshwari and ruby throat was a conscious decision, life finally insisted that i make the work i want to rather than it being the result of a head on collision but it is there in the cracks in the other material and i needed a wider sky to fly in, its very narrow in a sonic assault literally for a singer

**KFM:** So do you think the change in sound is more an aesthetic one, rather than a fundamental shift?

**KJG:** it is a fundamental shift, i'll elaborate. i struggle fundamentally with the concept of 'free will', this has taken me to very dark places in terms of another's autonomy impressing upon my lack of autonomy but in the darkest places the essential essence and kick for life makes itself known, eventually i am able to carve out very small corners of a very questionable autonomy, this is my

work, an ongoing process and the thing i struggle with most, there are many different ways of describing the same thing but this is how it makes itself know today. and then again all my music is an escape in process, i struggle against the imposed structure, the friction gives me power and elevation (extended answer to previous question)

**KFM:** So do you think artistic expression serves as a sort of marker of autonomy? a separate moment from the rest of life?

**KJG:** it's a lifeline, if the line breaks i longer exist. i wish it wasn't so, it's very tiring and i have no discipline. i'm working on it.

**KFM:** In terms of the struggle with an imposed (external) structure, what are some of the points that you would say have marked your greatest successes with that?

**KJG:** that's a wily question, i'll do my best not to slip out of it. i have the honour of an audience and a stage, the ritual and altered state of this place...this is music, the imposed structure serves as scaffolding i can climb, a jumping off point.

**KFM:** Speaking of stages (awkward segue)... live performance seems to have been a very important part of your musical history. do you prefer performing live to work in the studio? are the experiences different for you? or different aspects of the same basic thing?



**KJG:** studio work is mostly agonising, trying to breast feed a dead baby. when i work alone it's more like painting, the imposed structure is mainly debilitating in recording, painting by numbers. alone i can paint free hand and throw it if it doesn't measure up. this is all a measure of my weakness. the last qa album (djin) was recorded live, we kept the tapes rolling and the edit points become the imposed structure, edits no overdubs, first takes, the unselfconscious moment. a load of noise, means nothing under a broad sky.

i like to skulk in the shadows of others, i'm a kind of parasite, i take respite from the overhead lighting, it gives me a day off from the struggle for autonomy but having said that i don't roll over and take it, i get quite bitey...someone else to blame...

**KFM:** Do you find that you're still able to get your vision across, even when you work with others? or does it get transformed into something else

through the different personalities involved?

**KJG:** i don't have a 'vision', i'm more a receptacle, guess that's why i get angry and resentful when i work with others, i get filled up with all their junk as well as my own and autonomy trails on a very precarious thread somewhere way down below me threatening to pull me under and finally submerge, feel like i've got a t.v tied to my ankle, fingernails scraping horribly down the blackboard into nothing i've spent a long time doing that....terrible learned behaviour.



**KFM:** Do you think you would end up more or less satisfied if you were exclusively working alone? or would it matter?

**KJG:** i need both but i take care who i work with now, i take care who i have sex with, same thing.

**KFM:** Different sorts of intimate relationships.

**KJG:** some are good lovers and some eat you up, it's a choice. most awful when they are good lovers and beat you up. still a choice though. a choice in a vice

**KFM:** A constant evaluation of good versus bad.

**KJG:** sometimes good comes of bad, i suppose i wouldn't choose to use good and bad words, it's never black and white, sometimes i wish it was. there are thresholds, though.

**KFM:** Possibly we're conditioned to think that something is either positive or negative, rather than seeing that one is often intertwined with the other?

**KJG:** enormous boredom through endless repetition, if something doesn't change and mutate its basically dead, that's what i rail against.. i can enjoy all kinds of good and bad, it has to stimulate. and yes conditioning is a dead science

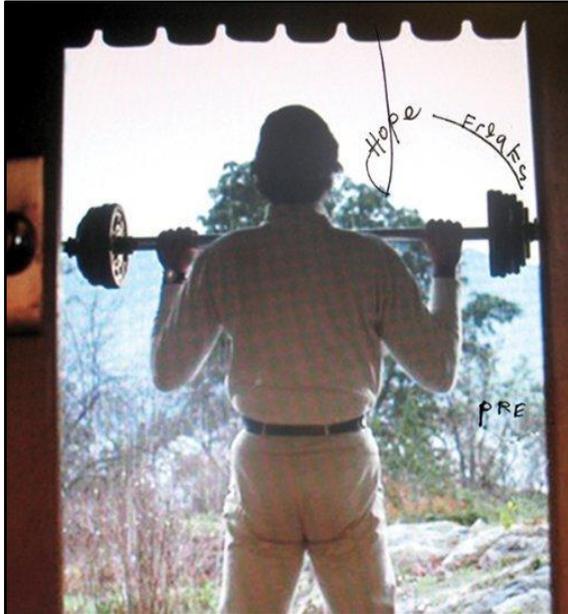
**KFM:** Are there any creative avenues that you're particularly curious to explore in the future?

**KJG:** babies perhaps, to be a vessel with feet firmly planted, to have it not be about me

**KFM:** I think that's a perfect final note. enjoy the rest of your evening. it has been a real pleasure.

## MUSIC REVIEWS

By Craig Woods [CW] and Mary Leary [ML]



**PRE :: *Hope Freaks***

**Skin Graft Records**

<http://www.skingraftrecords.com>

Of all independent record producers alive today, there is arguably none who enjoys a more privileged position than that of Steve “don’t-call-me-a-producer” Albini. As the top choice for all bands willing to pay through the nose to have their album sound as though it were recorded through a single busted omnidirectional mic in a rickety barn, Albini has carved something of a reputation as the ideal man to install the punk/indie cred into any band’s sonic arsenal. And in fact it’s easy to understand why - who can seriously listen to the Pixies’

Albini-produced *Surfer Rosa* and not feel the lack of a certain vitality in their subsequent output? The indisputable Albini Edge has not only worked lo-fi wonders for lesser-known bands, but has been consciously pursued by more mainstream acts such as Nirvana and PJ Harvey in order to reinvigorate the creative energies behind troublesome sophomore albums and hugely-anticipated follow-ups.

However, there’s a flipside to this coin. While artists with whom Albini has worked since their inception tend to pursue steady if not stellar careers, there’s a trend for those who go seeking his services as a means to redefine their established sound to thereafter come to a sticky end. I’m not suggesting there is some kind of Albini Curse at work, nor that the man is going out of his way to sabotage his clients, far from it. If anything, Albini skilfully extracts such raw power and passion in the recordings he makes that the bands themselves seem to implode with exhaustion from the experience, their creative apex pushed beyond its limit. There’s no shortage of examples; Slint struggled to maintain a steady footing after their Electrical Audio encounter; no sooner had the Albini-engineered *Griller* by No Wave stalwarts Ut been released before the band unceremoniously dissolved; Godspeed You! Black Emperor likewise disappeared on an “indefinite hiatus” following Albini’s mind-blowing work on their seminal *Yanqui U.X.O.* (... I may stop short of implying that working with Albini on *In Utero* contributed to Kurt Cobain’s suicide.

And yes, I'm aware that PJ Harvey adeptly climbed the ladder to superstardom following her stint with the man. So this hypothesis isn't perfect, sue me!)

It was with a giddy mixture of excitement and worry then that I greeted the news that Uncle Steve would be presiding over this second album by London noise-punks PRE. On the surface, such a collaboration seems logical - the band's penchant for high energy performance, frenetic angular riffage and a blatant disregard for standard song structure classify them as marginal heirs and heiress to the sonic and aesthetic territory mapped by Albini and his assorted sidemen, from Big Black to Shellac. However, Mr Albini the "producer" tends to be a very different beast from Steve the musician and a few of his recording projects have occasionally found him burying a band's strongest assets in a mix rawer than sushi (- Who hasn't at least once turned off *Rid of Me* in frustration at the frequent inaudibility of Polly's distinctive voice?).

Thus I found myself wondering: "Does a band like PRE really *need* Albini?" The band's debut *Epic Fits* represents a beautifully controlled balance between anarchic punk abandon and a colourful pseudo-pop sensibility. In Albini's hands, I feared, the glossier aspects of their sound might fall to be crushed beneath the weight of a belligerent lo-fi juggernaut. Moreover, I couldn't help but wonder if all was perhaps not quite well in the PRE camp, if maybe dissolution loomed on the horizon. For

sure, that's precisely the kind of fraught predicament from which Mr A habitually moulds the most beautiful kind of chaos, but I'd be saddened to bid adieu to such a gifted young band so early in their career.

The new album's cover art does much to create the impression that there are indeed some changes afoot. In contrast to the comparative sheen which adorned their debut, *Hope Freaks* is modestly presented with a retro Polaroid motif. A step back from their previous Technicolor excesses then, but not quite the descent into nihilism I might have feared. This impression is mercifully rewarded by the recordings on offer here, which in fact present a band at something of a creative peak and evidently in no mood to yield any of their power just yet. So much for expectations.

A bouncy cowbell-peppered rhythm - a reliable indicator of a band not taking themselves too seriously - launches the proceedings through a playful New Wave instrumental dirge before segueing into the first of several standout tracks. 'Haircut Tacos' adequately summarises the tone of this record; equal parts light-hearted mischief and antagonistic chaos, rich snatches of harmony and melody sailing effortlessly in and out of discordant riffs and messy rhythms.

Those familiar with the band's debut will pick up immediately on some subtle but crucial evolution at work. While vocalist Akiko Matsuura has become somewhat renowned for her

Devil Doll screech, her applications here are strikingly more refined and selective. Jettisoning the one-voice-fits-all approach, her lungs become something of an instrument in their own right on this record, switching effortlessly from sugar-pop harmonising to melancholy crooning to a strident banshee wail. So frequent are these shifts in mood - three or four occurring within a two-minute song - that the listener can become quite breathless in trying to keep up, but no less stimulated for that.

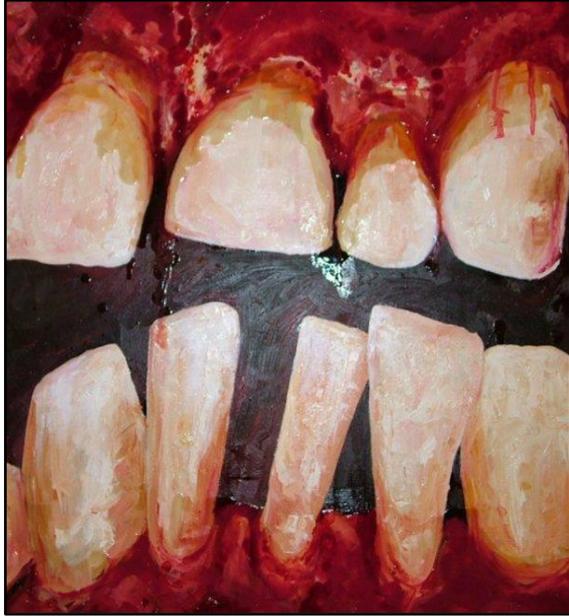
Matsuura's bandmates are no faceless backing act either, each attacking their instruments with a renewed vigour and boasting a far more confident sense of purpose than that displayed back in 2007. John Webb's distinctive guitar style mirrors the vocals with an audacity of range from the Andy Gill-esque chopping on 'Why Be Wives' to an unabashedly showy duel between atonality and infectious pop groove on 'Cold'. Meanwhile, the bass-heavy rhythm section pulls off an admirable job of anchoring these idiosyncrasies to a foundation which is consistent and adaptable, employing force and moderation in all the right places whilst not being shy of a few stylistic flourishes - just check out the snare/cowbell onslaught on 'Teenage Lakes' or the relentless bass grind on closing track 'Sleep Weak'.

The real clincher here though is in Albini's production which respects the complexity of these sounds, granting each eccentricity of timbre and speed the correct amount of sonic space it

requires. In direct contrast to the excessive Albini-izing incurred by some bands during their residence at Electrical Audio, *Hope Freaks* displays a band and their "producer" in complete synthesis of vision. Adopting an "*If-it-ain't-broke...*" stance, Albini seems to have approached this record as a fan of PRE's debut and endeavoured to preserve the most notable assets of that record whilst also pushing out the boat to encompass the band's broadening musical palette. There are few producers who would so painstakingly juggle the extremes between groove and grind on offer here, and fewer still who could deliver the goods with such a cohesive finish. After almost thirty years in the business, Albini's passions show no sign of waning and his willingness to extract the best from a band has here borne unexpectedly refined fruit.

While PRE may not be the most original band on the planet, and the Albini Edge something of an acquired taste, it's nonetheless reassuringly refreshing to witness band and "producer" alike pursue their particular furrow with such unpretentious fervour. That the end result comes away sounding rawer and more immediate than all the efforts of most contemporary noise-rock dilettantes combined more than justifies its need to be heard. [CW]

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**Divorce :: *Divorce***

**Optimo Music**

<http://www.optimo.co.uk/music>

Those with any real appreciation of history will know that revolutions tend to spring from the most unexpected and overlooked of corners. Within a relatively short space of time, almost every facet of a society can be revolutionised behind the spearhead of one fraction of a population who have for too long remained oppressed and silent, eagerly pouncing upon their chance to seize control of their own destiny. History provides many such examples of this pattern from the French to the Spanish Revolution and beyond, and you may pick your own.

Crucially, this trend applies not only to socio-political currents, but also to those of popular culture. And, as a Glaswegian with eye and ear habitually tuned to this city's underground

rumblings, I have surveyed the burgeoning tremors of revolution in clubs and venues for the better part of two years. Now, at last, it seems the bland reign of soundalike packet-soup pseudo-indie whiners which has retarded the Glasgow music scene for so long has come upon shaky ground with the rise of a new breed of impudent noise merchants and mischief makers who have begun to break ravenously from their shackles. At the fore of this movement are DIVORCE: a four-woman, one-man punk-noise combo whose debut 10" EP (freshly released on the fledgling Optimo Music label) bears so little resemblance to anything to emerge from Glasgow's long staid music scene that it could easily be mistaken for a declaration of war from an alien planet.

Armed with little more than a deliciously skewed sense of rhythm, an audacious embrace of atonality, and an almost maddening minimalism, DIVORCE have seemingly done the impossible: assembled a recipe from scant and meagre ingredients to produce an end product which is head-bustingly epic. The four tracks on this record, while each displaying their own individual tics, essentially coalesce to form an abbreviated portrait of a collective who are more militia than band. Combining the anarchic persona of No Wave provocateurs with a fine line in so-detuned-it-hurts Albin-esque guitar grooves, these four abrasive anthems are further augmented by a vital aesthetic freshness which places DIVORCE in the same league as contemporaries in LA's Smell scene and

elsewhere.

The militia metaphor is not merely whimsy on my part. This is music which not only demands the listener's full attention but is delivered with a seductive violence and urgency that makes its meaning, however obscure, utterly imperative. Like the voice of a revolutionary propagandist, Sinead Youth's unapologetic yells cut through the storm of dissonance to deliver with committed repetition phrases and slogans which are often cryptic but always sincere. Opener 'Early Christianity' makes the issue clear: "*This is not an empty threat!*" Sinead yells and, context aside, it is a statement whose truth is borne out in the following tracks. By the time we get to the first track on side B: 'Juice of Youth', which lyrically couples childhood obedience with intimations of being sent "*six feet under!*", the gloves are not only off but have been used to wipe up the blood of the old Glasgow scene and all its self-satisfied complacency before being left to burn in the smouldering remains .

Closing track 'Scissorfight', in which Youth chants a single phrase ad nauseam against a backdrop of repetitious machinelike droning, is not only the perfect coup de grace, but is also the band's most forthright statement of their all-out rejection of accessible trends in the Glasgow music scene and beyond. It's an exhausting and yet strangely satisfying finale. In under twenty minutes this modest disc grabs you helplessly by the jugular, slaps you awake, thrusts you facedown in your own vomit and leaves you

feeling thankful for the abuse.

DIVORCE is a band of extremes, from the nihilistic to the naïve, and their particular aesthetic is fuelled as much by a gleeful sense of childish mischief as it is by a commitment to artistic integrity. There is more than a smidgen of irony in every facet of their work and persona, something which is acutely on display in the record's design and packaging. Pressed on blood red vinyl and embossed with a sticker bearing the faces of the five members within the points of a pentagram, there's no mistaking their love of the crass and an apparent fondness for old school thrash metal. The sleeve art by guitarist Vickie McDonald provides a too-close-for-comfort view of a less-than-pristine set of human gnashers, suitably summarising both the raw and self-deprecating sides to the band.

Twiddling the knobs on this record is Chris White of cerebral Glasgow racket-makers Plaaydoh and this has had some impact on the band's sound which is not wholly positive. While White's recordings are certainly adequate, it's difficult not to come away with the feeling that something has been lost in the translation of DIVORCE from stage to studio. As the band's own press release on the Optimo website testifies:

*"Divorce are best experienced live, in a small sweaty room, with all the ear-splitting volume & uninhibited audience confrontation that goes with it."*

Never a truer word written. Having seen DIVORCE live several times, I am

all too familiar with the frenetic energy and passion their performances invoke, and it's a pity that that energy is somewhat lacking in these recordings. While the sonic palette of the EP is spare, it somehow just never feels quite *raw* enough, as though the power of DIVORCE is something which cannot be meaningfully delivered in anything other than a purely live medium.

This shortcoming aside however, the four tracks on this disc present a band of astonishing will and purpose with more than enough skill and passion to back up their convictions. Should Glasgow's new underground glory prove as ephemeral as the Spanish Revolution, we can only hope it is also as comparatively profound. With this explosive record lighting the route ahead, the future looks reassuringly messy, violent and bright as a Molotov inferno. [CW]



**Ultimate Thrush ::**  
*Ultimate Thrush*

**Winning Sperm Party**

<http://winningspermparty.com>

"What the fuck was that?" a voice I barely recognised as my own stumbled from my stunned lips.

"Band soundchecking downstairs," replied the barman returning from the basement venue, the door falling closed at his back to mute the storm of noise beyond.

Struggling to assign some identity to the abrasive sound my ear had snatched, I could conjure only esoteric visions involving a swarm of ravenous metallic insects attacking a rabble of runaway mental patients in the streets of a war-torn city.

Suitably piqued, I approached the door and pushed it open, hoping to glean a greater sense of the men or beasts responsible for the outlandish racket. In less than ten seconds it seemed the cacophony had dissipated as swiftly as it had materialised, leaving me speechless and paralysed but also aroused as one might be in the aftermath of a traffic collision or a random act of public violence.

The barman's wide eyed expression reflected a shared astonishment. "Sound pretty good, eh?" he murmured ineffectually.

"But... what the fuck *was* that?!"

Thus was my initial encounter with the band called Ultimate Thrush. Some eight months and many gig attendances later, their jarring effect has diminished little. Relying on a minimalist brutality of choppy guitars, crazed jazz-tinged

rhythms and demonic vocals, this tinnitus-inducing trio have developed a firm reputation as one of Glasgow's most original and exciting ascendant acts. It was with some eager anticipation then that I awaited this, their self-titled debut release on the recording arm of DIY gig-organisers Winning Sperm Party. Happily I can report that the finished article does not disappoint.

Bereft of the cultish smocks worn onstage and the physical extremities which make their live shows visually interesting, the ten tracks on this breathtakingly brief record find Ultimate Thrush stripped down to their core faculties. With the bulk of the songs stretching barely over a minute apiece, the band have pulled out all the stops to craft a concise collection of mini-assaults, each as swift and as deadly as a stab wound to the listener's cortex. Their transition from live performance to the rigours of studio recording has, inevitably, ensured that the tracks have incurred a few tweaks and changes but none which notably hinder the Ultimate Thrush power or purpose. If anything, the band have given the lie to the image of noise-rock bands as reckless, instead attacking each song with a fresh set of ears and imbuing them with a clean, cold production quality which has honed their seductive savagery to a rapier edge.

The songs themselves are playfully subversive, mingling militant aggression with tongue-in-cheek levity. In the world of Ultimate Thrush, nothing is quite as it appears as themes of murder and abortion weave jarringly

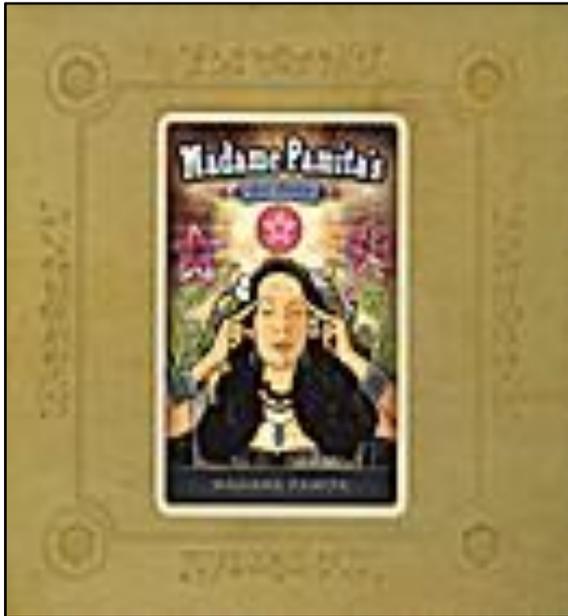
in and out of B-movie silliness and shards of pop culture. While the deranged-gremlin-style vocals might prevent you from tuning into each and every one of these references off the bat, the chaotic spirit in which they are conjured is nonetheless unique and as infectious as the clap. And yes, I mean that in a good way.

Given that the entire tracklist, from the ramshackle mayhem of 'Murder in Mordor' to the mutant-blues frenzy of 'Dog Cat Panther', clocks in at under fourteen minutes, it's testament to the power of this record that it nonetheless leaves the listener with enough elation to fuel an entire evening's jovialities and proves more compellingly addictive than cocaine. In essence, this is the perfect record with which to gatecrash a party - storm in announced, pull the Lilly Allen CD from the player, replace it with this monster and watch the eyes and mouths widen in shock.

Fourteen minutes later, brace yourself for the chorus of: "What the fuck was that?!" and get ready to hit the repeat button.

It's an obnoxious little beast this one. But not one to be tired of swiftly. Please enjoy responsibly. [CW]

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**Madame Pamita - Madame  
Parmita's Wax Works  
(Old Time Is a Good Time)**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tj4KskOcj24>

<http://www.madamepamita.com>

This is for those millions of listeners who've been longing for a new recording that hisses along with the sounds of ukulele, autoharp, musical saw, kazoo, and "Imperial Banjeaurine" but who got cranky when the last few they uncovered weren't captured on a state-of-the-art, 1898 wax cylinder recording machine. Or for those gals who carefully apply pancake make-up before stepping into a dress so old it's running out of places for patches. It's absolutely for anyone who was originally captivated by The Squirrel Nut Zippers but then walked away shaking their head, sneering, "What dilettantes!"

Madame Pamita's increasingly far afield (from her Los Angeles perch), field-style recordings are aesthetically sparse and scratchy, unless your response to Robert Crumb's Cheap Suit Serenaders was along the lines of, "This is a little too smooth and pretty." In that case, she may be just your cup of brew.

I could easily have nut-shelled this CD by saying that fans of the Serenaders and most Old Hat recordings might like it, but that wouldn't have seemed worthy of the tremendous effort and socio-artistic obsessiveness attending Madame Pamita's creation of her own funhouse mirror world. So I am going to say a few things more.

Madame Pamita is very unusual and absolutely loving in her treatment of moldy chestnuts, including minstrel show classic, "He's In The Jailhouse Now," Charlie Poole's "Moving Day," Dick Justice's "Cocaine," and even Blind Willie McTell's barely moldy (courtesy of the White Stripes's recent cover), "My Southern Can Is Mine." Her own compositions nestle easily with the "real" ones, and have titles like, "Three Wishes," "Mother Was a Sporting Girl," and "Love is Good."

While La Pamita says "My Southern Can" was cowritten with McTell via Ouija board, I'm disinclined to press the point, and, more to the point, have spent less time studying the genre than has she; I may be missing a detail or three. To my mind, it is somewhat lacking in etiquette to press my nose too hard behind the illusionist curtain comprising a good deal of her charm. The entire

oeuvre is illusionist, aided at times by Patrick Weise, Peter Dilg, and, recently, in London, Tom Rodwell and Art Terry. Indeed, this madam seems to be steadily creeping into a Next (Old) Big Thing spot, at least among the minds of those who are utterly perplexed at being born after 1930, or who simply crave messages (some of which are intensely populist) from other times and milieu

If you're nearly ready to seek out a musical emporium but holding back due to the need to pay your rent or some other pesky triviality, I think Madame Pamita wants you to know that the words "Pay as you go," or "Pay as you can," appeared somewhere (perhaps the Ouija board in her site's "Laboratory"), which is a very heady place; I may have imagined it. What I'm dead sure of is that receiving her CD is phenomenally exciting: there will be carefully handcrafted treats and bonuses, perhaps including your fortune - if not for a lifetime, at least for that moment.

The website is as creatively driven as the CD, and offers static and moving pictures related to Madame Pamita's many talents and activities, including "Treatises on Euphonious Prognostication," a solarium and boudoir. [ML]

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**Neon Mussolini :: 4-song EP  
Little Power Records**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCwqL-fj-COs&feature=related>

[www.myspace.com/theneonmussolini](http://www.myspace.com/theneonmussolini)

A rather quick aural perusal of Little Power Records's web page gave me the feeling that they feel several mid-'80s -- mid-'90s sounds haven't been completely mined. Along with a general sense of integrity, good sense, and downright goodness (the label has stated its wish to donate all first year profits to charity), it has signed enough exciting and interesting talent to give some weight to its synth-pop/industrial and post-punk leanings.

The tracks on the *Neon Mussolini* EP may be welcomed by listeners hungry for vintage Smiths with several dashes of New Order, the Cure and Joy Division thrown in. In fact, "Emotional for the Last Time" sounds as good or better to me than most anything the Smiths did after their first two albums. However, people who have immersed themselves further in this genre have called NM's sound a second-rate imitation of pop electronica masters that fails to be salvaged by anything particularly original or unique.

Whatever Neon, a/k/a Simon Elliott, may be sampling or by which he is influenced, I enjoy the evocative, rather dreamy "Oh no (for Kenneth)". Neon Mussolini's cover graphics and a video montage accompanying "Emotional" draw possible lines to bondage and other proclivities which seem to have caused misery (or the hiding of which has caused misery). In any case, Little Power Records seems worth watching, with or without Neon, a/k/a Simon Elliott. I like the fact the label has given a shot to a 37-year-old artist who has purportedly been a psychiatric nurse to murderers and sexual offenders -- and who may still be finding his way to his best sounds. A full-length CD is in the offing. [ML]

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[http://www.amazon.com/Hand-Dante-Novel-Nick-](http://www.amazon.com/Hand-Dante-Novel-Nick-Tosches/dp/0316735647/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1250681747&sr=1-2)

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