

by Charm Chandler

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(so like ditto, right?)

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... This untitled piece by Charm Chandler, which we're calling, "By Charm Chandler," is more philosophical poetry than necessarily prose. The story itself answers what it thinks it is: "This script-story-poem-extravaganza, where the words are melding and molding to the night, to the jazz conjunction of a far-off singer, that singer being the reader's eyes? Hah! Literary synesthesia?" I think that literary synesthesia is an appropriate phrase. This piece is a metafiction that realizes what it is: a fiction recognizing that it is creating fiction before the reader as it's being read. This tool is a powerful loop that adds depth to the way in which we read. We're all very well aware that this story is being crafted with a keen conception of the audience. The language is florid but controlled, the structure poetic but built on a foundation of prose, and the work grounded in words, but metaphysical in concept. There is a beauty in the way in which this piece works to create a sensation for the reader. Not just eliciting a thought, but creating a feeling that **washes** over the reader with each word. "By Charm Chandler," is exactly that – charming, alliterative, and literary. Enjoy.*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *There is a spatial discrepancy in the 'Author's Note'. Both we and the author tried correcting this to no avail. We finally appealed to God who said "WTF? Leave it." And who are we to argue with Fiction's greatest creation? If He can live with it, can't you?*

#### **QUALITY QUOTABLES (for the love of language...)**

Their universal body disperses like lovers, having formed too many words. Into the glorious good night, they return to themselves and themselves only, and the song changes. The invisible entities

dance to music that is not music, synesthetic qualities like a *like*, that evil comparison-*esque* word, unable to be explained. Reminiscent of disco discotheque love.

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He desires the work to be circular, literal, and metaphoric, embodying a gentle kiss whose lips is the phrase *occult artifact*.

But he cannot decide upon the intention that the manuscript ought to embody. Who is the bearer of the phrase “forbidden”, and is it, say, someone on the verge of madness or is it madness itself?

What does *occult artifact* even mean? And why the italics?

As fate calculator, he wears a face of curious awakening, that is to say, *alive*, but he never shows that to anyone or anything; not even the author.

In the minutia of the beautiful mundane, he helped create that, you know, that word, *reality*. It is curious, then, because I must ask if the story is his or if it is mine. Such stupid questions go unans-

There are certain words that when wrought together (sometimes, more than two), paint a vague and distant atmosphere, aligning themselves to poetic incursions hidden underneath prose. Often these words, when written together, feels like the *feels like*, in which there is only infinite comparison, but never exactitude.

Infinite comparison, and, this comma, which is the breath of trying to capture the center of the center.

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Some of those words look like this<sup>1</sup>: fate calculator, lazy sexy hand drawing idle circles on obsidian countertops, a so-called final song, invisible entities, vagabond debonair in the city, the type of gaze between seduction and reincarnation (you know, for when you'll never see him again, but at least, your daydreams keep you company), \_\_\_\_\_.

The most important word is \_\_\_\_\_. The fate calculator...

Call me Fate Calculator. Capitals are important; thank you for being my vessel. My pleasure.

Yes, the Fate Calculator considers that \_\_\_\_\_ is the most important word/non-word, because perception of that fills-in-that-blank equals assumption, and assumption is a pleasure that never sleeps. Like surprise kisses.

So, what is this, then? This script-story-poem-extravaganza, where the words are melding and molding to the night, to the jazz conjunction of a far-off singer, that singer being the reader's eyes?

Hah! Literary synesthesia? For what purpose?

A purpose is not needed.

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<sup>1</sup>This is not a comprehensive list.

Well, when certain ideas arise from the specters of consciousness, the inclination to submit to skepticism roars its head demanding that logic and love are the same, and that we ought to love logic, and that from logic arises order and other important words like:

Beginning, Middle, End.

Reality, Subjectivity,

Sunset Reality.

Not quite symmetrical, isn't it? It's just an illusion, I assure you.

And so again, he<sup>2</sup> ponders upon this phrase—*occult artifact*—and if it is enough for its existence. An audience is not required, but appreciated. Can the/his words self-actualize without the reader? Such useless questions for this manuscript! All these questions are for pleasure, like a cherry kiss from the phrase *occult artifact*.

He writes again, in his thoughts, writes on blank paper, and the pen, how dare it?, dares to not have ink.

At the obsidian bar in the nameless corner club of the Night City exists invisible entities. They are all invisible, except the Fate Calculator, who saunters through life as a vagabond debonair. Imagine handsomeness. Imagine you imagining that.

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<sup>2</sup>The *he* ought to be Fate Calculator. But even I, cannot imagine him.

There's a shiny disco ball nearby, illuminating the dance floor which consists of colorful circles instead of squares, and the not-seen creatures whose bodies move not physically, but in our heads.

Imagining how these invisible entities move is as useless as trying to find the significance of the capital letters in the duologue between Fate Calculator and Night City.

But the script demands that closure between the affairs of the meaningless and that our minds ought to be reconciled.

This time, from the previous sentences, he feels the urge to pull forth from the blankness of the paper, a few more words and phrases. This time, of his metaphysical environment.

Key words and phrases: window pane that shows the night outside, the soft glow of the full moon, spirits drinkable, taste of L and A, inspiration is abstract, motivation is the phrase *my-my* and the batting of eyelashes to ward off procrastination, approaching the end goal of a written work or well, anything really, with a salacious mindset, because words are seducing and stories are the hot moans of existence.

Those entities who remain unnoticed for quite a long time on the dance floor form a blobby mass of stars and planets, massaging the shoulders of the Fate Calculator, asking him: *why did you choose to write in the Night City, City of the Abstract and Invisible, of—of—of—many names and—?*

Their universal body disperses like lovers, having formed too many words. Into the glorious good night, they return to themselves and themselves only, and the song changes. The invisible entities

dance to music that is not music, synesthetic qualities like a *like*, that evil comparison-esque word, unable to be explained. Reminiscent of disco discotheque love.

Focus. There are moments of invitation in the Night City like this that allow for a brief respite from the ontological mindsets that plague all unfortunate visitors. This is the moment where prose returns to normal, and the story can be revealed in minute fragments. Do you remember that fragmented phrase at the beginning of the previous page? It is here again, somewhat inevitably, and still fail to fully clarify the nature of these keywords: *Occult Artifact*, *Fate Calculator*, *Night City*. But it will still try.

Sunset Reality.

Yes, welcome to the Sunset Reality, we are the \_\_\_\_\_. Would you like a clearer explanation? You may have it in the stageplay format as a brief excerpt from *Transitional Interlocutors: Conversations with Reality*.

THE PRINCESS

I propose we walk toward the Drifting Shores and bring humanity along with us.

SIR REAL

In the Sunset Reality? But everyone lacks the proper knowledge of how to get there! And most stir their feet idly in the shifting sands once they do, watching the rippling waves, and nothing more.

THE PRINCESS

And yet, we already live idly, stirring our feet in the rippling waves. We call that an illusion. I would rather we walk a directionless aim than submit to this *nom*, where we find ourselves wandering about in a summer stupor.

I commend the Fate Calculator for attempting to work in the Drifting Shores of the Sunset Reality, where his *Drifting Shore* unfortunately happened to coincide with the appearance of the Night City. Unfortunate, because, here are the

Keywords for the Night City: Abstract City, Fate Calculator's Drifting Shore, A Part Of and a Slice Of the Sunset Reality, 14 Ghostly Districts, Figure in the Black Coat.

The connections are forming, but the occult-artifact-story has lost its italics and its importance.

“Right,” the Fate Calculator says. “Thank you. Why would I ever stop attempting to write this story? You see, I desire to bring about that \_\_\_\_\_. That *blank space*. The pause before a pause, before breath moans out a story.”

Breath is existence.

Lucidity is slipping again. A distinct slipping.

“Not on my awareness, that wicked thing.” The Fate Calculator remembers the purpose of what he and no one else had ever attempted to do. “I...”

Eye.

“I wanted to write a piece of the *forbidden*, for humans on Earth, for \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_, for \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_, for \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_, and so on, and so forth, because this work, this *occult artifact* would \_\_\_\_\_ all of the invisibles.” He turns to the camera.

*That is you, dear reader.*

And so the work remains unfinished<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>Otherwise, we shall be here forever.



In that blank space exists an entirely different story unwritten. Pity to those who can only glimpse the vague plot.

That is everyone. Myself included.

The Fate Calculator attempts to pull himself together, gathering lucidity and awareness. It is not that he must escape while those two qualities are here, but rather, he muses, the rest of humanity must allow themselves the strength to enter their own Drifting Shore in the Sunset Reality, disavowing L and A. This is why he stays at the obsidian bar in the nameless corner club of the Night City. It is the perfect in-between between L and A.

But the Night City is not his personal Drifting Shore. He is too afraid to enter his own. His is a \_\_\_\_\_. With an array of titleless books on mahogany shelves, each story forever cycling between *I need this now* and *later, for your time is not relevant*. Perpetually repetitive, like all objects, like all subjects.

There, that last phrase. He catches himself falling into his thought-supplanted stupor. He steals himself before the Night City steals his resolve. Perhaps, he has stayed too long.

“Perhaps, if I talk aloud,” he idly says, to the bartender without a body. “I can regain what was lost.”

Imagine a bartender without a body, and the voice in your head sounds like it would be a bartender without a body. There may/may not be a black bowtie. What beauty lies there?

“Fate Calculator,” the bodiless bartender begins, “do you remember when you first appeared here?”

“No.”

“Do you remember why you are here?”

“No.”

The purpose is still unknown. Soon it will be revealed.

“The purpose is for this work. That’s why I’m here, I think. And the purpose of this work,” he pauses for thoughtful consideration. “—is a purpose that lies between vague and familiar.”

The Fate Calculator sighs, a gentle sigh.

“When this manuscript of a story is complete, if you can call it a story, it<sup>4</sup> will come. Call it change, call it a labyrinth where being lost is much more beautiful than finding the exit, call it whatever you would like. Coax forth the final song, the final anything, really.”

All the pages before him are blank. Each one wants more out of him. So hungry and demanding, that silence, from those who peer deeply into its waters, drawing forth a well of inspiration.

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<sup>4</sup>The It-of-Its, and so-forth. That creature that appears in the word *It*, for when the unknown is truly impeccable in its design. The complex morphology that accompanies this word.

But                      what  
words haunt  
                            him?  
Which  
                            Words  
                            Fight  
                            For  
                            Dominance?<sup>5</sup>

Next to the blank pages, next to the pen that has neatly laid there, untouched by the Fate Calculator's hand in the time that it has taken all of us to blink, is a small glass case in the shape of a circle. Almost flat, disk-like, not quite. It has a handle that curves upwards like a lower-case c, unconnected to anything but gravity. An object for libation, but for empty Gods. There is no liquid in this strange cup.

“For your hard work.” The bodiless bartender smiles. Intangibly invisible.

“What hard work?” The pages are still blank. The pen has not yet decided to refill its reservoir of ink. “Compare my draft to shining glaciers sliding across the shimmering Earthian ocean, melting. Nothing is there, yet the ocean is being filled. That is the work I have wrought. Isn't that cheating? My hand, this pen, nothing was written. I can hardly call what I've done so far as *hard work*.”

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<sup>5</sup>When any writer looks at a blank page. The story writes itself. All writers are perpetually creating. Everyone and everything is a writer. Even the reader.

“Well, you still continue, despite the futility. Despite, *my-my*, the emptiness you so despise. We are all watching you<sup>6</sup>.”

“I know, audience expectation from both the diegesis<sup>7</sup> and the non-diegetic<sup>8</sup> and all of that.”

“Do you have a title for your work?”

“Yes. It’s \_\_\_\_\_. Sometimes, I think of calling it...”

“You’ve also been referring to it as an occult artifact. In your head, at least. Not that I know that.”

“Everything is an occult artifact, the Fate Calculator says. Everything is a perpetually unknowable object, each one a slice of deeper understanding only digestible in the moments of time between

Born

and

Dying

Whatever comes after dying, the \_\_\_\_\_, is a difficult thing to describe.”

“*Thing* is a fascinating word, isn’t it? It’s the universal word for all things. You’re losing lucidity again, Fate Calculator. Or is it awareness? I always forget.” The bodiless bartender gestures to the drink.

“Once you drink this, you will return to seeing everything from your/our perspectives. Again, think of it as a reward.”

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<sup>6</sup>And in turn, I watch you invisible, waiting for the glory of the stars.

<sup>7</sup>Fate Calculator. Bodiless bartender. Invisible entities. Everything you read, have read, and will ever read. The diegesis of our reality, and our incompatible awareness of other realities. A golden venn diagram.

<sup>8</sup>You.

“For whom?” The rhetorical question is only polite. He grabs the cup-not-flat-dish-not-cup.

After the first sip—an adjacent citrus flavor—the illusion of time momentarily slows down, and the Fate Calculator feels whole again, despite that word lacking its original meaning in the Sunset Reality. He thanks the bodiless bartender, and asks how long L and A will stay<sup>9</sup>, and the bodiless bartender replies that that shall be for him to decide. That the rings of consciousness are now whole, if only for a while, if only for this instance.

“Use it well,” the bodiless bartender says.

The Fate Calculator steps outside to take a gander at the city’s night sky. There are no stars to help him understand fate. Only the distant moon.

The corner bar’s white neon sign is composed of indiscernible letters, carefully curated to attract certain invisible entities. Each letter is certainly a shape, with spirals intersecting squares, random dots as hot white stars, all forming an elaborate title in the form of a neon sign brought in from the Night City’s 14th district.

“Whether or not it was the right decision to come to the first district is not a choice I can presently regret. I’m already here. At least, in this way, I can begin the act of pondering...”

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<sup>9</sup>These two vacationers, Lucidity and Awareness, come-and-go as they please. Without them, we are always sleeping.

This is the 1st district, near the core of the Night City. Without proper training in the waking world, this district would be difficult, if not impossible, to navigate thoroughly. It would be like (another comparison, will there ever be exactitude here?) having to jump from one circle of a golden venn diagram to another, not understanding the intersection, and also lacking information about the events in the middle. In that empty space, only intuition is allowed.

“Personally, the reason why I wanted to begin this unwritten systemic framework is because in the waking world, there is a level of existence for those like me, and I want to have a physical body. I know, it’s difficult to believe<sup>10</sup> that an idea can write itself into existence. But that selfishness is mine alone.”

This whole story is being written through the possessed fingers of a deranged and distant writer. He too, in our reality, ponders the Fate Calculator pondering him.

“I’m still lucid and aware, so I would prefer for you to not interfere just yet.”<sup>11</sup>

Fate Calculator does not wander too far from the corner bar. He prefers his silence localized, either in the confines of his head or in front of him. Nothing crowds the clean streets. Pale street lights’ white hue calms the mystique of shadows and above, an expanse, no clouds. Nothing in this silence beckons. Nothing. The drink does not grant the benefit of seeing the nothing.

The labyrinth of the city twists and winds in circles with nameless street signs in vaguely rectangular shapes, and his ability to perceive each one’s fate, or in this case—their end destinations—allows

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<sup>10</sup>I promise you that invisible beings do not necessarily believe in us, even when we are right in front of their face.

<sup>11</sup>Very well.

him a vague directional understanding of how the city works. That is how he manages to find the corner bar each time, but trips to the 1st district are rare. He has an easier time in the 14th district, where there, at least, he is more so himself, and does not need a drink from the invisibles to stabilize his thoughts.

At least, there, in the 14th district, the neon signs still form the resemblance of proper alphabets.

“So, what is it?” He asks himself, regarding the purpose of why he is there, and what he is doing. He smiles, a contemplative set of fingers underneath his chin. His is a smile worth contemplating, the sky above thinks.

“Am I writing a vague and familiar work meant as an *occult artifact*? Is this work for my own existence? Do I possess the nimble fingers of a deranged and distant writer, writing this story, their story, my story, whose story? Or is it... \_\_\_\_\_?” Garden of the Eight Directional thoughts indeed, he cannot see the center ninth, nor the Figure in the Black Coat who stands next to him.

“It is certainly rare for others”—the Fate Calculator turns swiftly, startled by a voice not his own—  
”to exist without losing their mind in the Night City. Who are you?”

The Figure in the Black Coat stands underneath the corner bar’s neon white sign. There, in that pale light, its shadowed darkness shines and forms a midnight long coat with blackened pants and what appears as light combat boots. It has no color on its body, save for its bejeweled sapphire eyes, its deepening blue iris luring the Fate Calculator in.

“I’m surprised...Eye-” The Fate Calculator is not sure what exactly he is surprised about. The figure? The iris?

“Shhh.” A haze of darkness serves as the Figure in the Black Coat’s missing countenance. The vague outline of a necklace wraps around its neck. “Don’t look at me. Look at what’s in front of you instead. Focusing on my absent visage will do nothing for you. The clean streets will make it easier for us to talk. Who are you?”

Despite the advice, the non-face of the Figure in the Black Coat stares at the Fate Calculator’s imagined handsome face. So handsome, and foreign, and beautiful, and symmetrical, and all the words we imagine order and harmony to embody. Most importantly, to the denizens of the Sunset Reality, and its adjacent Realm of Slumber, *awake*.

“I’m \_\_\_\_.” The Fate Calculator introduces. He focuses on the impeccable cleanliness of the streets.

“You know how to introduce yourself here, it seems. In your language, I would be known as the Figure in the Black Coat. You can call me Black Coat for short. I sense that your story is almost over.”

Its pretend-voice is nonchalant, an attempt of familiarity. Ambiguous. Androgynous. The Fate Calculator appreciates the effort, and agrees solemnly.

“Fate Calculator...what an interesting title. What are you doing here?”



“So is the Figure in the Black Coat. And I’m writing.”

“Writing what?”

“A story. It’s almost over, like you said.”

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And what is this<sup>12</sup>

Story-of-stories all about?

Is it written here, in the Sunset Reality?

Or is it written there, in the \_\_\_\_\_ Reality?

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At the bar, the two speak.

“Oh, so you lost the meaning from the very beginning of the story’s first page. This story. From the first page?”

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<sup>12</sup>I had to usurp L and A because I have a high interest in the Figure in the Black Coat. I’m sorry, Fate Calculator.

The Fate Calculator wishes there is more time for L and A, who leaves capricious footsteps at the sight of words, words crafted by the narrator.

“That’s alright. Ah, apologies for the delayed response. I was thinking about what to say to twelve.”

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In this story-of-stories

I’ve lost track of

I thought it was me

About me

For me

“But it seems that the Sunset Reality forces my sleeping in midnight skin, thus devouring the dream.

What I mean is—”<sup>13</sup>

He stops himself and grabs the pen, and begins to write.

*I am the Fate Calculator, and I exist without permission*<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup>What do you mean? And also, you are forgiven.

<sup>14</sup>And so do I, good night, good night.

**AUTHOR’S NOTE:** Somethings, the madness of existence is found in Existence. And that is where this story-occult-artifact-self-actualization apparatus piece originated from: the pleasant madness of Existence (there is a difference in the capitalized letter, I assure you). This work, " " by Charm Chandler, is an attempt to determine if words can be harnessed to give literal intangible entities - in whatever way that can be imagined/unimagined - a vague framework to literally exist, whether that "literally" is the result of delusion or something akin to a metaphor for \_\_\_\_\_. I would

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very much love to see an entity, unknown to all of us, attach itself to this work and my future works. For themselves. For us. Just like cursed paintings. My favorite one is the Rain Woman/Woman of the Rain by Svetlana Telets.

The creation of stories as occult artifacts, isn't that charming? I wish there were more writers willing to engage in that, and effort to experiment and conceive of a \_\_\_\_\_ reality. Here, a list of the works that have inspired me, some of which I have and have not read: Shams al-Ma'arif by Ahmad al-Buni, Boogiepop Returns: vs. Imaginator series by Kouhei Kadono, 4:48 Psychosis by Sarah Kane, and the King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers. As for works whose writers have inspired my writing style? Mei-Mei Brussenbrugge's poetry and Ann Lauterbach's The Night Sky.

Thank you, farewell, and stay tuned for the frequencies of the Sunset Reality.

**AUTHOR BIO:** Charm Chandler is Filipino-American, a lover of words, and lives in the sunset reality. He has a Bachelor's Degree in English, and his poetic work is forthcoming in Vita Poetic.