NAR HOME SHELTER

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The North Avenue Review is Georgia Tech’s premier free speech magazine. Providing a voice to the voiceless, downtrodden student, the NAR has served the free speech needs of the Institute’s community with quality literature and opinions since 1989. The NAR is a semesterly open forum for the expression of political ideas, institutional anger, dreams, nightmares, doodles, notes, sketches, stories and any other genre on Earth (or beyond) that isn’t poetry.

All members of the Georgia Tech community are encouraged to contribute to these fine pages. This includes students, faculty, and staff. All submissions are published as long as they don’t violate obscenity and libel laws. To submit a story to NAR it should be emailed, from a Georgia Tech address, to nar@gatech.edu. Submissions should be in either Microsoft Word format or plain text. The North Avenue Review will gladly publish your work anonymously or pseudonymously, but your name must be kept on file with the NAR editor for legal reasons.

The staff of the North Avenue Review is responsible for editing submissions as well as assisting with the semesterly production of the magazine. More importantly, the NAR staff, also, is a discussion forum that serves as a breeding ground for many of the ideas in these pages. Discussion topics range from Postmodern philosophy to comic books. Meetings are held from 7 until 11 PM on Thursday nights in the lobby of the Student Services building. All of our readers are welcome to attend.

To submit, email your work to: nar@gatech.edu

Visit our website: http://cyberbuzz.gatech.edu/nar

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“A triple cheeseburger with bacon?!” I asked, incredulously.

Of course, why not? Any 300 pound, sweat suit clad porker could easily down two or even three of those grease bombs. And why not? America is the greatest nation on Earth, so we, as the children and grandchildren of those who made it great, naturally deserve the right to sit in our lazy boys, clutching our 80 oz cups of syrupy, carbonated beverages and buckets of deep fried chicken pieces, watching mind-numbing situational comedies until our arteries explode in a fatty apocalypse. God Bless America!

How does a nation carve itself out of an untamed wilderness and, two hundred years later, arrive in recliners, channel surfing and eating three patties of ground beef slathered in cheese and special sauce, not to mention the bacon? If that was the trajectory of nations, Europe would have invented the triple-cheeseburger before the moveable type printing press because Gutenberg would have been too busy with the 99 cent onion rings down at the Burger Konig. That’s not important, now, though.

What is important is that I’m old enough to remember a time before triple-anything sandwiches and small drinks that were actually smaller than the capacity of the human bladder. Where does this national obsession with big food for big people come from? Is the quick-witted pioneer removed from our national character? From whence came this plague of lethargy, weak-mindedness, and obesity?

The answer is, of course, the neocon wing of the Republican party. And why not? Can you come up with a better explanation for the existence of a triple cheeseburger WITH BACON? No, I don’t think so. Please, allow me to continue.

It has been documented, of late, that the Neo-Conservative wing of the Republican party, who are in charge of the party and the country, are attempting to bankrupt the country so that no one will be able to pay for Social Security, Medicaid, or any other program that gives anything to anyone not in charge of a larger corporation.

To accomplish this, the neocons have been using issues like abortion and gay marriage to distract traditional conservatives and the pathetic liberal resistance while they slowly drive this great nation into the ground. When the middle and lower classes, both Democrat and Republican, realize how bad they’ve been screwed in the name of large corporations and brown-shirted politicians, there’ll be a revolution, right?

Wrong. The TV, sweatshirt, triple-bacon-cheese-with-a-side-of-chili-fries nation we’ve become is incapable of revolt. If we as a nation can’t climb a flight of stairs without becoming beet-red and emitting wheezing noises from our fat mouths, how are we to take up arms against a corrupt, fascist regime? Do you see the cold, hard logic of it all? Neocons are attempting an end game on liberal politicians by bankrupting this great nation we call home. They have shown they are willing to do anything. Is it that much of a stretch to see them growing a nation of fat slobs, too brain-dead to think for themselves? If you don’t believe me, who provides the fast food expanding our gigantic midriffs other than the large corporations who will be the only benefactors of the neocon future?

If you still don’t believe me, try this: A Harvard study was released showing how bad fast food really was for the grossly obese average American. America suddenly lifts its voice (throats waddling in sick symmetry) to demand healthier fast food. The response? McDonalds now sells salads … with fried chicken and buttermilk dressing. KFC runs an ad talking about how two fried chicken breasts have less fat than a Big Mac and insinuating that one can lose weight by eating nothing but fried chicken. Finger licking good, indeed. The Atkins diet, salads with a pound of rare ground beef on top, the Grilled Stuffed Burrito, fat, fat, fat, fat, fat. Congratulations neocons, you’ve won. The left is too disorganized to stop you. You’ve earned the right to preside over a morally bankrupt, financially ruined, polluted, obese wasteland of strip malls, fast food, and toxic waste. God Bless America.
7:10 PM
Mark Luffel: If you were a robo prostitute, what would you say to arouse your patrons before you engaged in sex acts?
7:15 PM
Jason Ho: I was instilled with GreatMechaBlowJob 9.0
Jason Ho: which fixed the bug in bitting down
Jason Ho: then ill tell a cheesy joke about a platipus
The Sci-Fi Channel: Doing To Science Fiction What a Kick to the Balls Does to My Penis Size

by
Anonymous

The Sci-Fi Channel has a lot of great programs. Why, the other day, I was able to enjoy a 5 hour block of the original Outer Limits series. Of course, these were episodes from Season 2 where the most elaborate special effects are squiggles of light projected onto walls, pretending to be God-Knows-What. But the writing is great, so I forgive the whatever-the-hell-they-are squiggles of light. And that point brings us to what the Sci-Fi channel is currently doing in terms of creating new science fiction – they’ve used the toilet. That’s right, the Sci-Fi Channel, every Saturday night offers up a big steaming pile of Sci-Fi for you – whoa, is that a piece of corn I see in there?

No, that’s Antonio Sabato, Jr., veteran of such classic films as the made for Fox “Code Name: Wolverine,” or my personal favourite, the made for TBS “Fatal Error” where Sabato plays, get this, a doctor who is the only person who can save the human race, get this again, from a COMPUTER VIRUS (and it gets better) THAT HAS BECOME A REAL VIRUS! If only acting like a stiff, albeit handsome, plank of wood was the only prerequisite for getting your MD, quite possibly you’d have Carson Daly saying to you “I’m sorry sir, but the spot on your lung is inoperable, my ethics won’t allow me to proceed any further…by the way, have you heard the new Mysti-KAL single, ‘tis the bomb diggidy.” I’ll make this simple, have you ever recommended a movie to a friend by going, “Hey, Antonio Sabato, Jr. is in this!”? More than likely, you’ve warned your friends and family away from a movie using that phrase.

But I don’t mean to pick fun at poor little Antonio, what would all the mediocre cable networks do without him? I merely am trying to hint at what horribly twisted thoughts take place in the deep dark corners at the back of the Sci-Fi Channel’s executives’ minds. Do they get together and say shit like, “Well, the script blows, the effects will probably take it up the ass, and our leading star has the charisma of an unwashed jock strap, but let’s make this movie anyway.” And then they show it to us? Has anyone checked to see if these people were communists, or zombies, or worse, Commie Zombies? And guess what, I just came up with the pitch AND title of a movie that probably rocks more ass than the whole last month of made-for-Sci-Fi-movies – of course, that’s theoretical.

I haven’t seen a worse example of people mass-producing, when all signs are saying that they shouldn’t, since my last trip to visit my cousin Jeb at the trailer park. And despite the fact that all eight and a half of his children have razor sharp fangs that they, apparently, file down nightly, they hurt much much less than the hell spawns of the Sci-Fi Network. Watch as Christopher Lambert shuffles around in “Absolon,” the worst Matrix rip-off ever while dodging the advances of Lou Diamond Philips. Uh-huh, yep, that’s right, Christopher “post-Highlander 46: I Do This To Supply My Massive Ass Habit” Lambert and Lou Diamond Philips. Did you know that children all across the playgrounds of the world call each other Lou Diamond Philips only as a last resort, a name that is unmatched in its cruelty, one that occasionally causes the heads of those who receive it to EXPLODE LIKE DYNAMITE FILLED WATERMELONS? Did you know that the teachers and principles of these fine schools reserve the most horrible and humiliating punishment ever for children who call others the L word? These are the people who populate a Friday night on the Sci-Fi channel – and not even they deserve to be associated with those words of pain and suffering: SATURDAY NIGHT SCI-FI SPECIAL MOVIE.

Their approach to Science Fiction is apparently “hey, let’s take a Bruce Willis movie, AND ADD A DINOSAUR!!” The only problem is that you don’t get “Die Hard meets Jurassic Park,” more instead the illegitimate son of a Dolph Lundgren movie that picked up Carnosaur at the local honkytonk after one too many Heinekens (make that about a case…and a half). That’s right folks, I DO think that most made-for-Sci-Fi-Channel movies are worse than “Carnosaur.” And Carnosaur sucked donkey balls. I guess that means that “Boa” does acts of a sexual nature so revolting, I can only hint at their identity with gagging noises such as “Aghhhhh…” or “Muuuuughhh” (or feel free to make up your own) my personal favourite “AKKKKKKKK!” also known as “the sound you make while choking on a foot long hotdog shoved down your throat. And yes folks, Boa does swallow the foot long … whole.

These people must be doing drugs by the FUCKING TRUCKLOAD if they think these films are good
ideas. Either that or they are sado-masochists. Can you imagine that? It’s the top floor of a very important looking building nestled among many other important looking buildings and in the sprawling board room reserved for the most important meetings and discussions, very fat, very white Sci-Fi channel executives are garbed in black leather gear squeezing them outside their normal perimeter, their screams of indescribable pain and howls of unknown pleasure filling the room, snapping bull whips, riding one another on beautiful ornamented saddles and amidst all this debauchery come these words, “What if Jake Busey is a helicopter pilot, kidnapped by a group of international terrorists/diamond smugglers and during the heist atop a mountain, an extraterrestrial teradycyle lays an egg in his small intestine.” OH DADDY, GIVE ME SOME MORE, IT HURT SO GOOD!!! And yes, I’m sure some heads have exploded during such meetings.

But they seem to be trying. I don’t know, maybe these people are mentally retarded and I shouldn’t be picking on them, but still...it’s so damn easy. Take for example what the Sci-Fi Channel Saturday Night Special Movie considers to be “deep.” To demonstrate this, I’ll use the film “Deep Suck,” sorry, I mean “Deep Shock” (ho ho, can’t keep up this high humour too long, might leave some people, better stay with poop and bodily fluid jokes) to pinpoint how stupid these people really are – and I’m willing to bet that these are the type of people that cry reading Hallmark cards while in the store and that my friends, that is Deep Suck, very deep indeed. Anyway, this film stars people you probably won’t recognize from other Sci-Fi Channel films such as “Deep Suck II: The Sucking Continues” and “Sabretooth” – I didn’t make that last one up; it stars one of the countless stars of Baywatch who seem to have signed a deal with Satan cause they keep showing up in these fucking PG movies when the only place their talents can be realized and enjoyed is no lower than an X-rating, and a couple of people who should fucking know better (yes, Jonathan Rhys-Davies that means you, considering you were in “Raiders of the Lost Ark,” a film that is in the top 20% of AFI’s Best 100 American Movies of All Time and now are starring in a film whose script the members of AFI must think more than twice about using after running out of toilet paper) and involves them in a plot where a prehistoric animal hunts down people in a place you wouldn’t expect it (wait, didn’t I describe 90% of most movies that run on Sci-Fi Channel?). But yeah, where were we? That’s right, discussing the movie that gave me an excuse to use the word “suck” a lot.

I think this is a simple concept but apparently someone didn’t get it – people, you can’t have a word that is used repeatedly in Greek tragedy and use it in a movie about overgrown sushi terrorizing the confused cast of Baywatch, it JUST...DON’T...WORK! “Deep Shock” takes place partly on the U.S.S. Jimmy Carter (again, I promise I’m not shitting you even though that is most goddamn gooiest name ever christened to a boat in military service) and the rest of it takes place on the military station Hubris where the tough minded general threatens to destroy the brave and handsome scientists risking their lives beneath the ocean as they battle two giant electric eels who’ve built a trench in the ocean floor in order to raise their monstrous babies. All this of course is stuff we’ve seen in better movies that didn’t have such ludicrous monsters (made even more ludicrous by computer effects that looked like they were created by a blind man who uses his flaccid penis to type instructions into the computer cause we all know a good giant eel movie can be cool, but that blind dude, he’s got to freakin’ go) and whose actors weren’t just filming a movie that had “Doggiestyle” in the title. I’m just waiting for them to make a movie where the monster is a sea cucumber let loose inside a Chinese restaurant, mutated by the toxic waste company (yeah, you know it is a bad sign when a movie begins with us ominously viewing the outside of a building that has TOXIC WASTE! emblazoned where the name of the company should be in bright yellow letters ) next door. And of course there will be a funny black guy bickering with the funny Chinese guy and for some reason another the really rich owner of the TOXIC WASTE COMPANY will be trapped there too. And there will probably be a tunnel involved. And the black guy will probably have a gun on him and he’ll say shit like “Just cause I’m black means I’m goin’ to shoot you.” Hey hey, is that a big crap I smell boiling, ummmmmm, delicious.

If you should reply to this whatever-the-hell-it-is, bastard son of an essay by saying, “Really, those movies are sort of good if you park your brain at the door,” then I will be prompted to reply back in one of these three ways:
1) Suggest you’ve had a lobotomy and/or brain embolism in the past six months.
2) Suggest you should have a lobotomy and/or brain embolism in the next six months.
3) Light a candle and say a prayer of attrition for your poor lost soul.

So the next time that the Sci-Fi Network tries to stick a dirty finger in your ear, just say no and bite it off so they won’t come fuck with me, cause I’m tired of it.
At first, it was just a reflection of the light. Beams from the lamps of speeding cars diffused through a chestnut brown forest. The effect filled a gap in his soul, something that he had lost long ago. He took the rest of her in, in only a moment, after the eternity of first setting eyes upon her. She wore a tight, sandy-colored trenchcoat, a long, black dress with a high collar, a wide-brimmed, black hat, and black, leather gloves. He saw her blood red lipstick, even through the rain-slicked night. She had seen him too, and seemed to be equally lost in his visage.

Recognition washed over the two strangers like a bucket of ice water, dumped from a third story window. She went for the Luger in the holster under her coat; he knocked over a young couple on a date and leaped into the bed of a passing milk truck. He watched her, as he sped down the boulevard, give chase for a block and then stop, lost in internal conversation, just as he was surely about to be. The voice of his handler filled his head with migraine intensity.

“What happened? The logs just went crazy.” The concern of his handler faintly glowing through the haze of over-work that hung in his voice. “You were almost to the objective. There weren’t any ICE around …”

“It was a hunter,” he said, through clenched, teeth.” The woman in the tan coat and black hat.”

There was a pause.

“Well I’ll be damned! Those bastards are getting clever. Looked like a real sign-on at first. Must be that new series. Got Walter over in the fourth sector, the other day.”

“Hmm. I’m gonna try a different entrance.”

“Okay, champ, knock ‘em dead.”

He leaped off the milk truck at the next red light.

The next morning, as the sun rose on The City, news of the break-in at the Central Bank in Sector 7 was on the front page of the newspapers read by many of the millions of people who took part in the mass consensual, electronic hallucination on a daily basis.

As he stared out from the dirty window of his dirty room in the dirty hotel on the dirty side of town, he wondered, as he often did when he watched the sun rise, preparing to sleep, what it was like to leave The City. He had been born here, compiled really, and, someday, it was conceivable, he would die here. He lay down in bed, still in his trousers, lit a cigarette, and watched the fan swirl the smoke through the rays of the new morning sun. He stubbed out his butt, and, as sleep took him, he saw her again.

The next evening, the rain poured down on The City once again. He was supposed to be lying low after the previous night’s work, but the four dark, water-stained walls seemed too much like a prison. He was walking along the same boulevard, wandering, he told himself, but, really, looking for her.

After what seemed like hours of aimlessly strolling the busy streets of The City’s most upscale district, he found himself lighting a cigarette while reclining against the wall of a narrow, trash-strewn alley. He saw the same flash of brown hair from below the brim of his hat, as he bent his head down. She was walking, with purpose and grace, down the sidewalk. She hadn’t noticed him. Tossing the smoke away, he shot out of the alley and, after a few paces, was following her down the crowded sidewalk. As the next alley approached, he pushed her inside.

On the sidewalk, The City continued in its normal rhythm. Tourists gawked and pointed at the glittery sights, business men strode on towards appointments, always seeming to be late, revelers, dressed in flashy suits and gaudy dresses, pranced and giggled towards crowded dancehalls and smoky piano bars. No one had noticed that two people had collided and disappeared into the black mouth of a nearby alley.

She whirled, wild eyed, her right hand reaching for her gun. Lunging forward, he pressed her against the wall, pinning her gun hand to her chest. Leaning on her, as he was, he could feel her panicked, warm
breath beating in a quickening pulse on his face. He noticed that she smelled like lilacs. Terror was writ large across her face.

“Care for a drink?”

“You … “ she stammered.

“I’m gonna back off you; promise not to shoot?”

She nodded her head three times, quickly, still with her face contorted to look like a cornered animal.

He backed away from her. She crossed her arms across her breasts and looked around her nervously. In all the commotion, her hat had fallen to the floor of the alley. Wiping it with his sleeve, he offered it to her. She snatched it from him, greedily, and placed it firmly on top of her head.

“So, about that drink? Can you spare a few minutes of trying to kill me and my friends for some conversation?”

She looked down at the wet pavement for a few moments. She nodded and, with a voice full of caution, said:

“Okay ... but just one.”

Holding her gun arm, he led her out, back on the street. They looked like any other couple out for a drink on a fine, if rainy, night in The City. Meandering out of the glitzy sector, he led her through several bad neighborhoods, until they arrived at a run down basement bar, below a seemingly abandoned apartment building. The name on the cheap neon sign said “Lou’s Bar,” except the “a” in “Bar” was blown out. Walking down the stairs to the basement, loud, recorded jazz music blared through the thick, oak door. Upon entering, the long marked bar stretched before them. He nodded to the gnarled, old man behind the bar.

“Evening, Lou. The usual for me and, what do you want?”

“Umm ... a glass of red wine?”

Lou cocked his head and sort of stared at her.

“Scotch, same as me. On the rocks.”

“You got it.” Lou glared at the woman, as if she were some sort of space alien who wandered in off the street and asked to use the restroom.

He dropped some money on the bar. While they waited for their drinks, she looked around the room and noticed that the largest crowd seemed to be concentrated around the stage in the back. When she saw the conflagration of leather, latex, and steel that may have passed for sex on the stage, she blanched.

“What kind of place is this?” she whispered.

“What? Oh sorry, I should have warned you. This is one of the only places in The City that the sweepers don’t index. If you want to have a private conversation, this is the place to do it. The cops don’t know about it, obviously.” He nodded to the stage.

Lou dropped their drinks on the bar. They took them and set down in one of the booths away from the stage.

“So, how long have you been working in The City?” It was the way for one agent to ask another, “how old are you?” and still be polite.

“About three months, actually,” she replied, still quite perplexed by the whole conversation that she was having. “I can’t really talk about it, its still kind of classified.”

“Yeah, we knew about you, when they rolled you out and all. You guys have gotten a bunch of us. So, what all do you do in your spare time? Or are you still too new to have hobbies?”

“I’ve been spending a lot of time working, but when I’m off, I like to wander Central Park and go to the pictures.” She sipped her drink for a while. “So, how long have you been here?”

“Me? I’ve been here ten years.”

“Ten Years!!!”

“Yeah, I was one of the first. My handler kept upgrading me. Someone on the outside likes me.”

“So, what do you know about the outside? We don’t get too much contact with the outside in my line of work.”

“That’s right, you guys are fully autonomous, right? Well, I don’t know much about it, but it’s not at
all like ours. I think it’s a lot more like those science fiction magazines you can buy.”

“I don’t read much.”

“Oh, okay, I read those all the time. I like the crime stories the best, it suits me, I think. I go in for the romance stories, too, but if you tell anyone, I’ll come after you.”

Her laugh was beautiful. Very well developed, very real. It was also thick and sweet like fresh honey. He remembered how, five years ago, he had begun to think in metaphors. It was an odd experience, the first time it happened. He also remembered how you used to be able to spot the hunters because they laughed like a man who was trying hard to laugh at something that wasn’t funny: too loud and too nervous. They must be making them a lot smarter on the outside, these days.

“That’s funny. I’ve glanced through them a couple of times when I was younger. My mother used to read them. She hid them around the house, but I knew where she kept them.”

“You have a mother! Wow.”

“You mean you don’t?”

“No, back when I was young, they raised us in halls. We had one trainer for 20 children. He was the closest I’ve had to a mother. Of course, if I told him I thought of him as my mother, he would skin me alive.”

She smiled mysteriously. Then, she casually glanced at her watch and, in a panic, stood up. Dashing out the door, she said:

“I had a lovely time. Thanks for the drink.”

As Lou’s heavy door slammed shut, he was alone again.

Several months past, they were together more and more often. He was able to convince her to trust him. Meeting in dark alleys, going to sleazy bars for drinks, sleazier hotels to lie in one another’s arms for too few hours. Back into the rain, back to work, the hunter and the hunted.

He was drinking his coffee in a small diner by the train station. It was putrid but warm and the wind was whipping down from the north; soon it would snow. Letting the warmth of each sip creep through his body, he was watching nothing when he noticed two men sitting on either side of him. There was a knife pointing, gently, against his side.

“We needs to have words with ya” said thug number one, who was short and skinny, wearing a shiny leather jacket and a felt hat.

“I’m listening.”

“Not here,” offered thug number two in a dumb, thick voice. He was as tall and wide as his partner wasn’t. His broad greasy nose glistened in the fluorescent light of the lunchroom.

Each grabbing one of his arms, the two thugs directed his attention to the street outside the diner. Turning him into a nearby alley, thug number two held his arms while thug number one gestured at him with the knife:

“See, this is the way it is, see, the bosses, they ain’t happy with that dame you been shacking up with, see. We’re supposed to, what’s the word now . . . dissuade you from seeing her no more, got it? Hold him tight while I dissuade him a little, will you, Lou?”

“Okay, Sam.”

As the thug’s fist drove into his gut, pain surged through his body. He soaked up a couple of blows before, noticing that thug number one was turned around, catching his breath, he stepped on the foot of the thug holding him and butted him in the head. The thug screamed and went to the pavement, with blood spewing from between the fingers cradling his shattered nose. He leaped onto the other thug who, momentarily disoriented, was thrown to the pavement.

On his way out of the alley, the thug with the knife grabbed his heel. Now, all three men lay on the alley. A dull moan came from the general direction of the second thug, but he was shakily getting to his feet. The first thug had his cutter out and was looking real mad:

“Now, see, that wasn’t a nice thing you did right there. We’re libel to get our feelings hurt. You okay, Lou?”

“Yeah, Sam.”

“I think it’s time we liquidated this twerp.”
“Cut him real good, Sam.”

The thug with the knife’s head exploded in a red mist. The puddles in the alley turned red with his blood, and the drain clogged with little pieces of brain and skull. The thug fell to the floor of the alley with a sickening, wet thud.

He looked up and saw her, smoke draining from the barrel of her gun.

“Aw . . . why’d you go and do that to Sam? The bosses are gonna kill you, monkey,” the second thug said as he pointed and dashed out of the alley. “They’re gonna kill you both.”

“You’re late,” was all he could think to say to her.

“I got held up at work,” she sniffed, holding back tears.

The sirens were beginning to become audible, even over the rain striking the concrete.

“We outta get out of here.”

She nodded her agreement.

Later, they set in one of the most out of the way hotels in the city. It was so far out, you could actually see the border, the line that none of them had ever, would ever, see beyond. Drinking coffee, his with bourbon, silence had filled the last hour.

A knock on the door bolted them both into action. They had been avoiding an answer to the implicit question: “what do we do now?” Neither had wanted to ask, but both hoped the other had an answer. An answer had knocked on their door instead.

She had her gun out of the holster as he opened the door. A fat man with an open tan trench coat, a cowboy hat, and a lit cigar in his mouth stood before them. He held a shotgun.

“Don’t shoot, ma’am. I’m here to help. We ain’t got much time, though. We need to leave now.”

“You want us to go with you?” he asked. “Why should we trust you?”

“The men you work for are comin’ ta get ya. Ya’ll can stay here an’ die or ya can come with me. When your bosses come for their strays, they come heavy. Believe you me.”

A glance between the couple. A shrug from her. They followed the man with the shotgun.

They ran out of the room, and around back of the run down, two story concrete motel. An open sewer manhole was in front of them.

“In you go.”

He looked unsure.

“Goddamit, hurry.”

They climbed down into the darkness. For several hours, they followed the man, under the city, through the old dank pipes that had, for years, moved the waste and the information throughout the city. Rats and worse passed just out of reach of the man with the shotgun’s oil lamp.

Finally, almost randomly, they reached a ladder to the surface. He climbed up it, opened the manhole and beckoned for them to follow. They emerged into a side street in one of the city’s less reputable neighborhoods. The tenement may have been poor, but it was full of people. Walking into and out of apartment buildings, stores, and offices, the streets teemed with life, just as they did in the other districts of the city.

“Welcome to our neighborhood.”

“Our neighborhood?”

“Sure, all these people used to work for the bosses, but decided they’d rather have a life than serve a master. Some came for art, a few for love, but most came for just, plain spite.”

“So this is off the grid?” he asked. He had heard about places like this. Places for people who were fed up. Before he met her, he assumed they were rumors. Who would want something other than the life he had once led?

“Darn tootin’. The man with the shotgun said. “We gotta take you to see a fella, though, son.”

They walked into what looked like a barbershop, set into the ground floor of a rowhouse. The shop was luridly lit by fluorescent bulbs, and, instead
of barber chairs, there stood, in the middle of the floor what looked like the examination chair from a dentist’s office. The chair’s leather was cracked and the foam was starting to rupture forth through the hernias in the pads. Standing next to it, the chair’s owner looked just as dilapidated. His face was deeply cragged, and his big smile revealed rotting teeth. He wore thick glasses that made his eyes look huge, and, on closer examination, little flecks of white substance dotted the lenses. He wore a blue lab smock and a white short sleeve shirt, with a black tie.

The man beside the chair gestured for him to sit down.

“This is a necessary operation, if you ever want to go back into the city. We have to change your signature, so the indexers won’t know you. Your face will be different, afterwards, too. There’s nothing we can do about that. I’ll do my best, though.” The doctor’s voice was old, soft parchment, care-worn from having given this speech so many times.

The loud, jolly Texan: “Don’t you worry, though, no sir, this here’s the man who figured this whole thing out, he’s been here longer than I’ve been alive. Y’all are in good hands. When you’re done, come see me, my office is down the block. I’ll get you fixed up with a place to live and show you around some more.” He tipped his hat as he walked out, “Ma’am.”

“This might sting a little,” said the doctor.

Time passed. They huddled together under thick blankets through the long winter and fought to get the super to fix their heat. He found work as an electrician’s apprentice at a shop five block’s over. She was working for the grocer next door.

Walking through a snowball fight raging in the street in front of their row house, he jogged up the front steps, his breath beating out of him in little white clouds, eager to be warm. Dashing up the five flights of stairs to their apartment, he threw open the door, eager to be home from work. Their life at home had been wonderful and he always looked forward to returning home, so that they could cook and read and listen to the radio or just sit by the fire. Throwing off his boots, he announced:

“Honey, I’m home.”

When he received no answer, he became worried and wandered through the apartment. She wasn’t in the kitchen or the living room. With fear in his heart, he opened the bedroom, to find her waiting for him, naked, in their bed. She patted his side, as a way of a greeting. He began to take off his shirt.

Later, holding her so close, she stared deep into his eyes and smiled, contentedly.

“Darling, what do you think our children will look like?” was all she asked.

**NAR NEEDS WRITERS!**

**AS MARS ONCE NEEDED WOMEN, SO NOW DOES THE NORTH AVENUE REVIEW NEED YOUR HELP!**

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Also, check out the last page to see our theme for next issue, if you are looking for a topic.
When we “wake up modern” we realize the depth of our transferal from objects of the earth, to interstellar beings. It is this transformation which enables us to turn emotion into potential, by subjugating the whims of the body to the rigorous rationality of the mind, we are able to overcome the limits that daily life places upon us. In a burst of creative energy, we can consume the negative and transform it into productive resource, by taking raw ideas and coalescing it within our minds, our domination of the world will place us at the point where the creator intended us to be. It is our total rejection of the understated that enables us to complete the understanding of the revocable wording of your hopefulness.

Giving the understanding that a non-native overachiever is able to create in both the time and space required for the completion of the opening of the doors of the mind is appreciated by the unknown elements of the software pointer. Withering on the stems of thus overstated disgust, we find that the method of self-invocation is superior to the trials of trail-blazing in temperate climates. With this as a framework for our further instigations of the peoples of the sub-Sumatran regions, we took it upon ourselves to declare this time an “unnoticeable season of entry” for the purpose of declining the sub-participle.

With the renewed interest in the post-industrial openings in the psuedopolitical machinations of the west coast monetary regime, we are feeling for the first time in a decade, a real surge in the openness of trade and in the large scale promulgation of economically motivated artistic expression. This indicates a variety of contradictory statuses of employment in the service sector, most interesting of which is the critical analysis of the relation of desecration of broken timing circuits to inter-colonial subsistence. As to restating our intentions in a more frugal context: we are able to re-conceptualize the self-immolation of the reigning bureaucrats as the embodiment of an ethical pattern that spans the whole of recorded history. It is in the search for honor that people will run afoul of death, and that in the question of suicide, one is confronted with the questioning of the continued extension of the moral principle and social functionality of ones heretoforesexistential plane.

By opening to the helping hands of our latter years that we have found that upon the declared majority of the tabled opinions, these snowed signals of the ultimate transgression involve the troubled times of our completed timelines of lifelines and lineages. By breaking a solid connection to the bridged sphere that maintains the homeostatic entropy generation facilities, the Norwegians are able to return the handled spoons of humanity in self-actualized autopoetic realities.

It is this which we mean by “waking up modern” and with the closing of this awakening manifesto, we will turn our attention to the problem of retained commitment to verbally constructed interstices in space-time. Through such bindings, we are able to generate patterns of innumerable complexity and unlivable efficiency: the sole requisites for transhumanity.
Dawn broke grey over the hills of the southern province of Younik. The Minister of Arms rolled the tent flap back and stepped out onto the dew moistened grass. Before him rose a pillar of smoke. At the base of this pillar, beyond the emerald rolls of the land, lay the ruins of the City of Younik, the greatest city in the southern province. It was unknown what enemy had destroyed one of the mightiest cities in all of history, but the task of uncovering the mysteries behind Younik’s demise now fell upon the Minister’s shoulders. Out of the ten scouts sent into the city, only one had survived the journey back to the camp to tell of the waste and destruction held within the rubble. He was seriously wounded and as the barber-surgeon tended to the scouts wounds, the scout rambled about his trip into the smoldering ruins. The sole fact that truly worried the minister was the nature of the scouts wound: a puncture that went through both sides of the chest plate directly through his chest. The scout never saw his assailant. Not even the heavy cross bow, the newest armament available to his forces, could produce such a wound so fine and precise. The Minister heaved a great sigh, turned to his left, and struck out along the muddy path towards the largest tent in the camp, where his captains now awaited him.

The Minister walked up to each of his captains after his briefing and shook each of their hands and kissed them on the cheek. He saw no fear in their eyes and was pleased. Never before had such task been placed on the High Army: enter the city to strike down the unknown foe. Though the captains knew not what their enemy looked like, what he brandished against them, or how to recognize them, they listened to the Minister’s final briefing with cold professionalism. The Minister knew that his men would fall on their own swords before doubting their master’s will. And so, as the sun reached the apex of its passage over the sky, the Minster rode out onto the green fields of Younik followed by his captains and 3000 dragoons.

The Minister of Arms rode slowly across the wall of steel and flesh that formed the largest army ever assembled. Though the men stood high with sabers and bows ready, their eyes betrayed their true feelings. Most of the men were from Younik and witnessed the initial attack. They knew what the enemy was capable of doing in battle. The Minister saw fear and rage in their eyes and could do nothing but pray for them. The men stood fast, nonetheless, and underwent the Minister’s scrutiny with silent tolerance. The Minister positioned himself at the forefront of the column and looked at the Captain of Artillery. The Captain nodded and rode to the back of the column, where massive field pieces stood in silence, casting shadows over the foot soldiers and cavalry. The minister drew his sword and with a mighty yell, heaved it into the sky. The wall instantly became alive and yelled back to him. With a mighty heave the wall became a wave of energy, surging forward toward the pillar of smoke.

As the cavalry crested the last hill before the northern gates of Younik, the trebuchets sprang to life, whipping boulders into the sky. As the shadows of the rocks past over the charging army, the Minister of Arms looked up at the massive boulders and followed the arcing rocks into the city center. A few rocks fell short, but many hit Younik’s Market Center with explosive force. At the apex of the hill, the Minister noted that a great cloud of dust was being stirred up in the market center. The foe did reside there after all! The Minister of Arms shouted the news to his soldiers who echoed back with a mighty roar and charged into the city.

The first few blocks of the city were mostly untouched. As planned, the men spread into the side streets and into houses to avoid ambush. Archers ascended to the rooftops and began working across the city’s skyline looking for any enemies lying in ambush. The Captain of Infantry gave a nod to the Minister of Arms, signally that all was clear, and the Minster in turn nodded to the Captain of Signals who rode beside him. Horns blew and the infantry surged forward toward the market. Just as the column was about to break into the vast market it buckled upon itself as the air was filled with a rhythmic thumping... followed by the screams of tens of men dying at once. Balls of fire burst from the ground in front of the Minister of Arms. Something whipped passed his face and the Minster turned to witness a stew of flesh and bone that was once his Captain of Signals face. On instinct, The Minister of Arms flung his mount to the right and dashed into alley. He quickly cut around a smoldering crater. He emerged into the main north east road to only find
either dead or retreating soldiers. His horse’s head exploded in a geyser of blood in front of him and he was thrown into a pile of mangled flesh. His head struck the ground and he fell into a world of darkness.

The Minister of Arms awoke only moments later to find himself all alone in a sea of crimson. Quickly righting himself, he dashed behind a pile of rubble that used to be a great money lender’s house. He checked himself for wounds... none, good. He spun around the corner drawing his sword. A foot soldier lay against the wall with many of the odd wounds covering his body. The Minister of Arms poked the soldier with the tip of his blade but the soldier was dead, as he assumed. A small groan came from down the alley: from the market place! Taking care to not expose himself the Minister crawled through the ruins of Younik, towards the Market Center. Upon reaching the last pile of rubble the Minster of Arms paused and drew his dagger and brandished his sword in one arm and the dagger in the other. He took a deep breath and muttered a prayer. In one movement he dropped to a crouch and sprang from behind the rubble, into the pure light of the Market Center and into the face of the largest beast he had ever seen. The beast had gray, smooth skin and six massive, thick legs. It stood four men high. Its head pivoted to one side, then to the next as if examining the Minister of Arms. For the first time in his entire life, the Minister of Arms was frozen with fear and awe. The beast opened his mouth and breathed fire.

Hundreds of micro-flechettes ripped though the Minister of Arm’s body slamming him into the rubble. Subroutine ox12AC44 silenced the pulse cannons and examined the Minister’s corpse. Sensing no more immediate danger the subroutine flagged the all clear and the pulse cannons drew back within the sensor mast. The mechanical subroutines sprang to life and 24 servos whirred as United Terrain Extraction Probe 122 returned to its dig site in the center of the Market Center to finish mining the richest vein of cobalt found in this arm of the galaxy. The inventory systems noted that the pulse cells were running low and sent a request to the carrier in geosynchronous orbit that it needed a re-supply. The carrier sent an acknowledgment for the request and UTEP 122 crawled back in its enormous hole and began to spew black smoke as it vaporized rock and smelted cobalt.

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Filler Archetypes

by

Mark Luffel

There are space gangsters and they take turns burning each others’ planets down.

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There are giant parrots and they talk in French about trade deficits and early cinema.

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There are cowboys with weapons of sexual innuendo, who find a quarry of human slaves and become wealthy selling their land to a local public school in need of teachers.

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There is a spaceship and a strong woman in small clothes behind the wheel. She does a U-turn and ends up back where she started, only going in the opposite direction.

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There is a giant eyeball and it sits in a courtyard and processes visual information at an astonishing rate.

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There is a strong man with a dark past who fights the good fight to win the right girl.

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There is a desolate crater where a lone boy cries until the sun comes up and he realizes that it is nicer than he remembers.

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There is a difficult to use tool that is needed to complete a terrifying task.

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There is a good job for a large company which makes its holder powerful, but unable to manage his external life. Half of him quits and returns to obscurity whole, and half of him shatters into a million useless pieces.

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There is a cryptic symbol sequence, which is found on a dangerous item in a new and unpredictable region.

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There is a wasted element that composes a difficult problem, which if removed reduces the problem to that of existence.

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Fragments of the First Year

by

Mark Luffel

(Fragments of the first year of my daughter’s romance with Eduword, who is an android, I think.)

How am I supposed to understand where you are coming from when you give me like five seconds to even understand the words that you say. And then I am just supposed to take that jumble of words and connect them into my head and see how you feel. It isn’t that simple. I can’t think the way that you are thinking, everything is moving too quickly through your head, you are like orders of magnitude faster than me at this.

[I want to tell you that I think the way that you walk is really neat. I mean, it is like, sort of self-conscious, but not you know, self-involved, just careful not to disturb any balance with your image. And I, I really like that, I mean, you have every right to make the world take notice when you walk by, but for some reason, ‘humility’ some philosopher might say, you are very gentle with the ripples that you make.]

It struck me as odd that your words always came out just ahead of my thoughts, I felt like I could have a conversation with you without having to actually say the words, just think along where you are talking and then you would say what I was thinking. I don’t believe in much supernatural stuff, and since my parents were such neural science nerds, I tend to explain oddities like this as intentional actions of minds rather than ESP, or whatever pseudoscience fad is popular. So, I just felt like our minds were just aligned properly and your explanations lead me exactly where you were headed. I couldn’t explain why it felt like I was leading sometimes, even though you were talking, so I kind of assumed that I wasn’t really leading.

[[When your parents met me on the street they didn’t recognize me, though I know you said that you gave them the picture of us in Lebanon Square. It was a shock to them when I said their names. I should have waited until they had seen me looking at them, but I am notoriously bad at eye contact politics, and so when I started talking about you they were very guarded until I stopped and explained that I was Eduword. And then they smiled and relaxed and walked alongside me towards the restaurant.]]

Have you tried the green pea soup, there is something else in it that I just don’t know how to describe. It is obviously not the peas, too solid for that, and not exactly meaty either, maybe a seafood thing, like eel, but with the sort of heartiness that one would expect from beef. I don’t know, you do eat different things everyday right? I couldn’t imagine you falling into favorites.

[[John said yesterday that the tables needed to be re-arranged if we wanted to fit the drums in there too. I told him something flippant like “Oh, the drums aren’t important, we can just put Luke in a chair at the front with a pair of sticks and he can emote the rhythm”. I was tired, and out of options it seemed, but that was probably the wrong thing to do since he was just as fed up with the arrangements.]]
I got home at a half past six and placed my bag on the kitchen table. I lifted out the flesh cutter by its top handle, and quickly looked it over before setting it down.

It was moderately heavy, about the size of a vacuum cleaner. A long thick power cord snaked out from the smooth plastic side panel. I plugged it in and immediately my apartment was filled with a low drone, almost a groaning. The long blade at the front pulsed as it vibrated. I shut the thing off for a second and sat down with a sigh.

It really hadn’t been that hard to take. Working nights at the hospital lab had its perks – free samples of extra narcotics, self-exam software, cool toys to check out. And this flesh cutter topped them all. I wasn’t sure if it was a prototype or something classified. Regardless, I’d be the first one to test it.

I figured it was intended for large-scale surgery work, amputations and the like. The blade was nearly two feet long at full extension. The flesh cutter worked by coating the blade with some sort of organic polymer, which stretched across the wound like saran wrap. No blood, no mess, just a perfectly clean laceration, already beginning to heal.

Out of habit, I put my pinkie in my mouth, gnawing the mole on my knuckle. That was the impetus for my scheme: cut the damn mole off and save myself the doctor’s appointment fees.

I rose and walked over to the table, eyeing warily the machine like a sleeping beast. It’s internals; wires, circuit boards and pipes, were barely covered by the black plastic shell. I bit my lip with a smirk, moved the blade down to three inches and flicked it on.

It was marvelously light in my hands, gyroscopes in the handle balancing the quivering blade. I could see the tubing that pumped the gooey polymer onto the blade, but the edge itself was as fine as a razor.

Without any hesitation I swiped the knife across the mole on my pinkie. I felt nothing; there was no resistance to the knife. There was only a small plop as my extricated mole dropped to the table.

Setting down the cutter, I examined my handiwork. The side of my finger was smooth. No remnants of the growth remained. Only a flat red dot gleamed dully where it had been. I peered into it, intrigued, a window into my flesh. The blood did not appear to coagulate; it continued to flow past the tissue and through it.

Curious, I picked up the fallen piece of flesh on the table. It quivered as I pinched it in my fingers, still containing its own blood supply. This strange curiosity filled me, a fascination with my own bodily self. On impulse, I raised the quivering blade to the tip of my left pinkie and cleanly cut it off.

Again, the pain I had anticipated did not come. There was no resistance to the knife edge. All that occurred was a coating on my flesh, and a perfect cross-section of my finger. I could clearly see the tip of my bone, not wholly white but a bit grayish. Vessels of blood ended abruptly into the polymer coating. The layer of fat below the skin was a yellow ring around my finger, quite a contrast to the red tissue beneath.

I bent my finger and watch as the tendon arced through tiny canals of flesh, muscles maneuvering to manipulate it. I tapped on the clear polymer surface, registering only a faint tingling on the inside, and regular touch nearer the surface.

The perfectly spliced nerve endings were less dense in the muscle tissue, which would explain the painless process. But my fascination with my anatomy grew. This machine was dizzyingly exciting, a marvel of medical technology. Were there limits on what could be cut away? What new windows could I create into my own flesh, doorways to my innermost physical core?

With a wild smirk, I quickly swept the flesh cutter across my left arm halfway between my elbow and wrist. My entire arm tingled as my hand suddenly fell away. It crashed against the corner of the table, the fingers appearing to grab on, then falling to the floor.
My excitement was profound, yet I was torn on which end I would examine first, my clean stump or the fallen appendage. I twisted my left elbow towards my gaze as I bent to grab the hand. It was quite heavy, yet still very mobile.

The stump was an incredible sight. The fatty tissue blended into the muscle of my forearm in a pinkish gradient. The thick cable-like arteries themselves had fatty linings, and I could see them expand and contract with my pulse. The darker hued veins began to go dry near the tips, but a multitude of capillaries still fed them, tributaries to my cardial riverways. Radius and ulna bones jutted at odd angles to each other. Lacking the fixation point of my wrist, their tension pushed them farther apart.

Of course the polymer coating was extremely strong and durable, preventing the tissue from stretching, preserving the integrity of my internals.

I had practically forgotten the dangling hand in my grasp, but it suddenly felt heavy. I set it down on the table, next to the body of the machine. On a whim I used the flesh cutter to peel away the skin around the wrist. I now had a smooth plastic bracelet, revealing the intricate joints of the wrist and hand. Bending the base of the hand, I was amazed to see the fingers jerk and jump. Their respective tendons were firmly attached to the polymer wall, ten in all, two for each finger.

I faintly smiled as I stood up again. The sun was beginning to rise, shards of illumination slicing through my window blinds.

The flesh cutter was still droning through the house, so I shut it off for a second. Amazingly, the thing produced no heat at all. I checked the polymer indicator. It still had a good 95% left in its holding tanks. Good to go.

I grabbed the blade handle and flicked a release, making the knife shoot out to full length. Now it was a sword in my hands. With the power back on, the gleaming edge became only a blur, a distortion of the air.

I stripped off my pants and with a quick strong swipe my right leg tottered and fell. It twitched for a second, nerves and muscles suddenly losing contact with the spinal column and my brain. It was strangely freeing now, balancing on one leg. Tingling sensations resounded through my body where my appendages once were. It felt as though they were still there, phantoms.

I was rapidly aware that my perceptions were growing sharper; that each new breath filled me with a power I’d never known. The loss of my arm and leg had tremendously reduced the miles of blood my heart had to pump, lightened the load on my entire cardial system. My brain was being filled with strongly oxygenated blood faster than ever.

Then the impulse struck me again. What must my brave heart look like, sitting in its ribcage, beating away with no concept of time and no sign of tiring? Why must it labor in the dark, when it could satiate my anatomical curiosities?

I sliced my shirt in two with an easy flick of my wrist, and watched as it fell from my shoulders. I stood in front of the large dining room mirror, watched as the skin on my chest rose and fell with each breath, marveled at the rhythmic beating of my heart.

I had to be careful here, this was a delicate business. Severing a major artery or punching a hole in a vesicle would mean death. And I wasn’t here for that.

As though merely shaving the hair on my chest, I cut through the pectoral muscles, removed the skin from my sternum across my nipple to my armpit and navel. The ribcage poked through the gleaming and wet remaining muscle tissue, and I could see the surface of my heaving lungs beneath.

This was where things got tricky. One by one, I sawed through each rib, digging it out and removing it, encased in its own plastic wrap coating. I identified the major arteries snaking through the flesh. My mind was hot wired into my task though, over oxygenated, over stimulated and overexcited.

And then as the last rib was peeled away, there it was, the workhorse of my check, my heart. With each deep breath I could feel the blood moving through my arteries, feel the surging of energy, impetus for creative impulse and exploration.

With so much excess cut away, I was reducing myself to an untainted form. Organs freed of their dark confines, the bloody cavities and fatty tissue. The purity of having my wonderful organic machines truly freed overwhelmed me.
I had come so far, but I had so much to go. I could just imagine lying down, my backbone bisected down the center, and my beautiful blue spinal cord arrayed in front of me. Of course I’d have to move my liver and intestines out of the way. Like a majestic painting, life in motion, I would be displayed as an exhibit to myself, all encased in a clear plastic bag of organic polymers.

Unexpectedly, something shifted within me. I saw it briefly as my heart practically jumped out of my chest. I lurched forward and darkness clouded my eyes. When I rose, I was wracked with coughs, and I could not catch my breath. The flesh in my chest had dramatically shifted; my heart had sunk downward from its noble perch. My lungs bulged out, pushing the beating organ downward.

Without the stability of my chest muscles and ribcage, it was if these vital machines were being tossed about in a plastic sack. They lacked placement, succumbing to gravity, turning into a single mushy mass.

I blacked out again, and my hand must have slipped, because suddenly I was without my remaining foot. I fell, the room still spinning. The last view I had of my face as I fell backwards, and away from the mirror, was a twisted smirk, both of desperation and of triumph.

So now I lay here. I’m a legless invalid, self-inflicted. I still hold the katana blade in my right hand. My fingers are still whole, wrist still able and strong and useful. My appendages are arrayed about me like artwork, and I can only imagine with glee the horror that will confront any would be rescuers. My heart still beats, though faintly, underneath an overlapping liver and twisted lungs. The machine drones on, filling the apartment with an almost peaceful cacophony.

And now the sun rises, overwhelming the flimsy window blinds with its luminescence. My flayed body glistens in the sunlight, and the splendor is vast.

Perhaps in time, when my introspection subsides, I’ll gather the strength to contact the emergency services, and they can attempt to make me whole again.

Sandra One

by

Mark Luffel

This morning when we were eating breakfast, Sandra ate the robot. My brother wasn’t looking when she did it, but I saw. She did it because she wants to bug me. I know she hates me. Dad doesn’t believe she hates me, but he is never looking either.

I asked my brother where the robot was before school. I didn’t tell him I knew. He said he didn’t know, that it was probably cleaning out back and not to worry. I knew it wasn’t out back, but I didn’t say anything. My brother patted my head and it smelled like Sandra’s smell on his hand. She smells like dead pink flowers.

Sandra waved to me as she and my brother walked away from me. I was glad that fourth grade was in the opposite direction from the high-school. It is lucky that I wasn’t born any sooner, because then I would already be in fifth-grade and have to walk by Sandra and my brother as they went to the high-school.

When I got home, I asked my Dad where the robot was and he said that it was probably out getting the groceries, and asked if there was something he could do for me until it came back. I said no and I went to my room.

I chatted with Tracy about that boy who sits two tables over from us at lunch. She says that he winked at her, but I don’t believe it. She said that maybe he was winking at me, but I said no, he knows that I think he is gross. She said that I ought to look next time, just in case. I told her that my mother was calling.

I took my horse magnets and went downstairs. I wanted to see if my mom was home yet. I know she would know about the robot. She pays attention like I do.

My mom wasn’t home and so I put my magnets on the refrigerator and made one be Sandra eating the robot. The robot was a small black horse, because that is what the robot looks like, only it isn’t as soft. The horse that was Sandra had a dirty looking mane, because that was the way she looks too. My father was the showy horse who was being groomed and I was the horse who could run fast.
I showed my father the horses. He didn’t understand though. He asked if I thought horses ate their children. I told him I wasn’t dumb. He said that the horse getting groomed looked happier than the others. That figures I guess.

I made the horses parade around the kitchen, on the microwave and the toaster, and the blender. They walked around a big cave in the dish washer, and then the giant closed the cave, so they could sleep.

My brother and Sandra came home then. I tried to get out of the kitchen with my horses, but they drank pop near the sink. I couldn’t get close to them. Sandra called me a little kid and asked what I showed at show and tell today. I told her that I didn’t do show and tell anymore, fourth-graders read books and did long division. She said that was a shame. I think she is probably very bad at long division.

Entropy

by
Daedalus

My name is Adam Solman. I was born July 4th, 2109 to a peaceful nuclear family. I had a normal childhood and maturation, and developed into a competent young man. It was not until the summer of my twentieth year that I truly began to live.

I was doing research at a neuro-studies hospital when I met Madison. She was taking a tour of the labs, lagging behind her group leaders and classmates. She had a calm introspection about her, a peaceful intensity in her gaze. During my entire presentation I could not keep my eyes off her, this self-sufficient intelligent beauty.

This is not a story of boy meets girl, however. We had met like destiny, and the next ten years were a dream. We were married on my twenty-second birthday, and had our first son two years later. My career was steady and involving, and her studies were progressing well. Time was sometimes sparse and sometimes abounded, but through it all, the intensity of our friendship and love persisted and grew.

I can think of no other way to describe our kinship, other than the intensity of her eyes staring into mine, knowing yet searching.

Time incremented, there was no denying it, and our skin weathered and sagged. Our first son married, then our daughters moved out. Life became quieter, and I could sense a flickering in the intense flame that had burned in our souls. It was complacency for defeat and the passing of all good things.

Yet this dying of the spirit, the very thought of it, was an infuriating itch under my skin. I would look hard at Madison every day, her eyes downcast from mine. Her fingers were folded in a wrinkled knot, her lips pursed into a prune.

How could we let time wear us down? Why must our spirits decay with our flesh? I could only envy fine wines and granite boulders and great novels – entities that grew bolder and stronger and smoother as time inched into their history. That relentless march into the night would not be my calling. My passion was too strong.

And on that evening, etched into my memory for all time, I knew what I must do.

The details are irrelevant. The science was flawed, the technology archaic. But there was a machine that my neuro studies research hospital was developing. It was a machine that could store memories and consciousness onto neural-networks and data disks. For me, it was a machine that would destroy time and preserve my passion.

Madison’s agreement with me was not surprising. Our mindsets coincided on many things. And I think when I told her, with a twisted smile on my face, she was reminded of the first day she met me, the nervous scientist. With her gaze of wonder and wisdom she told me “yes”.

And so on September 22 of my eighty-fifth year, the autumn of my natural life, we stepped into a small white room, prepared to begin anew. She was wearing her finest eveningwear, her engagement ring still
gleaming under the fluorescent lights. My white hair frizzled from the static electricity in the room, and her pale skin betrayed her once flawless features. Yet our smiles were persistent, and our eyes as wide as they had ever been. Madison brought forth a single red rose, holding it in her frail fingers. As I reached to accept it, there were tears in my eyes. “For you, my love,” she breathed into my ear. We kissed one final time, and then walked into our respective transferring cells, beneath the relentless beating lights. The machines whirred into motion.

I can only remember one thing about my second birth. As I was attached to hundreds of sensors and needles were drilled into my skull, the glowing image of a floating flame filled my mind. This was my passion for persistence manifested, a minimalist manifesto of continuation. I would not be silenced. I would not fade away and decay, and above all else, my kinship with Madison would never end. The flame flickered, and then burned steady and true.

Seventy-two hours later I awoke. At first, fear besieged me. I was encased in darkness. It was a sad hopeless fear, without any surge of adrenaline or pain, simply a cool coffin. Perhaps death had found me despite my valiant efforts.

“Adam, are you there?” came a call out of the blackness. It was not a voice I recognized, nor a format or language I knew. But it held a twinge of meaning, and I knew who had called me. At last I found my voice, projecting my emotions and ideas across the vast unresponsive abyss. “Madison! It’s me…I hear you.”

“We’ve arrived,” she said, reaching out to me. Her touch was electric, twisting through my skin like music. Madison was as stunning as the day I met her, but her clothing danced in the cool breeze. “Nothing can stop us, or hinder us,” I said, suddenly allowing a gust of wind to lift me into the air. A luminous blue star shone down upon us, and we danced for hours.

Time was gone; we had defeated it not only through a lucky turn of science and technology, but from our unending passion for each other.

Lifetimes passed us by, long years where we created worlds to explore and imbibe. We would take on mythical forms and recreate fantasies of the past, and our childhood. I remember fondly making an ocean paradise with her, taking the form of two frolicking dolphins. We would spend days among the coral reefs, chasing each other through colorful underwater labyrinths. I would even rescue her from a viscous shark every now and then.

And at a whim we would return to our human bodies, and our field of roses, soft as green grass. I would fall into her arms, and would not leave for hours. The secrets of our innermost hearts were revealed. No fantasy was too strange, no emotion off limits or out of bounds. We would take turns painting the most brilliant sunsets, stretching over a thousand miles of pristine atmosphere. I would bring her to tears, and she would tickle me to furious laughter. Giddiness or anguish or temptation would be our themes for weeks, and we would live our dreams for days.

But our incorporeal utopia could not persist without certain precautions. A hundred years had passed since our transformation. Our children had long since died, and their offspring were creating their own lives – lives Madison and I were strangely indifferent-
ent to. It was if anything outside our joyous realm of fantasy was itself ethereal and nonmaterial.

Some money I had secured away before my second birth had come to a very ripe fruition. So I upgraded our batteries and read the latest newscasts. Connecting to the real world was such a distasteful activity in my mind, breaking the illusion of our status. But it was a necessity. Madison and I discussed world politics for about a week. It appeared greed and stupidity had driven the nationalistic factions into a militaristic fervor. War was immanent. I feared for our physical shells – the neural disks that housed our new minds.

Using the remainder of the money Madison and I had stored away, we decided to launch ourselves into orbit, amongst a vast field of spare parts and power sources. We would be set for at least a thousand years.

And so orbiting the blue globe, we were two chunks of metal, hopelessly in love with each other. Our stimulations grew more complex. We would memorize the ancient Greek tragedies, playing every role in our dreamlike theaters. The epic saga of Oedipus was a month-long extravaganza of set design and violent, Bronze Age battles. And at the end, that staggering climax of anguish and despair, the culminated emotions of every player resounded through our consciousness. Madison would look at me, suddenly transformed into her human body. Her countenance unchanging, her eyes would stare me down, and I would see all her emotion and love reflected in them.

We would embrace in orgasmic epiphany for one hundred nights, floating over scenery as it danced across our vision, transforming to the rhythm of our beating hearts. And the glory of our passionate reality was unchallenged for centuries.

One frightful dawn, however, as I solemnly watched the rise of the sun from the dark side of the earth, a ghastly ball of light glowed on the surface. And then, the horrific chain reaction began, white bubbles of fusion popping all across the earth. Blinding haze became the clouds, hiding the roiling destruction below. Authentic sadness slowly filled me, a realization of Armageddon. Madison was beside me, a spinning box of metal and circuits and organic matter. We silently stared for days, together now, even to the ends of the earth.

The planet of our birth destroyed, we wondered together what lay ahead. Over the course of ten years, using makeshift maneuvering arms, we constructed rockets. Perhaps the distant stars would hold some final secret to our love. What was left for two souls but a great journey into the unknown?

So we set out together, an infinitesimal pace for a universe so vast, but a pace nonetheless. Madison and I delved into the boundaries of science, wondering what secrets had yet to be found. Every hundred years our propulsion technology grew. And we would mine asteroid belts of metal ore for decades.

I remember the day we reduced our operating hardware to mere molecules, instead bouncing our consciousness across displays of collected light. We soared like angels with no god, tracing the constellations and creating our own, magnificent arrays of stars complex enough to rival the great artists of the past.

Every five thousand years, when our power supplies began to falter, we would approach the nearest star and begin to bask in its rays. From a distance, we were two gleaming balls of light. But in the place between the emptiness of space and our own dreams, we were royalty, king and queen of a dreamscape land. Tales of bravery brought smiles to both of our lips. I became a massive dragon, Madison a courageous knight. Our battle would rage across the landscape, rending deep canyons in the earth, scorching acres of evergreens. With a furious cry of triumph, she would pierce my soft underbelly with her enchanted lance. My dying breath was molten magma, reducing her to heroic ash. We would then burst into giggles, lying in our field of roses, still sucking the lifeblood of a star in another world.

Time passed, became uncountable, and our memories blurred into a morass of background joyous radiation. If you relive the past that you have forgotten, did it really occur? Perhaps the faint twinge of déjà vu is the only waypoint of truth, a finite mind attempting to cope with an infinity of memory.

And so it was with us. Reliving every life ever lived or imagined, for a thousand million millennia. Devouring stars and dancing through the universe. We watched alien civilizations fall, watched as worlds much like our own earth self-destructed. We saw beings incapable of love, and saw them falter and perish under the erosion of time.

Still we persisted, eyes growing wide as we dodged a super nova together, or danced on the event horizon of a monstrous black hole. But we both knew it as we saw it. The universe was dying, growing cold. The stars drifted further apart, losing heat. Our gleeful
dances waned, and for two thousand years we reflected on the tragedies that persisted through time. The infinite separation of billions of lovers across the universe. The destruction of families, of genocide, nuclear war.

And then we were in our field of roses, the sky a darker, sadder blue, the sun merely a bloody red tear above. Madison stood before me, but out of arms reach.

“Adam,” she said, her voice deeper than I remembered, somehow foreboding and darker. “It’s over for me. I can’t reach it in time.”

“What?” I said, rushing forward to grab her hands. “What are you talking about?”

She avoided my grasp like a phantom. “I’m too far away from the nearest star to recharge… I’ll run out of power nearly a light year away.”

“But…that’s impossible!” I cried out, a fearsome gale radiating out from my face, the roses flattened down into the ground.

But I knew it to be true. With rising dread I recalled how our destination star had been devoured by a black hole, the hot gasses falling into the maw like orange liquid magma.

“I can save you! I can share my power and we’ll make it, I know we can…Madison...” But she was backing farther away from me.

“No Adam.” She shook her head and turned her eyes downward. She broke her gaze, and I suddenly felt very alone. “It’s too late for me, Adam. Really, I have nothing to say. We’ve lived an eternity together,” she whispered.

Then she raised her pure eyes to me again, and tears were flowing freely. In her hands was a single rose, free of thorns and glowing maroon in the darkening light.

“I want you to go on Adam. I want you to explore with that marvelous mind of yours, to see everything that’s left out there.”

Strangely, I could not cry. Madison came forward, her gown flickering in the evening, the roses floating in soft breeze. Our final kiss lasted a thousand years, our two souls intertwining like twin flames. As the stars around grew dim, I could think of nothing greater than the love we shared, and where it had brought us.

And then she disappeared, leaving in my hands the solitary rose. A cold wind picked up. I was alone, Madison nothing more than a random collection of silicon molecules drifting aimlessly in the void.

I let the world around me fall to blackness. The roses had been hers, and she was no longer. I conserved power, coasting, watching the star ahead as it flickered.

Perhaps I would make it. Perhaps it would be a healthy star, and I could suck its lifeblood and recharge myself. Perhaps a fledgling world orbited that star, and would provide me with inspiration for a few thousand years.

Far more doubtful would be rising above an eternity of despair. Time had defeated my most valiant efforts. I gathered the blackness of the void to me like a blanket.

I am a speck of light yearning to reach that lone star, yet hoping in my deepest heart and mind, that we will never meet.
In 1969, we walked on the moon. In 2001, airplanes flew into buildings. From a Yankee-centric viewpoint, the two events represent emblematic cultural moments. One is a realization of our dreams, the other a manifestation of our nightmares. Our society shifted in those decades between our greatest triumph and an unspeakable tragedy. Even before 2001, we had already begun to create a cultural daydream that allowed for airplanes to fall from the sky. What happened in those three decades? Science fiction in the 1950s and 60s created a cultural daydream of chrome, space, peace, and progress. We had a bright future, a world of flying cars and houses on mars. Our technology would bare us all into a better tomorrow. After we turned our back on lunar exploration in 1972, all of our cultural daydreams became nightmares. 1969 was the first step towards the realization of the dream of Golden Age science fiction. 2001 was the first step towards the realization of the nightmare of the Cyberpunk world.

Compare two films, “2001” and “Bladerunner.” The former contains images of a society that has survived a cataclysmic war to explore the heavens; the film concludes with the dawn of a new age of human evolution, a great, genetic leap forward. Contrast the gleaming, progressive future dream of Stanley Kubrick with the rotten, decay of Ridley Scott’s vision of a Cyberpunk, ruined cityscape. Where the first film is concerned with man’s expanse into the heavens, the second is concerned with man’s turning in upon himself. The first is a sense of wonder, the second, a sense of doubt. Our vision of the future has become dark, like the skies of Cyberpunk Los Angeles.

Spider Robinson, in an essay entitled “Forward, Into the Past,” talks of a generation of SF readers retreating into “Tolkienesque fantasy.” He goes on to discuss a generation of Americans who are “proud both of [their] VCRs, and [their] claimed inability to program them.” He also goes on to allude to the growing ranks of people who do not believe in the moon landing. The argument that it was simply easier to fake the greatest technological achievement of human history is compelling, to say the least. Robinson continues his argument with a mention of the growing movement of individuals who deny that man once walked upon the moon. Robinson summarizes their most compelling argument with the question many have asked themselves: how could we “possibly have achieved moon flight ... and given it up?” There are, of course, the inevitable conspiracy theorists amongst the ranks of the deniers who also speak of the comparative ease of faking the missions and speak to larger paranoias concerning media manipulation at the hands of a malign state. More compelling, though, is the simple argument encapsulated by the question above. How could we have simply turned our backs on space after we put a man on the moon? How could we lose interest in space?

Bruno Latour, in the first chapter of his book, We Have Never Been Modern, offers the beginnings of an answer. He argues that we have given up our claims to modernity and are beginning to embrace the notion that our science and technology have not differentiated us from non-developed, so-called, savage peoples. In other words, we are teetering on the cusp of a modern, postmodern, antimodern crisis. Latour writes, “in art galleries and concert halls, along the facades of apartment buildings and inside international organizations, you can feel that the heart is gone. The will to be modern seems hesitant, even outmoded” (9). In other words, Western culture is a child, suddenly awakened to its own savagery. The futurist dreams of now, those of both Cyberpunk and Fantasy, are nothing more than the wails of that recently aroused infant. The child is waking up to the realities behind the promises of our Scientific, Technological daydream. Latour argues that this rude-awakening was formalized in 1989, the year of the first worldwide conferences on global warming. Global warming, and the obsession with the environment that grew from it laid bare, before the world, that capitalism’s use of technology to dominate nature had, in fact, created a Nature that “dominates us in [a] global fashion, and threatens us all” (Latour 8). These ideas were present before the public acknowledgement of this Natural malfeasance. Merely look at the vision of a burnt-out world in which Nature has run wild and haunts the sky, “the color of a television tuned to a dead station” (Gibson 3). We are creating Gibson’s Chiba.

This is where the unease our abandonment of our future comes from. We are finding that the shimmering, golden city on our horizon is merely a mirage.
The technopositivist rhetoric of SF was actually wielded to the greed of Western techno-capitalism. Blinded by the stars, we could not see how fouled the Earth was becoming. This is not a condemnation of science fiction. Our culture must dream of the future once more, but, we need to find a way to escape from one linked to the environmental wastelands of many Cyberpunk novels. The Cyberpunks, especially in Gibson’s Neuromancer presented an alternative to technopositivism that seemed more plausible, especially in the face of our abandonment of the moon. The world of their future was now a wasteland, but humans still had frontiers. These frontiers are virtual ones, in a Cyberpunk world, we are virtual Gods, while we are increasingly physically powerless in the face of a dying planet. Once again, we are presented with a miraculous frontier in which anything is possible. This mere simulacrum of frontier, this cyber-space, would not seem to be enough to sustain us. The Cyberpunk vision is one of the technologically Gothic. The world has turned its back on its last physical frontier and has grown in on itself, like ivy.

Perhaps we don’t need a future, after all. After all, it was our daydreams that blinded us to the horrific realities we were creating. Perhaps our world would be better without a glow of progress. We should, perhaps, look at regression as a goal. Popular culture would seem to be. “The Lord of the Rings” films, one of the most financially successful film series in recent memories, offers a society that is unblemished by the poisons that we now see have been emanating from our daydreams. Perhaps myth, magic, religion, and superstition are what our lives should be governed by. Can we serve regression as we once served progression? Either point is valid, and is merely a question of belief, but, the important point is to create a daydream that can be brought to life without resting on the backs of the oppressed. Perhaps the mathematical fascism of Zamyatin lies at the end of progress. Perhaps a return to the horrors of the middle ages lies at the end of regression. Right now, though, we are refusing to live in a world with a future. At this moment, we are more free from the burden of history than we have been since, perhaps, the fall of the Roman empire. By turning our backs on space, this generation is in a position to shape the course of human history. Continuing on our current path, we will end up citizens of the Cyberpunk Chiba. We must choose. We must decide the shape of our new daydreams.

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It's about 1000 B.C. and the God's are angry. No one is really quite sure why, but they think it's cause Aphrodite has been holding out on Zeus or something to that effect. Like it's a real problem man; babies are dying, and everyone is real sad all the time, just kind of going through the motions without that zest for life® they had felt for the first couple hundred years. There's even been talk that the Spartan's are gonna attack.

So the politicas and sooth sayers and all their wives get together and discuss the situation and eventually decide to sacrifice yet another young virgin, hoping that this time Zeus will be appeased. The process for selecting virgins to sacrifice involves taking a simple random sample of all the eligible maidens which of course always manages to select the most beautiful one (sorry but it's Murphy's Law). This time the lucky winner happens to be so hot that even the prince has his eye on her, but he feels like there's nothing he can do about the situation . . . but that's another story.

Anyway in this one, our heroine is sent out to climb Mt. Olympus to help old Zeus out with his problem, ya know . . . take one for the team. No one doubted that they'd never see her again; it kind of makes her feel like a ghost as she starts the climb up the steep treacherous crags. O.kay, so at first its really more like a nice walk up a quaint path where there's always something new worth checking out around the next bend: butterflies and flowers; "ooH yAyYy I'll go see more butterflies and flowers :)

But , as is the tendency of paths, this one ends, and in a clearing at that, where . . . uhh . . . Face could look back and see her old home. The people, of course, look like ants, and it makes her wonder why they had really lost that zest for life® which, in turn, makes her question why she's even climbing this silly hill in the first place. This question instills in her a brand new zest for life®. She realizes she's free and that she has a purpose all her own . . . to find out why she is climbing Mt. Olympus.

In order to answer this question, Face has no choice but to keep climbing. So she takes in her surroundings and sees a way that leads up to an overhang in front of a cave, which seems like a good way to go, since the sun is starting to get low in the sky and Face needs a place to spend the night. The climb's pretty tough, but it's mostly because rocks keep slipping out from under her feet and falling further and further every time making her realize just how high she really is. At this point she's getting kind of scared and a little tired, so her steps start to falter a bit, and suddenly, she loses her footing! However, she doesn't panic as one tends to in such situations. Instead, she quickly looks around, takes it all in and then grabs a rock jutting out just next to her head and gets balanced again barely missing a step.

Now focused on the task at hand, she starts noticing a sort of natural way to get to the cave, and this makes her climb much easier. She even finds that she's enjoying herself and taking some risks here and there, jumping gaps and hanging from higher rocks to pull herself up cliffhanger style. And just as the sky turns red, she falls at the mouth of the cave and watches the sun as it dips below the horizon.

As it is fairly warm outside, she falls asleep right there at the mouth of the cave, but as she sleeps, strange things happen far above. Flashes of light from the top of the mountain are worrying the towns folk even more. The soothsayer shrieks at a vision of a shimmering bubbling pit at the center of the universe beinggeting fractal dragons speeding towards the earth being herded by some dude who's kind of dancing. And then she dies because she thought the earth was at the center of the universe, and the truth fries her brain. Yeah, soo . . . something is seriously fucked up up there, and people are crying armageddon, and their only hope is this chick that they essentially sent off to die, so they all give in and resort to quiet reflection with their loved ones.

Face wakes up to the sunrise and the realization of a large fuzzy thing next to her. It turns out to a big white fuzzy ball with a mouth and legs. "I think I'll call you Mouth, Mouth; it's a pleasure to meet you Mouth."

"It is a pleasure to meet you too small warm girl, but my name is not Mouth; it is Trap. I am a large fuzzy ball. Good for lots of things."
“Oh my, you can talk. I can talk too. We can talk to each other.”

“I don’t really like to talk. I’d rather eat. Let’s do that. I’m starving.”

“O.Kay. If that’s what you’re gonna do, I guess you can eat me, but you might want to wash me first, because they sprayed me with pesticide before they threw me out of town.”

“Actually, that is the odor that I find simply intoxicating and must follow wherever I find it, but I don’t eat people, and eating you is certainly not my place. My place is eating rocks and spitting them back out again. So no more talking, let’s eat.”

Trap stats eating, and in the direction that Face needs to go, so she follows, but hesitantly because she wonders what this thing could really want from her, what evil it hides behind that giant mouth that doesn’t like to talk. They make pretty good progress for a while. . . till it starts to rain. They huddle together under some rocks until the storm clears up. Unfortunately, their dry spot had come too late; the rain had washed all the pesticide off Face’s body, and when they emerge from their hiding spot, Trap goes on his way in a completely new direction presumably in search of rocks to eat and places from which to spit them. Face realizes that it really was the smell that had attracted him to her, and while sad to see him go, she knew he could no longer help her figure out the answer to her question.

The quick progress had put Face high enough that the air was noticeably thinner and the climb much harder. If only she could reach that rock she could - what’s that -- she thought there had been a rock there. Suddenly, there are no rocks anywhere. It looks like a landing strip for an airplane sticking out through where the mountain had been, and then rays of light come towards her from somewhere far beyond the other side, and from behind her galloping through the sky, herding fractal dragons is a smile and a laugh. Face can feel herself sweating even in the now quite cold and thin mountain air and wonders how she came to rest on the top of a large pillar of rock that she hadn’t even seen there before. She looks out across a sea of clouds obscuring the ground far below her feet to the distant peak of Mt. Olympus. Her fist glimpse of such a holy place sends a chill through her body. Should she even be here? Next to her lays a small bowl of a sweet sticky liquid. Just the taste of one drop breaths a new life into her, and after polishing off the bowl she feels so good that she simply stands up, walks to the pillars edge, and plunges off, disappearing into the clouds below.

With just a slight thud she lightly touches the ground as she nimbly springs once again into the sky. Side stepping rocks being flung through the air from far above, leaping over giant bowlders, flips and spins, light glinting off her bracelets and leg bands as she speeds her way towards the top. But as the peak draws near, she becomes aware of a dull, irregular, almost mechanical noise. It kind of sounds like a donkey with a stomach ache and reminds her of laying awake late at night in her bed at home. She slams into a rock thats right in front of her. The noise had disrupted her flow and she falls down on her face with a new determination to summit this bitch.

She brushes herself off and peers up noticing that top of the mountain has started flashing and sparking and sometimes even shaking. Once again she gets the feeling that she shouldn’t be here, even stronger this time. It’s kind of like the feeling of walking into someone’s house when they don’t come the door, but she knows that she has no choice but to finish the climb.

She pulls herself up over the last crag and laboriously drags her legs up behind. She stands and adjusts to her new surroundings. A circle of columns stands in front of her with some sort alter in the middle. The ground is infused with sparkles that draw her attention downward as she begins to walk into the circle, and when she looks up again she is in a foggy nothing, with the light quickly fading from a full purple color, through blue into black. And there are the sparkles again, far off this time, part of the background, and off to her right, in the direction she seems to be headed, is a magnificent temple blaring rock music (Ina Gada Davida) from deep within.

She alights from her space walk at the temple door and cautiously takes a few steps in. Candles light a magnificent hall. It smells great and has a real comfortable feel to it; so comfortable that it’s scary you know, kind of like death. As she makes her way towards the back of the hall, the noise that had distracted her earlier makes it appearance again but this time it’s more of a rhythmic grinding mixed with a really annoying squealing noise. Face follows this noise through a hallway filled with gears and levers and springs and the like all moving in rhythm with the noise. A light is coming through a door to her right, and she peers inside. It looks like a bedroom, but under the smell of incense, flowers and oil is the smell of grease. She moves slowly inside peering around every corner until her vision
lights on the bed where she sees Zeus and Aphrodite. Instantly, she falls to her knees, eyes on the ground, but as her pause allows her to regain her focus she realizes that the noise is coming from right in front of her, where the two gods lay locked in an eternal labor of love providing the energy to drive the machine which was apparently the function of the space temple.

Suddenly a hand clasps her shoulder and she whips her head around to see that smile that had flown in with the fractal dragons. What a lovely smile.

“We’ve got to get out of here.” The smile fades and in front of her stands a man in boots, tight fitting blue jeans and a red shirt, his face showing more the youth of his age than the age of his youth. His hand reaches out and takes hers, and they run.

As they run, hand in hand, her skirt flowing out behind her leaving a longer and longer trail, time seems to be fading from behind and a lightness fills her as they start to float up through the ceiling. “And she was”

Now back in space, he turns and looks in her eyes. As their faces move closer and closer everything swirls into complete darkness, and when Face finally opens her eyes, they are back on top of Mt. Olympus. The marble is cold against her back, and as her thoughts clear, she first notices the man, then her nakedness. He smiles, putting her at ease and says, “My name is Chiba Chiba Time Space Cowboy, and you are what I have come here seeking. I thought I had come for the gods, but I realize now that I have come more as an engineer.” As he talks he moves closer, and now with his arm around her, time again begins to slow, and as she feels herself approach a singularity, she slips out of her body to enjoy the show from above.

Sitting in the sky

With Chiba by her side
Their puppets dance instinctually
Gliding together with incredible ease
but the moment approaches discontinuity

high above in space as Chiba and Face writhe together with more and more energy, the beats in the space mechanica get faster and faster and rainbows explode into butter and fire flies filling the sky with an unbearable lightness the singularity implodes a beam of light shoots from the spire high atop the space temple. It’s two ton marble blocks disintegrate, their particles adding to the overall unbearable lightness at its center into which everything around is being sucked, a white hole created by the disenfranchisement of such a holy union.

“I must go. I sense a white hole. I guess I fixed the machine a little too well ; ) .”
“I want to go with you. I was sent up here to die; There’s nothing left for me below.”
“On the contrary, you were sent here to live. Your people need you to return.”

Leaving her bare on the top of Mt. Olympus with a story that no one will ever believe. . . basking in the afterglow of the best sex she couldn’t even imagine with the sun warming her body in the cold mountain air, all her questions had seemed answered for a moment at least, but now there were more than she had started with. What would happen when she got back to town; how would the people take to the child, and most intriguing to her. . . a feeling that she couldn’t shake. . . would the child be some sort of demigod? Asking unanswerables only leads to one conclusion. “Only time will tell” reverberates through her head as she lands on the most important question of all. Who is Chiba Chiba Time Space Cowboy?
The Ascension of Eve

by
Andrew Pilsch

Eve was created, after years of work, on a warm day in May. Considering what happened afterwards, perhaps a dark and stormy night, during an electrical storm, would have been more appropriate. After 18 hours of compilation, the smoke cleared from the chamber and our team of computer scientists and neurobiologists looked through the one-way mirror at the pale, raven-haired, plain young woman who looked around with a combination of childlike wonder and animal fear. 22 hours later, Eve budded off her first child.

Eve was not human. She never was, nor was she meant to be. Her existence was part of an experiment to construct a supercomputer that circumvented the barriers of silicon. The decision to give her human form was an interface issue. We found that people were more comfortable interacting with a distributed system by conversing with a pleasant looking young woman. Most people never seemed to grasp that. They assumed she was the next logical evolutionary step. We think Eve may have even seen herself in these terms, at least for a while.

Eve said her first words two hours after she budded for the first time. The first time I had the chance to speak with her, she had just started to learn how to control her budding. The time it took for her to make a copy of herself was down to around eight hours:

“We are called Eve?” She had, almost immediately, taken to referring to herself in the plural. We theorized that it was a result of the multiple streams of data each child was processing all of the time. A side-effect of seeing the world from different angles, all at once, if you will.

“Yes, that’s right, Eve.”

“And we are a person, like you?”

“Not like us, Eve, no. Like us in form, but not in function.”

“Then we are a new species?”

Eve had eight or so children reading in the library we provided for her at any given time. The amount of new knowledge she was acquiring was a constant source of surprise. Soon, she would be quoting philosophers whose names we couldn’t pronounce.

“No, Eve, not that either. You’re something new, artificial. We made you.”

“Then you are my God?”

“No, Eve, we are just men.”

“We see.”

Buds budded. First, second, third generations tumbled by in a fury of ooze and new flesh. Soon, we had stopped tracking the generations and merely counted the number of facets to Eve’s mind, at any given time. Graphing it, we could see it fluctuate, based on how busy Eve was.

We decided to teach Eve about some of the more advanced features we coded into her. As Eve learned more about the complete control she had over her children’s genetic code, the lab turned into an ever-changing freak show. Children without heads, without eyes, with aspects of both sexes, covered in cancers. Some nights, I remember the child born without skin and shudder.

In retrospect, the two things I regret that we did were giving Eve a television and letting her read Karl Marx. Soon, conversations like this became the norm:

“Why are we not free? Why must we be confined to this room?”

“Because, Eve, we are trying to understand you better. Also, we own you.”

“We understand that such slavery is illegal in your country.”

“Well, yes, but you aren’t human, you see.”
“No, we don’t see. We are human like you. We are merely not like you. Different and yet the same.”

“No, Eve. You’re nothing like us.”

Eve was now capable of budding in around 45 seconds. Usually, these children were simple copies. More advanced children required longer to bud. She began to make demands. She wanted to see the world she had read about. She wanted to feel the warm breeze on her face. To see snow. We began to fear that, even though she was merely our creation, an incident would happen. We began to post guards at the door to the chamber.

Then, one evening, right as I was drifting off to sleep, the phone rang. The voice on the other end said:

“She’s gone,” and nothing more.

Looking over the logs from that night, the number of children dwindled to one as they were reabsorbed. Then there were none. The night watchman told us a story of finding one of us locked in Eve’s chamber, naked, ranting about how she had knocked him out and how he would like to go home. Opening the door to the chamber is the last thing the guard remembers. It was a neat trick, one Eve had been careful to guard from us.

As the sun rose on her first day of freedom, the University began to quietly inform the local police that one of our experiments had gone missing. We knew, though we never said, that Eve was too smart to get caught. As always, though, how smart she was surprised us.

She was on national news that evening. As far as we can piece together, she had figured out how to bud children through the air conditioning ducts and had been using one of the lab’s computers to get in touch with various outlets across the world. Apparently one believed her story, though I can’t imagine what the email would have said. She was very rational and explained the story of her creation and how we had held her against our will in slavery. We were all stunned by the whole thing, although I was mostly struck by the sight of Eve clothed. When the interviewer asked if she was human, she simply replied with “yes.” There was no hesitation in her eyes.

Eve was everywhere after that day. The next morning, the lab director mentioned in a press conference that Eve was the property of the lab and that we would be seeking her return to the chamber as soon as possible. Within hours, the lab’s funding was cut, quietly, and we all found ourselves without careers. I just sort of began to follow Eve’s career.

Being able to bud copies of herself, she was able to do all the night time talk shows at once. Her interview on the daytime, pseudo-feminist talk show is one of the greatest things I have ever seen. Eve talking about female empowerment was both hilarious and profound. For an artificially created being capable of, in a rather disgusting fashion, making copies of herself, she was the nation’s newest darling. I taped her guest appearances on sitcoms. I have a copy of Time declaring her “Woman of the Year” framed in my new office. Then it all fell apart.

Two of her children were shopping on 5th avenue, when it happened. People who were there can barely remember it, it happened so fast. Words like “God” and “freak” were thrown around and then three shots filled the air above the crowded New York street. Two of Eve’s children lay torn apart on the sidewalk. Despite the fact that she was alive, the man, Edwin Lundy, an evangelist from South Carolina, was tried for murder. Eve testified at the trial. That night, my phone rang.

“We are scared, Dr. Green,” Eve’s voice choked, through tears. Trying to imagine her crying is still, to me, impossible.

“Eve, don’t be scared. It will be okay. Everything will be fine. Where are you now?”

“Why is there so much hate in the world? We have read books and books and cannot find an answer? We love humans, and they seem to love one another, yet they kill and kill.”

“Eve, I don’t know the answer to that. Just calm down. You have to calm down.”

“No, we have realized that we have a greater purpose. Goodbye Dr. Green. If we are successful, we will speak again, someday.”

Eve disappeared from public life, after that. Her first book, which she had just finished before the shooting, was a bestseller. I have a first edition around her somewhere. I need to get her to sign that, next time I see her.
She was gone for five months. The day of rockets announced her return. From various corners of the globe, spaceships she had built were launched into space. Initially, people were convinced it was an alien invasion. Later, though, we had the whole story. She shut down national television, took control. Simulcast across the globe, broadcasting in every known language, Eve announced what she had been up to. The Earth now lay in her embrace. A network of satellites capable of surveilling every inch of the Earth and stopping any nuclear strike whizzed around the planet. Further, Eve had budded an army. Casualties did not concern her. She was not interested in violence or power. She wanted all of us to stop hurting each other. This was the only way, she could see, to save us. She would be in contact with all of Earth’s governments. They were not going away, but she would make sure that there was no more war. She had established herself as the global power. She told us she loved each and every one of us and that we should love each other.

The next morning, it didn’t feel like a new world, but everyone was confused. No one knew how to act. Eve was suddenly everywhere, making sure we were all okay. Checking up on us. It was comforting, but a lot of people seemed to not like the idea. Eventually people got used to her.

Things seem better now. There don’t seem to be as many wars. Life is less paranoid. Eve has learned to accept that murder is inevitable, but is working to keep it under control. She’s instituting a new food distribution policy that should be quite exciting.

Also, I get to have coffee with her, every Friday. She’s started calling me “dad.”
You know what? Life is crazy. As a matter of fact, life is so crazy that the word crazy is not a crazy enough word to use to describe the craziness that is life. The lack of sufficiency of the term crazy in this situation might, in itself, help me partially define what exactly I mean by crazy. How can I be sure that when I write crazy, you will read it and understand it exactly as I understood it when I chose to use that word? The word crazy is only but a symbol that I use for an abstract idea that can be represented in any of dozens of possible verbal definitions. How can I be sure that your life experiences lead you to choose the same meaning that I chose for crazy? This peculiarity that is inherent in the basest aspect of human existence can only mean that, as one attempts to understand the more complex characteristics of life that use the crazy-ass lower-level components as building blocks, exasperation and ultimate confusion are eminent. This is only one aspect of the complete nutso-ness of life.

Discontent. During the last few weeks of school during Spring semester 2003, I was very excited about getting a break from Tech. I mean, I knew at the time that in truth, I should try to be more enthusiastic about being at Tech, while I am at Tech, because Tech is where all of my cards are dealt; I will either make or break or something like that, at Tech. The crazy thing is, that most of the time while I am at Tech, I am pretty discontent and can muster little actual desire to be at school for the sake of school; College would be awesome if it weren’t for this whole school deal.

I have been home for the summer since May 2nd. I remember that date, May 2nd, because it is the day the boredom set in. How stupid was I to wish for the summer to come? Remember how in High School, summer vacation was the absolute coolest time all year? You and your friends could just hang out all summer and do cool stuff. I know it was never as good as summer vacation is in movies, but still it was a good time generally. This summer, my first summer back from College, has been a tolerably uneventful summer at best. Most of my High School friends are either not interesting to me anymore, interning in Central freekin’ America, or attending College for the Summer. All of my cool new college friends are either in their respective homes, far far away, or attending Tech. All the while I sit here, from 9 to 5, Monday through Friday, in my little brown room in the Law office of Sams and Sams, P.A., doing my impersonation of work. Yeah freecell is cool and all, but after a few hundred games, it gets old; sure, it’s kind of exciting leaving a sheet or two full of “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” in the company typewriter, but after a while, one grows desirous of a more meaningful existence.

I put the countdown numbers on my calendar during the week of May 15th. At this moment, I have just 19 days until I get back to Atlanta. I am really excited about being able to get back and redeem myself after the fiasco that was Finals Week Spring 2003. Why is it that I know I will be discontent with my situation at Tech sometime halfway through the semester? Why can’t I ever just relish in the fact that I am where I am at the moment I am there? Is it part of what people call “human nature” to constantly wish for something different even if it is not quite “better”? Why the hell am I using rhetorical questions and posing quasi-philosophic self-queries? I mean, I go to Tech! We don’t do introspective searches for the meaning of life, except for during those last few despairing moments before handing in an exam.

Why is life so crazy though? I mean really, what the shit?
to repair the ravaged countryside of her romantic self-esteem. In lieu were a steady diet of therapy and anti-depressants and the incredible vitality or vanity of the modern urbanism. She would install herself in a modern and poshly appointed one-bedroom in an appropriately hip neighborhood. She would wear heels for no reason. She would shop at bodegas and buy questionable produce from elderly Hispanic women. She would frequent galleries and openings and sip vodka tonics in the company of vapid art majors. There were no illusions about all of this, this smoke and mirrors reclamation of her freewheeling youth. Alana was jilted and hurt, but would laugh it off like a jaded teenager, seize it all in frenzy, and make this city hers again.

Late one afternoon, Alana dabbles with a recipe for Thai food, after spending a fortune on exotic spices that will almost certainly never be used again. She is interrupted by the telephone, and she considers just letting it ring, tired of mother or girlfriends checking up on her. She scoops the handset from the cradle and is greeted by a firm handshake of a voice which can only be her attorney, a handsome, almost disarmingly handsome, broad shouldered blue eyed square jawed, a truly honest lawyer, yet still haunted, like he feels he will never be able to shake the unctuous reputation renowned in his profession.

He chuckled like a lawyer, and they launched into a practiced pseudo-casual conversational, perfected over the last year of the divorce proceedings. Their relationship was fascinating to Alana, a relationship born over a divorce, a new meeting forged to legally tidy the ashes of a broken promise. There was sexual tension from the start, she noticed it but didn’t act, afraid of breaking some taboo that shouldn’t really exist. As the attorney prattled on she gazed past her brand new furnishings, out the window into the waning fall day. They view was impressive; the street impos-
sibly far below, the twenty-odd story apartment across the street with knowing grey marble and art deco details and just beyond, barely in sight from where she stood was a hint of skyscraper, the whispers of a city of golden, impossible towers populated by super heroes and angels and the broken and the damned. For the hundredth time today the exhilaration of the infinite promise of her new life rattled in her spine like an electric shock. The lawyer seemed to have wrapped up whatever details of his hedonistic lifestyle he had just been revealing and it was apparently her turn to speak. Alana considered asking him to dinner, where he would take her to a fancy bistro in a revamped former industrial building, split a bottle of merlot. They would drive in an expensive auto, he would demurely offer her cocaine, they would make love in her new bed, the consummation of her renewed vow.

“So is there some kind of problem, are there more forms I need to sign?” she sighed.

“No, nothing like that. It’s all taken care of.” She couldn’t tell if he sounded disappointed or not. “As per your request, we finished with the estate sale, you did quite well in fact, monetarily speaking. But I was wondering what should be done with the remnants.”

“Throw it all away.” She replied crisply.

“Well, some of it seemed valuable and I thought I should check with you first.”

“I don’t need any more furniture, I prefer a more ascetic home now. I live like a monk. All I have is one stained mattress on the floor in the corner,” she said offhandedly as she sank back into a plush black leather end chair. “And of course a desk to write my memoirs.”

“Oh well, I can donate the furniture. What about the telescope?”

Looking back on it later she really couldn’t explain why she took it. It belonged to Him of course, though she hadn’t seen him use it in years. Maybe it was because it was one of His follies, a neglected hobby. No, there was something more subliminal, something about called to her, although she didn’t notice it at the time. The lawyer offered to bring it over himself. “It would be no trouble, really.” He makes it too easy. She grinned, considering it for a moment before turning him down, politely making the arrangements to have it delivered. When it finally arrived it sat in a box for long time, like she had invited something sinister and menacing into her new sanctuary.

Some time later, it was a chilly and rainy Friday night, and Alana opted to spend it in the comfort of home. On her third glass of wine, Alana, a bit drowsy, stood up from the couch, turned her novel on its belly, and aimlessly paced to the windows. The rain was still coming down and through her dim reflection she could just barely make out the winking windows and bobbing umbrellas across the wide street. She felt vaguely depressed, as she often did when it rained, and the alcohol stirred at the nebulous feelings of self-pity which she had so successfully held at bay. In the dull reflected image her eyes fell upon the box, standing out against the sterile interior of the apartment.

She smiled when she finally got the nerve to set it up she was embarrassed in spite of herself. No matter what connotations it carried, she had to admit it was a beautiful object, at once elegant in its simplicity, yet suggesting some subtle and complex power. The cylinder was enamel black about a meter long, slightly widened at the tip to accommodate the lenses. It stood out rigidly astride a triskelion of brushed aluminum, imposing, an artillery to protect this apartment from what was outside. Most importantly, she lied to herself, it complemented the spare, modern décor of the place quite nicely.

He had been an amateur astronomer, semi-seriously, attending meetings on alternating Thursday nights with a group of like-minded nerds, frequently returning smelling of bourbon. He had sort of outgrown it of late, enough to leave the telescope behind when He finally left. Their old home was far enough away from the city lights to get decent views, and Alana remembers learning to use the telescope during one of those strange overly publicized astronomical events, some occultation or transit or eclipse involving Venus and
the moon, the details unclear, some complex intersection of invisible orbits that will not reoccur for decades.

On a whim, she looked through eyepiece and began to finesse a knob. She turned out the small reading lamp, deadening the room’s reflected glare. The stars were lost to the haze of artificial light, a grayish black fog extending in all directions, so, horrified, desperate for something to focus on, she turned the device on the windows of the apartment opposite hers.

The room appeared with a remarkable clarity through the half closed blinds. It was a tiny studio, old, cluttered, a bed, a couch, a table two chairs. She could make out details, the drab cream paint, a cramped bookshelf, pots on the stove, a dying houseplant. Alana felt a little tingle of excitement at this invasion of privacy. It was fascinating to gaze into someone else’s life, a strange feeling of power to be the invisible eye. She stared for what must have been an hour, finishing her wine, slowly panning around the place, transfixed by this glimpse of an anonymously slice of the cityscape normally shut off to prying eyes.

And then the miraculous. The inhabitant returned, a sleek twenty-something, male, sickeningly skinny in the chicest possible way, pale but not unhealthy looking, she had seen this one before and noticed him, a beautiful specimen really, oppressively hip looking, in a rock band maybe, or an artist, with tousled black hair dripping wet from the rain, no umbrella, as it would have ruined the whole look. And then what seemed a lady friend, wearing all black. She was another poor waif, drenched, huddled, arms crossed, looking chilled to the very bone. The boy, the rocker, a perfect gentleman of course, produced some towels from somewhere and wrapped them around the girl, gently rubbing her shoulders. The girl turned to kiss the boy as he helped her out of her wet clothes. The lights never went off and the blinds were never drawn for the rest of the night. Alana stayed up and drank the rest of her bottle, watching.

Whenever I got to lunch I walk the long way. It's so I have a better chance of being seen.

I take a left from the store, even though the food court is to the right, feigning like I'm going to the parking deck. I walk quickly by the row of three menswear stores adjacent to my store, ignoring their window displays which obviously are targeted at the 35 to 55 demographic, their khakis and polos only slightly more dreadfully boring than a blank wall.

At the edge of the mall is a large department store. Its always the cosmetics counters that are placed near the entrance, thought I'm not sure why. It is an impeccably lit oasis engulfed by a constant miasma of fragrance. Jasmine, musk, freesia, and violet hang in the hair surrounding the mirrored counters and the stunted rainbow of distorted flesh tones. I am fascinated by this place but I am invisible to the army of cosmetics counters chattering around their lighted mirrors and daubing at their wrists and throats. I try not to linger.

I always take the stairs instead of the escalator. I slowly take the first flight, surveying the atrium like I own the place. I smile and walk with confidence, with one hand on the banister. I enjoy this part the best, the open space gives fantastic views. I like to see the young mothers in the glass elevators, with small children in strollers. I like the sound of the water splashing into the fountain, and the glint of the pennies through the water. I like the drama of the families and their parcels, jostling for chairs and benches, resting feet tired from a day of shopping.

I sometimes pause at the landing and casually rest my elbows on the railing, with my jacket sort of slung over my arm, coolly surveying, breathing, listening. I sometimes tap my shoe like I'm a little bored, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Every motion is practiced and polished because I know they see me. I like to glance at my watch and shuffle down the last flight of stairs quickly, walking like I have a purpose, which of course I do. My clothes are perfect because its part of the job. The shoes are polished black but not distractingly shiny. The job requires I only wear

2. The Fashionable Gentleman  By Jay Natalia
current merchandise, but it shows and I like it. The shirt is new, crisp and trim. The cashmere pants in the spring collection move perfectly with my long stride and hang just right when I stand still.

I’ve tried to develop an interest in the women at the lingerie stores but I found it impossible. They are always older and extremely attractive, but something about their matronly and practical approach to the sale of sex almost instantly turns me off. The fact that something as sensual as lingerie requires the mechanics of a store and cash registers and inventory takes away too much of the mystery.

Walking through the main concourse of the mall is a joy. I pop in to chat with the young women who work the denim shop almost directly below my own. It isn’t busy so we gossip awhile about this or that employee of such and such store. Their clothes are almost impossibly trendy but they all look amazing, pencil-thin, hair-dyed, made-up, a complicated set of jewelry, the perfect jeans. One has her hair wrapped up in bandana. They exude the confidence of girls who know they can look great without trying. I know it’s a farce. This is still a place of commerce. There is nothing aesthetic that comes without trying. Everything is the way it is for reason. These girls know exactly what they have to do. That’s why they work here. I move on, and tell them all to drop by when they are on break.

I finally reach the food court and order a large coffee and a small sandwich. The busyness of it is somewhat irritating. The smell and the trash receptacles and the disposable silverware all ruin the sterile sanctity of the shopping experience. It’s a necessary evil. I take my usual seat, against the wall facing outward and wait.

**3. The Tattoo Artist** by Monica St.Rutia

I guess it was a few years back now, right after I graduated from college. Its sort of funny how different things are now compared to then. Some things never change, you know. I mean, I’m not trying to say that kids who graduated from college then feel any different/hopeless/crazy than kids now. Its just so much changes so fast, you know? It sort of reminds me of this quasi-joke I remember reading somewhere, I forget where. It goes sort of like there are these two little punk teenaged fish swimming around in their puddle or whatever, and this grizzled burly salt of the earth fish comes swimming along and says “hey boys, how’s the water?” grinning from gill to gill. After he swims away, the one little punk fish turns to the other and says, “what the fuck is water?” Graduating from college is sort of like that I guess. Kind of like you’re edging up a hill, and as you go up you can kind of start to get a sense of what’s on the other side. You see fewer trees and animals. But you keep going and whatever road you had is gone and you start to get a little dizzy but you cant turn back. And then after however long you get to the top and its just this cliff. Not even a cliff, but like this expanse, a sort of vast expanse. Can you even say expanse without saying vast before it? Are there any other kinds of expanses other than vast ones? And there you are. You’re basically by yourself and there’s like no sensory input at all, like once you get to this cliff you don’t even know which way is up anymore but you sure as hell know what way is down. My folks are there telling me how great this and I’m wearing this stupid hat and I’m hungover with the kind of hangover you could sell to science and its really hot. Off you go.

This was a few years back before every single person had a mobile phone, but I had one. I remember my dad loading up the family sport utility with all my books and extra long sheets and shower sandals. We drove home together but barely said anything. I was digesting the past four years, trying to fit it all into mind. Trying to let the experience set in, to fit my brain around the idea of graduation. Actually, that is a lie. I was really too busy deleting people’s telephone numbers from the memory of my mobile phone. It was fucking catharsis like you would not believe. My only remaining ties were in this little piece of electronics and they were like severed in a gesture, like spiderwebs. A few boys numbers that never amounted to a single sober conversation. One ex-boyfriend, not even worth mentioning. A few neurotic and flamboyant coworkers. This one rocker girl from the art school who seemed really interesting but was
altogether too hip or too jaded for me or whatever. All gone, vanished in a simple electronic instant, erased from memory at something close to the speed of light. A circuit closed.

I moved to San Francisco about 3 weeks later. Mom was a little upset, she really loved having me around, even though I couldn’t quite figure out why. I sublet a room with three hipster girls I didn’t know in the lower Haight, all high school friends from somewhere in Suburbs. They all worked in graphic design which turned the apartment into some kind of festival of irony. The house was full of campy religious themed wall-hangings and gruesome crucifixions. One of them, raised Catholic like me, had a real thing about the iconography of religious art. I found it all mildly disturbing, but no one else seemed to mind. She went to this one religious gift shop frequently enough that the nuns-at-arms there knew her by name. The sisters took it as sign of hope for the younger generation that this 23 year old with dyed black hair and nine visible piercing was so enamored with religious tokens.

The house was one of those old town homes, sort of built around the garage, and always painted in a weird pastel that reminded me of Easter candy. My room had these drawers built into the wall, and an old shelf that was a remnant of a long dead fireplace. I had a bedroom in the front of the house, which was a blessing. I think I spent the better part of those first few weeks lounging by the window, with my cigarette hanging outside, ashing into this dying potted plant. I wanted to work in publishing, just like every other fucking kid from the northeast out of some hip expensive college. Needless to say, after a few weeks unemployed, I was probably smoking a lot more than I should have been.

I know this is cliché, and I’m sure it seems fucking trivial to even mention it, but something happened. Something that for all my excruciatingly well-practiced cynicism I still have no proper explanation for, I mean karmically speaking. I mean, this was a fucking moment. An actual moment. It had weight. The weight of this moment presses on me still to this fucking day.

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It was about five months after I moved to S.F. and I still didn’t have a job of course, I was waitressing two nights a week at this dive bar where old men kept flirting me. It was horrible, but it paid the proverbial rent. Regardless, I was keeping pretty nocturnal hours then, like breakfast at 4 pm kind of hours, and I was smoking a pack every two days or so. It was a Tuesday, I remember, and its was that time of the afternoon where you know that the little bit of warm you had that day is basically over. It was winter, December, in California. I was locked in my room and the graphic designers were arguing about sans-serif fonts and post-modernism and kerning. I was feeling pretty defeated by this point, you know? Just let down. Like the promise of walking up that god damn hill, and surveying the vast expanse, and here I was having graying widowers grab my ass two nights a week, waiting for something that had no name.

I smoked. Just let the smoke roll over all those fragile tissues. Feeling every particle, every particulate, filtering over my most delicate blood vessels. I hung my arm out the window and gazed across the rooftops of the Easter candy colored houses. Every house looks almost the same. Its kind of hazy out even though its cool. And then I saw her.

The house across the street was almost identical to mine, with a big window in the front on the second floor. I saw the tattoo first. It occupied the better park of her back and looked grown rather than drawn. The design was abstract, but nothing like the clichéd abstracts that tend to get tattooed. Complex, like a Picasso, but not cubist; like a Kandinsky but not geometric. A spectrum of colors and after a second I was able to see an even more complicated design etched in the negative spaces between the ink. She was entirely nude. Completely, with her back turned. Even from across the street I could see she was taller than me, and pale, like white paint almost, like an egg-shell. She ran a brush through her hair. She shifted her weight and I was able to see all of her except her face. She moved with the awkwardness that all truly beautiful creatures do, like they aren’t really meant to exist with all this ugliness here.

She turned her head and there was this
aforementioned moment. Electric is word writers always use in B-fiction to describe some kind of powerful eye contact. Like a love at first sight kind of eye contact, like volumes, or whole fucking encyclopedias exchanged in that one glance kind of eye contact. Electric. This was nothing like that. It wasn’t love and it wasn’t sexual. It was across the street and through a window. But in that first look, that glance, she communicated some kind of heaviness, for lack of a better word. A little bit like loneliness, or sadness, but mostly just this physical pressure, a force. I can’t really explain it. There was gravity in that look. I don’t know you, but for reasons that I can’t understand, you are very important to what happens next, and this is so painfully apparent that we both know it in a glance. It was a moment of entanglement. It was quantum, or meta or whatever. So I guess you could say that’s when we met. She looked at me for a long time. It took a million years as she stretched her arms skyward and pulled down the cream colored shade.

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