



Are We There Yet?

REFLECTIONS ON CLASSIC
AND MODERN DYSTOPIA

AP ENGLISH LITERATURE

COMMENTARY

Articles analyzing dystopic
literature in all its forms.

FICTION

Compositions mimicking dystopian
style

2017

CONTENTS

07 **Foreword**
Leo Bickelhaupt

COMMENTARY

10 **Dystopia antebellum style**
Grace

11 **Dispatches**
Patrick

14 **Animal Farm: A Product of its Time**
Siena

16 **Resistance is Futile, at Least it Used to be**
Grace

18 **Why I Read Fantasy**
Simon

20 **Dystopia Vs. Apocalypse**
Not an All-Star Wrestling Match
Ella

22 **An Action Story in Dystopic Clothing**
Did the Hunger Games revive the dystopia genre or kill it?
Leona

24 **Dystopic Romance**
Is the Hunger Games a true dystopia?
Melina

25 **The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas**
Mayong

CONTINUED...

CONTENTS

- 27 **Jack the Animator**
Adriana
- 28 **Trump and Machiavelli**
A match made in heaven?
Madie
- 30 **Dystopia Goes Corporate**
Annette
- 31 **Leaning on the Past**
Emma

FICTION

- 36 **Dangerously Alone**
Charon
- 40 **The Vigilant Eye**
Max
- 43 **Fields of Orange**
Zoe
- 45 **Separate and Pure**
Jordan
- 47 **Rule of the Enlightened**
Aurora
- 50 **Peas in a Pod**
Sovigne

CONTENTS

- 53** **The Devos School For the Gifted**
Thomas

- 55** **Quarantine**
Ian

- 67** **“Happy”**
Evan

- 68** **Trademark You**
Flannery

- 70** **The Yellow Jackets are Coming**
Marisol

- 71** **Beware of District 7**
Eli

- 73** **Friends, Family, Food**
Faith

- 76** **Timid New World**
Sam

- 79** **Virtue Points**
Matteo

- 85** **Ashes to Ashes**
Diego

- 89** **Running Away**
Mayme

- 93** **The Bloody Game**
Aubrey

- 96** **You for You**
Fua



FOREWORD

LEO BICKELHAUPT

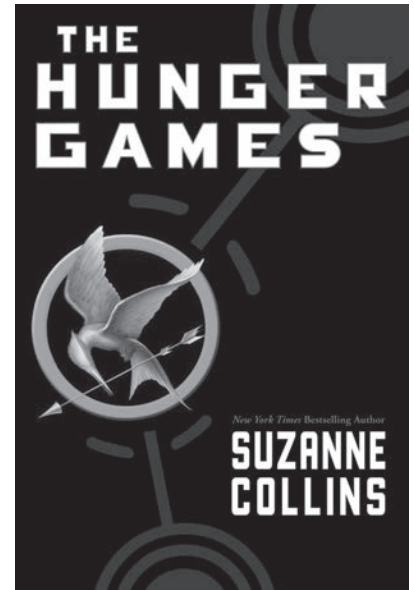
I have a particularly strong connection to the juniors and seniors in this year's Advanced Placement sections. I have had most of them on and off in English class since they were in seventh grade. A few of them, in fact, have had no English teacher other than me since they left elementary school. This is an anomaly. Students who start at OWL today will have a healthy cycle through all three English teachers, but because of staffing and other variables at play for these classes, we have spent a lot of time together. Given the special connection I feel with these students, I decided that it was crucial that we end their high school career with some kind of final tangible product. I wanted to publish their thoughts and writing just one more time for posterity.

In that vein, we have compiled a journal of commentary and fiction focused on the dystopia genre. The theme for the year was actually power, but given how much dystopia we ended up consuming, that seemed like a logical focus for our magazine. Students of course received a steady diet in the classics, with works like *Brave New World*, *Harrison Bergeron*, and *Animal Farm*, but we also took time to read what other authors were saying about Dystopia, and discussed how the genre has evolved to the present day.

Students then had the option of writing either an article, or a piece of original fiction. The articles focused mostly on questions of genre, how it has evolved, and how it connects to our lives. For the fiction, students were asked to extrapolate – to imagine world in which some important problem or issue remains unsolved. Students were also encouraged to use fiction to make fun of the dystopia genre, which does have a tendency to take itself rather seriously. At least two students rose to this challenge.

To watch the stories and articles evolve over the last two months, has of course been deeply gratifying. Students writing articles tightened their paragraphs and jazzed up their leads, while the fiction writers spent time shaping their prose carefully, and helping us see the dystopic worlds more vividly through the eyes of the viewpoint character. The end result – this product – speaks for itself.

I would like to thank Caryl Mousseaux for helping this project get off the ground. She helped me conceive of the product and served as a sounding board during the development process. Sam Dale-Gau and Siena Leone-Getten, meanwhile, made it possible to weave the material into an aesthetically pleasing publication with their design skills. I would also like acknowledge Ian Nixdorf, who provided most of the artwork that makes all of the stories seem more worth reading. And of course, thank you OWL class of 2017 for helping the school grow into what it has become today.



Commentary

DYSTOPIA ANTEBELLUM STYLE

Grace

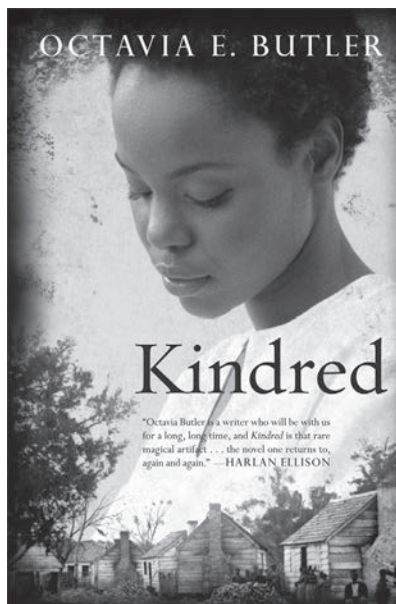
When it comes to avoiding mistakes that can cause large scale disasters, dystopias seem like the genre that can get us there. *Brave New World* portrays a world where a glorified utopia has gone terribly wrong. *1984* warns against the dangers of authoritarian governments that control the spread of information. However, as author Justine Larbalestier points out, “we are always living in a dystopia.” Dystopic conditions exist around the world, but somehow we don’t view modern day and historic events through the same lens that we do the potential dystopic near-future. And as the old adage goes, if we don’t learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it. That is why we would do well to occasionally view historical events as if they were dystopias, and make changes to our behavior based on the worlds that we see there.

Octavia Butler, best known as a science fiction author, gives us the perfect opportunity to do just that in her book *Kindred*. In the book, Dana, a black woman in 1970s California, is thrust back in time against her will. Her destination: the Antebellum south. At first, Dana’s modern preconceptions make her try to fight

against her own enslavement, so she decides to run away. However, she quickly realizes that she is under the control of an enormous power structure that surpasses her resources for escape.

When trying to educate other slaves, Dana runs into another roadblock. The overseers on the plantation severely limit the skills that slaves are allowed to have. Literacy would pose a threat to the power structure in place, because it might enable them to have access to more information. Limiting the spread of information is a hallmark of dystopias: from *Brave New World* where new scientific discoveries are not permitted, to *The Hunger Games*, where the Capitol tries to suppress news of rioting from the common people. By showing the slaveowners using this technique, Butler places slavery in America within the context of other dystopic stories.

Today’s more recent dystopias often feature a scrappy teen protagonist who takes down an authoritarian regime with a stylish weapon. However, *Kindred* follows a more traditional model, with a protagonist at originally wants to rebel, and then gets beaten down



by the system. In *Brave New World*, characters who have doubts about the system never manage to really enact change. And Dana, even with her modern perspective on slavery, grows more comfortable with living in the South as the novel progresses. The system of slavery is so powerful and pervasive that Dana has no chance of causing widespread reform.

The dystopic society of the Antebellum south has echoes that reach into Dana's life in 1970s California. Dana is married to a white man, Kevin, and neither of their families are comfortable with the union. Kevin's sister is a racist, and Dana's uncle did not want a white man to inherit his property. Dana's aunt approves, but only because she wants Dana's children to have lighter skin. Similarly, Rufus, the white slave owner on the plantation that Dana travels to, has fallen in love with Alice, a freed slave. However, in order to maintain power in

“Limiting the spread of information is a hallmark of dystopias: from *Brave New World* where new scientific discoveries are not permitted, to *The Hunger Games*, where the Capitol tries to suppress news of rioting from the common people.”

”

this dystopic society, Rufus cannot admit that he loves Alice, if that's even what it is, and he cannot act on this love in a healthy way. He abuses his power, selling Alice's husband to slave traders and forcing Alice to become his concubine. Both the Antebellum south and the 1970s have stigma around interracial relationships.

Octavia Butler's books force us to confront difficult truths. She shows us what is possible in our futures, and compels us to look beyond a romanticized version of slavery. She believes that history will repeat itself unless we can learn from our mistakes. Dystopias exist all around us, and will affect more and more people unless we do something about it.



DISPATCHES

Patrick

You're a 19 year old kid, stuck in an unfamiliar, inhospitable land, filled with strange people who may or may not want to end your brief time on earth. You've seen violence beyond comprehension and you were forced to come here against your will. The weather here is strange, like nothing you've ever experienced. Sound familiar? It is not a scene from *The Hunger Games*, but instead this scenario represents the experience encountered by hundreds of thousands of draftees during the Vietnam War.

Literature that examines the conflict as an intimate narrative of men and war, not simply as an overarching timeline of the conflict, provides a compelling opportunity to examine both the Vi-

etnam War, and the literature written in its wake, through a dystopic lens. Michael Herr's *Dispatches* deals with a variety of themes all boiling down to how humans respond to unfavorable and dangerous circumstances, a theme prevalent in many dystopian novels.

A trend in a sizable portion of the modern Young Adult dystopian novels is the characters are frequently adolescent, and are forced deal with a coming of age and a loss of youth in an inhospitable and jarring world. In Vietnam, infantry soldiers were in their late teens or early twenties. Still within their 'coming of age', they were placed in an environment where they were forced to grow up incredibly fast, and faced with sights and experiences that



were and should be unsettling to anyone. *Dispatches* covered this aspect thoroughly, asking “How do you feel when a nineteen-year-old kid tells you he’s gotten too old for this kind of shit?” The speed at which soldiers aged while ‘in country’ is frequently touched on, with the powerful statement that says that if you looked at only the eyes of the soldiers it would be impossible to distinguish between a teenager and a man of 50 years: their eyes would be blank, dirty, and wrinkled, but above all, empty. Herr sums it up in one sentence: “Vietnam was what we had instead of a happy childhood.”

Similarly, in many dystopian novels the protagonist find themselves growing up in an oppressive and traumatic environment and lament a loss of youth. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss deals with a similar plight. Thrown into the crucible of the Games she faces the most horrendous event of her life while she is on the cusp of adulthood. At time when Katniss would typically be transitioning into life as an adult she instead is training and preparing herself to kill and be killed. This exposure not only forces her into a situation filled with violence, but it completely deprives her of the waning days of her youth.

Part of why *The Hunger Games* resonates with us is that as a nation we are obsessed with youth. Often age and experience is often less valued than youth and innocence. Think of how care-

fully we avoid revealing the truth to children about things like Santa, or more topical, war and violence. Our human nature makes us go through great pains to protect the perceived innocence of children, even when it comes at the cost of truth. The result of this can be seen when Katniss, given her youth and innocence is placed in this terrible scenario, the reader is more appalled and disturbed than if the competitors were adults.

A difference between Vietnam and dystopias is the justification for violence and the degradation of morality. Although both Katniss and soldiers in Vietnam faced violence, Katniss was never faced with any moral ambiguity. Throughout most dystopian literature the protagonist has this sort of moral high ground that allows them to act with impunity, not that they would need it however, as authors are frequently more than willing to provide ample distinction between enemies who get what they deserve, and bystanders caught in the crossfire.

In *The Hunger Games* there is never a moment of questionable use of force, nor moral strife surrounding violence. The most direct act of abject violence committed by Katniss occurs when she shoots Marvel with her bow, but even that comes only after he killed Rue, providing justification for her actions. Of course, in a setting such as a fight to the death it makes plenty of sense to kill others, after all it is the supposed only way to survive,

but the reader would have a lot less empathy for Katniss if say, she laid an ambush before shooting others from out of reach. There is no sense of cold blooded murder, despite the setting requiring it. To avoid having to deal with the consequences of Katniss killing others the author elects to simply omit any element of moral ambiguity.

Soldiers in Vietnam were not afforded such a luxury. They were out in the bush for weeks on end, chasing an enemy they interacted with only through one sided ambushes and boobytraps. Strategies like body count essentially incentivized needless killing, as units with high body count would often earn “Rest and Recuperation.” Officers, knowing that higher body counts would reflect well on them and increase their odds for promotion often either turned a blind eye or encouraged excessive use of force, trying to use technological superiority and huge amounts of war materials to try and fight an unconventional enemy through conventional means.

For many, throughout their tour their sense of morality would degrade, regardless of whether or not they participated, and the line between right and wrong would become blurred. Herr describes this as part of why the public would never be able to understand the war, and those who fought in it had such a hard time conveying it. “Somewhere on the periphery of that total Vietnam issue whose daily reports made the morning papers too heavy to bear, lost in the surreal contexts of television, there was a story as simple as it had always been, men hunting men, a hideous war and all kinds of victims.” The war in Vietnam described by Herr is not one with a clean line between right and wrong, no clear cut good-guys-and-bad-guys distinction. This reality was perhaps best stated by Paul Meadlo’s mother after his role in the My Lai Massacre was exposed, saying “I gave them a good boy and they made him a murderer.”

The most significant difference between the *Hunger Games* and Vietnam is the purported enemy they faced. In the *Hunger Games*, the series ends with a war that overthrows the corrupt government. The force driving the plot was the need to overthrow the government and ultimately the government was overthrown. In Vietnam, the

concept of a clear goal was more ambiguous. Some saw themselves as there to protect liberty, some to fight the evils of communism, some told Herr they were there simply to “kill gooks,” but in the end it made no difference. Fighting an enemy who wore no uniforms and was often indistinguishable from civilians, soldiers were left to their own intuition, sent to “search and destroy” with barely more to go off of than a hunch and their gut feeling. This lack of a clear enemy means that there was no clean-cut conclusion to the war, something far different from most dystopias. Even *Brave New World* brought some form of conclusion in John’s suicide, whereas there was no conclusion to be found in Vietnam.

The reason why we find dystopian literature so compelling is because at some level we find it based on our own reality. To varying degrees of extrapolation, in some fashion the worlds woven in dystopias seem only like an extension of our own reality, however far-fetched. Conversely, due to dystopias being rooted in our world, we sometimes find things that would be more fitting, and perhaps more palatable, were they able to be dismissed as simply a fable or campfire story. Vietnam is one such incident that seems to fit better in the pages of a dystopian novel rather than in a history book, and as a nation we must understand how our actions and our aspirations led us to this dystopic conflict.

“The reason why we find dystopian literature so compelling is because at some level we find it based on our own reality.”

”



ANIMAL FARM: A PRODUCT OF ITS TIME

Siena

Dystopian novels are supposed to serve as warnings about what could potentially happen in the future. Many of these books can be used to warn of evils or corruption that could come about if things continue on their current path. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is no exception, playing into the fear of communism that had spread throughout the United Kingdom and the United States. Published in England in 1945, it presents Marxist methods for running a society in an allegorical critique of the Russian Revolution and Stalin's Soviet Union.

In August 1945, a review in *The Guardian* described *Animal Farm* as "a delightfully humorous and caustic satire on the rule of the many by the few." It was written at a time that ensured its popularity because it satirically warned of the dangers of communist rule, right as the Cold War was beginning and polarization between communist and noncommunist countries was intensifying. It was quickly a bestseller in the U.S., but perhaps what is even more of an indicator of its success as a critique of the Soviet Union is the fact that it was banned in Eastern Bloc countries until 1989.

Orwell's personal beliefs played heavily into the writing of *Animal Farm*. In his book *Why I Write*, he says he wanted *Animal Farm* "to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole." Orwell wrote in 1946 that it was "un conte satirique contre Staline" or a satire against Stalin, reflecting, "Of course I intended it primarily as a satire on the Russian revolution..[and] that kind of revolution (violent conspiratorial revolution, led by unconsciously power hungry people) can only lead to a change of masters [-] revolutions only effect a radical improvement when the mass-



es are alert." He was a socialist, but not to the extreme of Stalinism, more aligned with socialism for its economic principles and perhaps advocating for something between revolting and accepting the oppression they were under. In a 1947 preface

to his book, Orwell said that during Spanish Civil War he realized: "how easily totalitarian propaganda can control the opinion of enlightened people in democratic countries."

"But by the time *Animal Farm* was published, there was enough polarization with the USSR and the U.K. and U.S. due to the Cold War that he was no longer expressing an unpopular opinion

”

During World War II, Orwell was a strong critic of the U.K.'s alliance with the Soviet Union because so many idolized Stalin as a result of the alliance. But by the time *Animal Farm* was published, there was enough

polarization between the USSR and the U.K. and U.S. due to the Cold War that he was no longer expressing an unpopular opinion: "... for the past ten years I have been convinced that the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the socialist movement...I thought of exposing the Soviet myth in a story that could be easily understood by almost anyone and which could be easily translated into other languages." Orwell's intentional satire of the Soviet Union was aided by his own personal disdain for revolutionary socialism.

While the book is a reaction to Stalin's Soviet Russia, which is more in the vein of fascism and socialism, there is no denying its connections to communism. Animalism, the beliefs the animals society is based on, is clearly a play on the word and the crossed horn and hoof flag is meant to send a clear message. There are strong parallels between the messages in Old Major's speech in the first chapter of the book, in which he lays out a plan for the Revolution and Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto. Old Major says, "Now, comrades, what is the meaning of this life of ours? Let us face it: our lives are miserable, laborious, and short. No animal in England knows the meaning of happiness or leisure after he is a year old. No animal in England is free. The life of an animal is misery and slavery: this is the plain truth," while Marx called for the oppressed "Working men of all countries" to unite. Marx also expresses that the enemy is the bourgeois, which for the animals are the humans and the book further expresses marxist views as Mr. Jones owns the means of production, while the animals are "born, we are given just so much food as will keep the breath in our bodies, and those of us who are capable of it are forced to work to the last atom of our strength; and the very instant that our usefulness has come to an end we are slaughtered with hideous cruelty."



Nearly every scene in the book has an important historical connection that helps to establish the clear representation of the Soviet Union. Orwell believed that the scene in which the pigs receive all the apples and milk was the turning point in the book, and is a clear allegory for the double standard that emerged in the Soviet Union under Stalin, in which leaders would prosper while commoners starved. There are endless such examples in *Animal Farm*. The pig Napoleon soon became the sole leader in much the fashion that Stalin did, adopting mantras like "Whatever goes upon two

legs is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend", to polarize enemies, a play on the Stalin quote: "When there's a person, there's a problem. When there's no person, there's no problem."

The animals' seven commandments are also a great example of the pigs asserting their control in a Stalin-esque manner. Some of the original commandments the animals agreed upon were: "No animal shall wear clothes, no animal shall sleep in a bed, no animal shall drink alcohol, no animal shall kill any other animal, all animals are equal." The commandments are revised as needed by the pigs who begin to enjoy human activities including living in the farmhouse, drinking alcohol, sleeping in beds and wearing clothes. They eventually read: "No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets, No animal shall drink alcohol to excess, No animal shall kill any other animal without cause, All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

The very commandments that were enacted to keep the peace become the tool that is used to justify the pigs' rise to power and the oppression of the rest of the animals. This practice is not uncommon in a totalitarian regime, and revisionist history was certainly prevalent in the Soviet Union in order for those in power to secure a stronger hold on society.

In a review in *The Tribune* by Julian Symons, *Animal Farm* is summed up well: "it is

a satire not at all gentle upon a particular State –Soviet Russia?” It’s almost impossible to not to “identify Napoleon with Stalin, and Snowball with Trotsky, and express an opinion favourable or unfavourable to the author, upon a political ground...today it is a political satire with a good

deal of point.” Orwell used his own disdain for Stalin’s regime in the Soviet Union to effectively create a satire of it that could only have been equally effective at the time, playing into the widespread fear of communism.



RESISTANCE IS FUTILE, AT LEAST IT USED TO BE

Grace

Katniss Everdeen is a badass. She is the sole provider for her family, volunteers as tribute to save her sister, and is a highly skilled archer, hunter, and trapper. As the protagonist of *The Hunger Games*, she is one of the strongest and most well known figures of young adult literature, an inspiration to a generation of readers. Winston Smith, the everyman protagonist of *1984*, is feeble and sickly. He can barely walk up stairs, has an ulcer on his ankle, and does a lot of writing and philosophizing in his journal. Despite his dreams of revolution, he is ineffectual. Both dystopias take place in flawed, unideal societies, but the protagonists of the modern young adult dystopia and the traditional dystopia have little in common. It looks like dystopias have changed a lot from 1949 to 2008. The most significant contrast between each story depends on the differences between how each protagonist rebels against the dystopian society around them.

Everyone is familiar with traditional dystopias, even if they haven’t read them. George Orwell, Margaret Atwood, and Aldous Huxley are well known authors whose dystopian novels have lasted as classics and have

been made into multiple adaptations. Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* has even recently been made into a TV series. But the protagonists in each of their stories leave much to be desired. Winston Smith in *1984* is a middle aged man with “a smallish, frail figure...” (*1984*, pg. 4). Similarly, Bernard in *Brave New World* is described as “ugly,” “small,” and “a mistake” (*Brave New World*, pg. 46). These protagonists are ordinary and seriously flawed, not people that readers can look up to. But the existence of these dysfunctional characters forces readers to question the society that has created them. In this idea lies the purpose of the traditional dystopia, to warn readers about the dangers

of totalitarian government and ask them to question their own society.

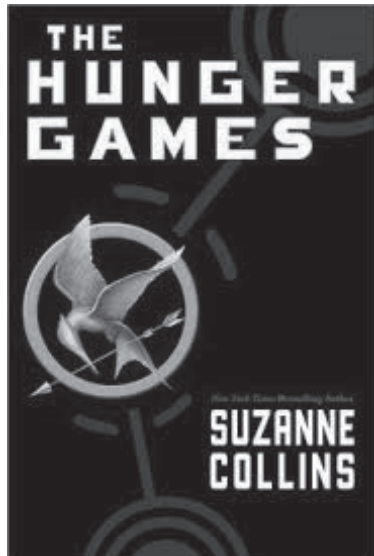
The traditional dystopia tends to be serious, with a final message or moral. It is intended for adult readers, and usually this type of writing is a work of literary merit. The purpose of these novels is to draw attention to issues and themes that the author believes are important. The author communicates their message through their protagonist, typically an adult

who is not happy in the society. The protagonist performs small acts of rebellion, whether it is writ-

“ In the traditional dystopia, any rebellion against the government is in vain. This represents a main terror of the traditional dystopia, a totalitarian government with such absolute power that any resistance or divergence is crushed and destroyed. ”

ing in a journal while out of view of the cameras as Winston Smith does in **1984**, or frequently discussing criticisms of the World State as Bernard Marx does with Helmholtz Watson in **Brave New World** (*Brave New World*, pg. 66-71). It is important to recognize that this traditional protagonist may be a visionary, but they can never become a leader. While these characters are unhappy with their life, there is not much they can do about it. Generally their small rebellions are found and destroyed easily by the powerful government. After Bernard does not conform to the World State, he is “sent to an island” as the ultimate punishment for his subversion (*Brave New World*, pg. 225-229). Winston is tortured and reprogrammed for his acts of defiance in the ironically named Ministry of Love (**1984**, Chapter 5). In the traditional dystopia, any rebellion against the government is in vain. This represents a main terror of the traditional dystopia, a totalitarian government with such absolute power that any resistance or divergence is crushed and destroyed.

The Hunger Games and similar “modern” dystopias are less thought-provoking than “traditional” dystopias. This type of book doesn’t have a deeper meaning and isn’t a case study of extremes in government, rather, it is a teen empowerment novel with a strong action/adventure theme. The protagonist is typically a teenager who reveals and fights the corruption of the society that they are in. Even if there is an existing rebellion against the government, it needs the differently thinking teenage protagonist before it can be successful. Eventually the teenager provides the key to overthrowing the corrupt government. Tris thinks differently from other members of society in *Divergent*, and this way of



VS.



thinking allows her to break the existing society. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss forces people to acknowledge the corruption of the Capitol with her handful of berries, providing the “spark” of rebellion that sets the districts ablaze. Without Katniss’s act, the District 13 rebellion could not succeed, and only Katniss can make the new society successful by choosing to directly kill the manipulative President Coin. The ability of a teenager to bring down the existing society almost individually is an important aspect of the modern dystopia.

So why are the protagonists so different in the styles of dystopia writing? The answer lies in what the books are trying to accomplish, and

the audience that they are trying to reach. The imperfect protagonists of the traditional dystopia are intended to demonstrate the horror of government control. Their resistance is futile, showing us that if such societies are

ever able to form, it will be virtually impossible to topple them. This serious literature is intended for adult readers, and making the protagonist an adult helps readers relate with the character and their situation. The modern dystopia has an entirely different purpose, to empower teen readers and provide release to their stereotypically rebellious natures. Every teen wants to feel like they can change the world, and modern dystopias provide situations where teenagers really do make an impact. It’s fun to read an action novel where talented teens smash the things that keep them from being free. We will have to see if these lighter novels last as long as the traditional dystopias that have been recognized for their literary merit.



WHY I READ FANTASY

Simon

As an elementary schooler, I was afraid of the *Harry Potter* books. When I was eight years old, I decided to borrow the first book from my babysitter. I thought I was pretty cool. However, my mettle would be tested during the “Halloween” chapter. I had heard from my friend that this really scary troll shows up and attacks them in the bathroom. I remember nervously crouching on the stairs, unable to sit still while I half read, half hyperventilated. When Harry and Ron decided to check in the bathroom for Hermione, I couldn’t take it. I hurriedly crammed the book into a shelf and ran as fast as I could to the other end of my house, where I proceeded to not touch to the



book for a year.

In my late elementary school years, I set my sights on the rising genre of dystopia. As I read books like *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*, I was swept up in their themes of rebellion and totalitarianism. However, as I went through them, I noticed a stark difference in their villains. Instead of tangible and individualized villains who captured my imagination, I found cold puppet masters who controlled the plot from behind the scenes.

The reason that high fantasy works is that it offers a level of escapism reflected in its different setting and laws of reality. Modern dystopia, however, reflects the angst and internal conflict that the adult world sees in adolescents. All of these are reflected in the nature of their villains. High fantasy uses a tangible villain, be it a secluded fortress of darkness or a marching army across the land, allowing for a clear objective and relative moral simplicity. Modern dystopia, on the other hand, likes to have the villain be part of the tyrannical establishment - a leader in the protagonist’s society. This allows authors to dive into the themes of teen angst and other issues of internal conflict.

In your average fantasy novel, the villain or antagonist creates a connection to your imagination, be it a dark wizard with no nose or a giant floating orange eye at the top of a tower. They have values and characteristics that shape their actions throughout the plot, allowing the audience to have a sense of clarity when defining the evil in the story. One classic example of this is Smeagol (Gollum) from the *Lord of the Rings* series. Smeagol is a severely unhinged hobbit who has been changed into an obsessive lunatic by the One Ring. This is shown in the movies by Smeagol having a conversation with his evil,

obsessive half, deciding whether or not to “kill the filthy hobbitses” in their sleep. By giving the audience a genuine person for an antagonist, weaklings like myself become a lot more terrified of the villain, and therefore more invested in the plot.

These complex villains will often have an internal journey similar to the hero, growing and adapting their personality over the course of the work. I think one of the best examples of this Saruman from *Lord of the Rings*. (Yes, I like that series a lot). When present-

ed with the unstoppable force of Sauron and the hordes of Mordor, he turns from a “good” guy (we all know he was kind of a jerk) into one of the Dark Lord’s main lieutenants, and proceeds to beat the living crap out of Gandalf. Over the rest of the story, we see his controlling aspects he used as a good guy applied to his leadership of an evil army. This concept of villains having character arcs and deep reasons for why they do the things they do is one of the best parts about a good fantasy story.

Undeniably, the genre that has gained the most popularity in the recent years is dystopia. And no, I am not talking about good, hardy dystopia like *1984* or *Brave New World*. I’m talking angsty and explosion filled not-really-even-dystopia type stuff. The biggest of these titles include things like *Divergent* and *The Hunger Games*. And if you think their protagonists are cookie cutter, just wait until you see the villains.

Today’s “dystopian” stories will feature their own oppressive government system of choice and a villain to reflect that system. These villains will often take the form of a figurehead, spouting the rhetoric of their society and not really capturing the imagination. Speaking of no imagination, let’s look at *Divergent*. Its villain

of choice is....oh crap, I forgot her name. Um... the one lady, you know, the one that talks about factions, and staying in your place, and ends up mind controlling a bunch of people. Let me just get one thing straight. Any good villain is memorable, and allows your imagination to create its own unique image. However, today’s dystopia writers seem to be content with a talking head that just spits the ideas of the society. And there, ladies and gentlemen, lies the difference between fantasy and dystopia villains.

As much as I would like to prattle on about *Divergent* and its lack of character depth, let’s look at why authors of this genre write villains like this. My best guess (as a member of their target audience) is that they want to explore this idea of the establishment being the “bad guy” in a story. I think they see most teens as trying to fit in and make their own way in the world, and therefore be receptive to all of these “break the mold” type stories. Apparently, we fight day and night against the tyranny of the public school system, or even society as a whole and we need to be reached through some gritty, relatable teen angst.

When it comes down to it, I believe fantasy is better than dystopia, even though dystopia is far more popular. I understand that dystopia really appeals to teens who feel like they have been a victim of “the system” and seek to fight against the crushing pressures of modern society. However, I enjoy fantasy because it allows me to escape from societal pressures, and lets my brain imagine its own different world. I can create my own world instead of being reminded of the one I live in.

“ The reason that high fantasy works is that it offers a level of escapism reflected in its different setting and laws of reality.

”



DYSTOPIA VS. APOCALYPSE

(NOT AN ALL-STAR WRESTLING MATCH)

Ella

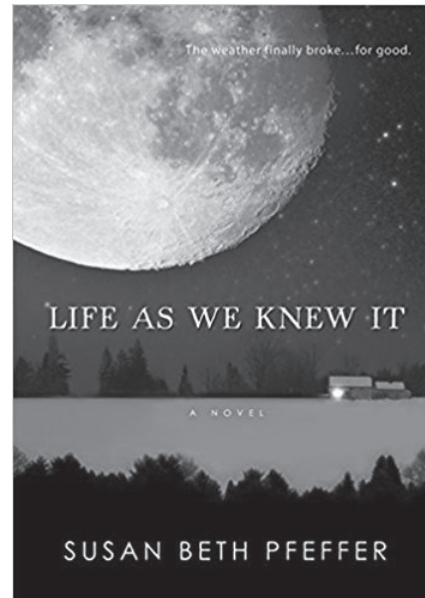
In a classic scene from *The Hunger Games*, our strong young protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, rises up against her oppressive government. She'd rather eat a handful of poisonous berries with her companion than let the Capitol win. She forces her government to either lose their victor, their reason for the games, or let a girl from their lowest district defeat them. Her quick wit and her survival skills keep her alive, and her strong willed nature fuels her upcoming fight for the destruction of the capital. In a scene from the book *Life As We Knew It*, a young girl fights to survive when an asteroid hits the moon. The impact drives it closer to earth, causing chaos around the world. When food becomes scarce she must survive with her family, fighting and arguments become increasingly more common as the food runs out. Her battle for survival relies on her quick thinking and her ability to adapt.

The first story is a classic dystopia, the second belongs to a genre I refer to as apocalyptic. Are these two genres really that different? Can they collide?

There are similarities between the two genres, both contain protagonists that must overcome obstacles that are presented to them. Both dystopian works and apocalyptic stories contain elements of a coming of age story, a young protagonist overcoming their struggles. However dystopia -- at least the modern version -- focuses heavily on the young adults rebelling against intimidating governments, whereas apocalyptic stories delve into the strong wills that are needed to overcome a struggle against the elements.

However there are several important differences between the two. Classic dystopian novels focus largely on either the government, or big corporations. *The Hunger Games* is a prime exam-

ple, Katniss Everdeen must rebel against her controlling and oppressive government for the good of



the people. The idea that things are never how they seem is the essence of dystopia. Apocalyptic literature still offers this underlying theme of 'overcoming', but it supplies it through physical destruction and disaster. The line between these two genres may

be blurred at times, but key things such as setting and the overall storyline can help you differ between the two.

These apocalyptic stories provide the reader with two questions, could this happen in our future? And could you survive? This contributes to their popularity as well as their difference from dystopian stories. The protagonist faces incredibly difficult scenarios that test their strength, both mental and physical. "We'd stared into the face of Death, and Death blinked first. You'd think that would make us feel brave and invincible. It didn't." *-Life as We Knew It*. These challenges shape the characters, and the challenges themselves come from our environment. *Life as We Knew It* throws a teenage girl and her family into peril when the moon is pushed closer to Earth. Survival is key and they must do whatever is necessary to achieve this. With Apocalyptic novels the setting is important to

establish the story, be it an environmental disaster like in *Life as We Knew It*, or brought on by outside forces in *The 5th Wave*. “I lay still inside the bed of dust and bones, covered by the ashes of their victims, the Others’ bitter harvest. And I tried not to think about it. What I was covered in. Then I thought, These bones were people, and these people saved my life, and I didn’t feel so creeped.” -*The 5th Wave*. These detailed accounts of the character’s surroundings shape the story. Without these details the story may lose its power.

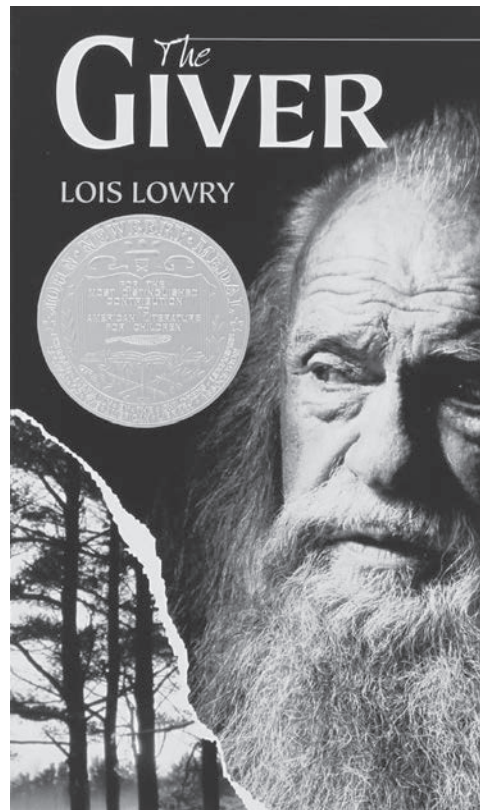
Dystopian stories offer something different: the possibility of something terrible happening right under your nose. How would you deal with it? Would you rise up and fight back? Popular young adult novels such as *The Hunger Games* and *The Giver* delve into this possibility. The controlling governments in these stories may be different, but they are from the same family. *The Giver* offers a situation where the majority is completely ignorant to all of the faults with their society, only to be discovered by a young boy searching for answers. “If everything’s the same, then there aren’t any choices! I want to wake up in the morning and decide things!” -*The Giver*. Government is the underlying force that pushes these characters to want more. Restrictions bring rebellions. *The Hunger Games* demonstrates this, and more. “Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. ‘Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there’s nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we

will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen.’” -*The Hunger Games*. The protagonist must rise up, fight back and survive. Dystopian literature can be written in many different ways, but always there is a controlling force; be it the government, big corporation or any other. Without this, it is no longer dystopian.

Of course there is always the possibility that dystopia and apocalypse collide; books such as *City of Ember* demonstrate this perfectly. The story has a controlling government, “Doon Harrow and Lina Mayfleet – Wanted for spreading vicious rumors – If you see them, report to mayor’s chief guard. Believe nothing they say. Reward,” but they also have the apocalyptic element of the world ending, which landed them in this underground city in the first place.

There may forever be an argument if there is always a divide in these two genres, but there may be key details to distinguish the two. Focusing on the government and how the people interact with it as well as the surrounding environment may provide clues as to which genres you may be reading. These two genres have always been extremely popular with young adults, the ideas of rebellion and independence are seen as incredibly appealing. Both

genres contain these elements, so are they really that different?



Dystopian stories offer something different: the possibility of something terrible happening right under your nose.

”



AN ACTION STORY IN DYSTOPIC CLOTHING

DID THE HUNGER GAMES REVIVE THE DYSTOPIA GENRE, OR KILL IT?

Leona

In a classic scene from Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, Katniss Everdeen tries to stay alive. "How long I scramble along dodging fireballs I can't say, but the attacks finally begin to abate. Which is good because I'm retching again." Dodging fireballs? Scenes like this beg the question: is *The Hunger Games* a true dystopian novel, or is it just a captivating action/adventure in dystopian clothing?

The first chapter of a book can tell you a lot about it, even the genre. A prime example of this is *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. In the opening chapter he makes sure the setting is properly described. "A squat grey building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and, in a shield, the World State's motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY." This is literally the very first paragraph that opens the book. "Conditioning", "grey", and "squat" all have negative connotations and happen to be some of the first words at the start of this classic, but it sets a perfect scene for a dystopian book. You get some idea of political atmosphere because of the motto "COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY" in addition to the set up for "a dark, nightmare world."

In *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, on the other hand, the opening line is focused on the character. "When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim's warmth but finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress" What does this tell me about the political atmosphere? Next to nothing. Sure it seems that the main character is cold and there is a "rough cover" on the mattress she is sleeping on. This opening line tells me this main character nor-

mally sleeps in the same bed as her sister. I could infer that sisters don't typically share one bed, but the author alludes to the fact that they are sharing a bed out of necessity for warmth, which could mean their living conditions are poor, perhaps due to an oppressive government...? But that's a long shot and a lot of filling in the blanks.

Suzanne Collins takes the approach of creating a badass character that people can find intriguing or even relatable, especially to young adults. According to Samantha Ellis, journalist for *The Guardian*, "Suzanne Collins's 16-year-old heroine is hard as nails" and "so magnificent." She creates a character that drives the story and makes you want to keep reading. I don't want to keep reading this book to see how the protagonist interacts with their political environment. No. I want to know if Katniss will win the hunger games, or if she'll pick Gale or Peeta?

Huxley, by contrast, makes the first page of his book unquestionably dystopian when he goes on to describe a room inside this governmental building with phrases such as "cold for all the summer beyond the panes," "pallid shape of academic goose-flesh," and "gloved with a pale corpse-coloured rubber." This clearly depicts a negative environment that a character, who is not even mentioned until the second page of the novel, would want to rebel against or change.

By opening with a badass character like Katniss, Collins sets her book up to be an action/adventure book. In an action/adventure book you follow a super cool character who does crazy cool stuff like fighting monsters, or going on an adventure with a wizard, an elf, and a dwarf on a mission to destroy a ring by casting it into the volcanic fires

in the Crack of Doom. In this case you follow Katniss Everdeen from district 12 who embarks on the hero's journey and shoots stuff with arrows along the way.

Another factor is that Katniss' whole life changes in the story. She gets more involved with the government by volunteering to fight in the Hunger Games, but her motive to fight in the games isn't to change or stop the Hunger Games or the political environment, it's to protect her little sister. "I protect Prim in every way I can, but I'm powerless against the reaping. The anguish I always feel when she's in pain wells up in my chest and threatens to register on my face. I notice her blouse has pulled out of her skirt in the back again and force myself to stay calm. "Tuck your tail in, little duck," I say, smoothing the blouse back in place." When the unthinkable happens and Prim's name does get drawn at the reaping Katniss protects her by volunteering to fight in the hunger games in place of her.

In classic dystopian novels like 1984 by George Orwell and Brave New World the main characters live pretty regular lives. The author focuses on their regular day-to-day activities in their society

and then to show how they interact with their political landscape. "Winston kept his back turned to the telescreen. It was safer, though, as he well knew, even a back can be revealing." Winston is so afraid of the government that even when he turns his back he's worried that his thoughts of rebellion will be found out.

In 1984 there is one moment of "modern action" when the bomb is dropped. Other than that the action of this dystopian novel is internal, like worrying about the thought police. Winston physically isn't fighting other people or the government. Katniss, on the other hand, is shooting arrows at a bag of apples to trigger an explosion, "Then the apples spill to the ground and I'm blown backward into the air,"

and fighting for supplies in an arena. "I'm turning to fire (an arrow) again when the second knife catches me in the forehead." The Hunger Games is about the fighting. Half of the book is set in the arena where tons of action is taking place. If this was a real dystopian book it would focus on how the Hunger Games affects the setting i.e. the political atmosphere, people's reactions to the Hunger Games, how Katniss changes, and the way the government thinks. At the end of the book there is some resolution when Katniss takes out the berries. However, this is not an active statement against the government, it's a gambit designed to save her skin and her love interest. "I spread out my fingers, and the dark berries glisten in the sun. I give Peeta's hand one last squeeze as a signal, as a goodbye, and we begin counting. "One."

Maybe I'm wrong. "Two." Maybe they don't care if we both die. "Three!" It's too late to change my mind. I lift my hand to my mouth, taking one last look at the world." Romeo and Juliet much? She does disagree with them, but she's more worried about saving Peeta. "If I want to keep Peeta alive, I've got to give the audience something more to care about.

"I don't want to keep reading this book to see how the protagonist interacts with their political environment. No. I want to know if Katniss will win the hunger games, or if she'll pick Gale or Peeta?"

”

Star-crossed lovers desperate to get home together. Two hearts beating as one. Romance."

It's not just The Hunger Games that doesn't fall into a true dystopian category- it's all modern "dystopia" books, Divergent is another example. Let's be honest, kids nowadays really only find a book interesting if it has some action/adventure vibes, but if you add too much you take away from a book being a true dystopian novel. A prime example is The Hunger Games. It was catered to what would sell, what kid wouldn't pick up a book about other young adults killing each other and not want read it? Does this mean that true dystopian novels are dying breed in this new generation?





DYSTOPIC ROMANCE

IS THE HUNGER GAMES A TRUE DYSTOPIA?

Melina

Watching the screen broadcasting the games, Gale sees his love, Katniss, decide to risk her life to save Peeta and passionately kiss him. Hurt, Gale slowly looks away with a disappointed look on his face because he has loved her for so long and has wanted to be with her for even longer. The Hunger Games trilogy is almost always labeled as dystopian, but after taking a closer look I came to the conclusion that the books really are not dystopian novels, but simply contain some elements of one. It is true that the world of Panem is very unpleasant and

controlled by the totalitarian government known as the Capitol, but the books seem to focus more on the action adventure in the Hunger Games and the love triangle between Katniss, Peeta, and Gale than on any sort of political statement.

Romance plays a huge roll in the the books, even more so than the dystopian elements. A lot of Katniss' feelings are related to the love triangle and influence the decisions (most importantly concerning survival) she makes when she is in the games. Through this romance the reader is introduced to how caring, selfless, and witty she is. In

the first novel Katniss decides to go along with the “starcrossed lovers” image with Peeta in order to attract the Capitol to liking them and therefore persuading them to send resources they need when they are in the games. At the end of the games, she cheats the gamekeepers by pretending to take nightlock berries so neither Peeta or her get to live, and for the first time two winners are produced from the games. Both of these actions show how far she would go for both her own and the survival of her partner as well as creating a dramatic love story between two teenagers.

According to the Goodreads website, the Hunger Games trilogy is categorized as a set of “action adventure” books, and I think that is rightfully named. The first nine chapters of the first book focus on how Katniss prepares for the games including saying goodbye to her family and meeting with her “coach”. Beginning in chapter ten when she first steps foot in the Hunger Games arena and through chapter twenty-five when she and Peeta are named the victors, the main focus of the narrative is on the action behind her survival. It is written in a fast paced, page-turning way that makes the reader not want to put the book down in fear that something

terrible might happen at any moment and they must read on. Yes, this definitely could be a main factor of a dystopian trilogy, and they do reference how the Capitol is reacting to the brutality of the games. But as the trilogy goes on, it becomes more about the war action between the people and the Capitol. Ultimately, the books mostly focus on the war between the Capitol and the people.

Lastly, I think these books do not make a true dystopian story because of the way it ends: happily. After being brainwashed by the Capitol and turned against Katniss, Peeta recovers and the two starcrossed lovers go on to live a life with brutal memories and PTSD, but now in a peaceful world with the potential to start over and create a better future for their children. Compared to dystopian classics which have given this genre a name such as *Brave New World* and *1984* which end in a suicide and conforming to a totalitarian leader, the Hunger Games does not end so drastically. Together, all of these mentioned components produce a well written, page-turning series but not one I would classify as dystopian.



THE ONES WHO WALK AWAY FROM OMELAS

Mayong

When you think of dystopias, you think about a stable but flawed society. The society maintains stability, but at a cost. For example, in *Brave New World*, where soma is used to enslave the citizens to feel enforced happiness. They are trapped in this happy world that only lasts ten hours. The citizens are forced to conform to society through operant conditioning and enforced drug use.

You're probably not familiar with Ursula Le

Guin's short story, *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas*. The price paid for stability in this world is frighteningly simple, but unpleasant. Le Guin describes Omelas as an “ideal city” through the guise of a utopia. The story begins at summer festival, with crowded streets and sounds of “shimmering of gong and tambourine,” that drew people to dance. “Merry women carrying their babies and chatting as they walked,” while children are playing through the streets, willing horses with their bare-

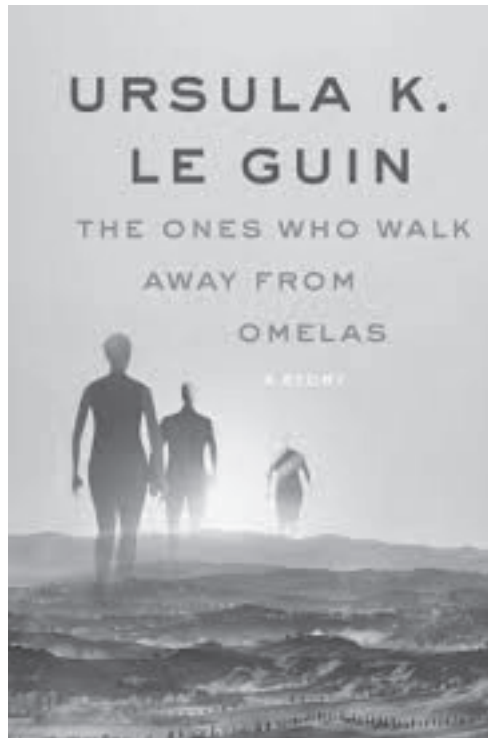
feets.

Sounds great right?

Well not only is the city full of such great and fun things, the citizens are smart and non-violent. Le Guin goes into great measures to really convince us that the citizens of Omelas are no less complex than us and are PERFECT in everyway. She describes Omelas as a clean and well-maintained city with no king or government. But there is one exception, in this society for a idyllic city.

The one exception that must be followed for the idyllic city they desire, where all the unhappiness of the society is placed upon a child. The child was locked in a basement cell covered in its own excrement and festered with sores. It was either born defective or became an imbecile through fear, malnutrition and neglect. The child did live a normal life as a citizen. It could still remember sunlight, its mother's voice, and sometimes speaks and cries, "I will be good!" "Please let me out!" for a good deal but they never answer. It only makes whining sounds and speaks less and less. It is kept in misery to enable everyone else's happiness, the health of their children, the beauty of their city, and the abundance of their harvest.

Think of it as an allusion to Jesus, but not entirely like it. Jesus was born to die on the cross for the sins committed by mankind. It was Jesus's



“She describes Omelas as a clean and well-maintained city with no king or government. But there is one exception, in this society for a idyllic city.

”

the child is only to benefit themselves.

Often young people leave home and does not come back when they have seen the child in the room and keeping walking. “They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not

cost for their idyllic society.

The Ones Who Walks Away from Omelas and Brave New World demonstrate that stability often comes at a cost. For some in the city of Omelas, the cost is too much.

fate to sacrifice his life for his people. However, the difference is that the child is a scapegoat not a sacrifice.

Are the people of Omelas really doing this for the city or themselves?

Now most citizens don't feel any guilt about the child, in fact some feel contented. Some are even disgusted by the child but most of them learn to accept the situation. Many wanted to help the child but they began to rationalize that if the child was to be brought into sunlight and cleaned, “all the prosperity and beauty and delight of Omelas would wither and be destroyed.” The exploitation of

come back.” LeGuin says. The ones who walks away are different. They won't accept the child's misery, or refuse to accept the



JACK THE ANIMATOR

Adriana

Of all the books I read in high school, one character stands out as the a figurehead of evil and destruction -- Jack from the Lord of the Flies. Jack is pure evil; he drives the rest of the boys away from civilization and towards killing for meat and then for fun.

In the Lord of the Flies we can see a clear division between the boys when they first meet. The only boys who know each other from before are the kids that are part of the choir and follow their leader who at the beginning they call "Merridew". From the beginning we see that Jack Merridew is used to being a chief and a leader. When the boys decide that there should be a leader, Merridew nominates himself right away but the boys don't like the idea and say "how about a vote?" and that is how Ralph becomes chief and Merridew becomes the one who strives to drag all the boys on the island into savagery.

From the very beginning Jack is described as a "not charming boy with an ugly face" which to me makes me think about a villain in the movie who is ugly and overall not very well liked. On the other hand we have Ralph, who is described as "charming and great with all the characteristics of a leader," but he is so insecure that it doesn't work out. Jack can see that Ralph lacks leadership skills even though he may seem like a leader, and that is when he begins to slowly bring out the savagery in every boy. As the narrator informs us: "what intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy while the most obvious leader was Jack."

"Merridew becomes the one who strives to drag all the boys on the island into savagery."

Looking back at the story, it is clear that Jack is the figurehead of evil, leading almost everybody astray. First I want to start off with this great inspirational quote by Jack "We've got to have rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages. We're English, and the English are best at everything" How ironic is this? The scene in which we see one of Jack's first glimpses of Jack's personality is the scene in which he stays out late hunting, disobeying Ralph's orders, in order to satisfy his desire for

meat. When Jack returns, he tries to justify his actions: "Jack tried to convey the compulsion to track down and kill that was swallowing him up." When Jack is conveying his desire to kill and get meat he is

described as having "madness" in his eyes. This scene shows us his first act of disobedience towards the chief and the rules and his desire to kill.

In chapter four we can see that Jack continues with his desire and urge to hunt but is now giving himself more power by shielding his identity by painting his face: "Jack looked in astonishment, no longer at himself but at an awesome stranger... He began to dance and his laughter became a bloodthirsty snarling... Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness." We can also see that he is now dragging

minor characters, such as Samneric, who do not want to go hunting at all but do it for fear of Jack. In this chapter we see that Jack finally fulfills his desire for pig meat and now feels the desire to be respected, followed, and even revered: "I painted my face—I stole up. Now you eat—all of you!" A lot happens in chapter five. First of all we witness an all out argument between Ralph and Jack that ends with the meeting and gets the younger kids excited with the idea of having Jack as their new leader, "Bollocks to the rules! We're strong—we hunt! If there's a beast, we'll hunt it down! We'll close in and beat and beat and beat—!" In their argument Jack tells Ralph what I think is definitely the most important characteristic of a leader "you can't sing" In this scene we can see that all Jack cares about is eating meat,

hunting, and having fun, and not going home. We also see that most of the boys are already leaning toward Jack's 'side.' They too would like to have meat and hunt. Piggy's statement foreshadows later events, "If Jack was chief he'd have all hunting and no fire. We'd be here till we died."

These are only three of the many scenes in the book in which we see Jack transform into a full on savage who is thirsty for blood. Whereas the dystopian stories we read this year generally had no clear figure head -- the government or some other institution is in charge. The source of savagery in *Lord of the Flies* is Jack. Savage boys like Jack use their power to gratify their own desires, treating the little boys as objects for their own amusement.



TRUMP AND MACHIAVELLI

A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN?

Madie

"Niccolò Machiavelli, the great sixteenth-century Florentine diplomat, is synonymous with ruthless, immoral, self-serving behavior. Despite his bad rap, and while he did habitually cheat on his wife, he was a loving father, loyal friend, and brutally honest observer of the human condition. He commented on everything he saw — the cruelty, brutality, lies, and deceit — and wasn't afraid to tell it like it is."

-Suzy Evans, RawStory History News Network

Sound familiar? I thought so, too. Donald Trump's bids for political power remind me of Niccolò Machiavelli in many ways, and it's not just their deplorable personalities that line up eerily well. In 1532, Machiavelli wrote a book called "The Prince," which lays out suggestions and guidelines for men to follow if they wish to become a successful ruler. As I was reading, I was surprised to see that much of the ideology outlined in his book can be applied to Trump's presiden-

tial candidacy, and to his presidency thus far.

In chapter 18 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli advises that a ruler "need not feel uneasy about being criticised for that bad behaviour which is necessary to maintain the state." Donald Trump's speeches last year while he was campaigning make this quote easily applicable. Trump often spoke negatively of his political rivals, and made derogatory and unseemly remarks about people from all walks of life. Clearly, he wasn't worried about

being criticized for his bad behavior on the campaign trail, or he and his platform would've made more of an effort to tone it down. To his—and Machiavelli's—credit, he won the electoral college by an unprecedented margin. As one reporter put it, "[Clinton's] approach won her over 2.7 million more votes than Trump. His approach won him the presidency." Machiavelli's model fits Donald like a glove. He may not have behaved in a presidential or decent manner, but he did what was necessary to win.

Another sticking point comes with this Machiavellian guidance: "Let a prince have the credit for conquering and holding his state, the means will always be considered honest, and he will be praised by everybody." Trump's delivery makes people see him as honest, claiming it's because he speaks his mind, and tells it like it is. His supporters admire him and believe in him because they feel he isn't hiding anything from them, and Donald himself is very aware of this fact. As he puts it, "the people, they love me." That sounds a lot like what Machiavelli intended, and while he may not be praised by everyone in the country, there are a fair amount who do.

In the next chapter of *The Prince*, Machiavelli writes "Therefore it is unnecessary for a prince to have all the good qualities I have described, but it is very necessary to appear to have them," perfectly describing yet another Machiavellian technique that Donald Trump used on the campaign trail. His surface-level persona that got so many voters on board with his Make America Great Again tagline was designed to be appealing; he "appears to have all the good qualities" Machiavelli talks about, such as honesty, friendship, kindness, and integrity. On closer inspection, however, he's clearly been following the "unnecessary to have them" route.

Even after he took office, he was still inadvertently following Machiavelli's advice. From chapter 16: "It does not take away your

reputation if you waste what belonged to others, but adds to it. It is only in wasting your own possessions that injures you." Trump's numerous vacation days while in office is just one example of how he's started spending others' money before his own. He admitted to this, brashly claiming that "There's nothing like doing things with other people's money."

To close on a slightly more contradictory note, there is one big way in which Donald Trump decidedly does not conform to Machiavelli's lengthy checklist. Are you ready? Here's the chapter 19 heading:

CHAPTER 19 THAT ONE SHOULD AVOID BEING HATED AND DESPISED

Aha! This is the point where Donald's flawless Machiavellian strategy completely falls apart. Although Niccolò does instruct that "it is wiser to be feared than loved," he also emphasizes that inspiring hatred in one's subjects will only bring about the end of one's reign more swiftly (impeachment, anyone?). And avoiding hatred isn't taken lightly by the Italian mastermind, because chapter 19 is one of the longest chapters in the book. So while all other evidence may point unequivocally towards Donald Trump being a perfect Machiavellian candidate, this is one rebuttal that could be used to completely dissolve that entire argument.

Donald Trump's political presence may not be a perfect match for a Machiavellian Prince, but he comes close to fitting the mold. And upon reading any more than one sentence of Machiavelli's publication, it is impossible not to notice the parallels *The Prince* has with the sitting president's politics and personality. As one writer on the Daily Kos aptly put it, "every damn sentence [in the book] had relevance," and I would have to agree. Donald Trump; Commander in Chief, POTUS, and Prince.

“There’s nothing like doing things with other people’s money.”

”



DYSTOPIA GOES CORPORATE

BIG BUSINESS IS THE NEW VILLAIN

Annette

President elect Donald Trump's inauguration into office has spiked the sales of George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (increasing sales by 9,200 percent, according to the Huffington Post) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (increasing book printing demand by 100,000 copies in 2016, according to the New York Times), proving that dystopian literature continues to maintain its intrigue for its depiction of dark worlds set in the not so distant future. While classic dystopias were set based in a world ruled by corrupt governments, a whole new breed of dystopias has come about. The present-day enemy for the genre is corporate corruption.

Brave New World and *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* are two notable dystopias that take place in governmentally controlled societies within England. Themes of citizen conditioning and manipulation, and the presence of divided character groups/types (i.e. "Alphas", "Betas" or, "Savages" and, those of the "Inner Party", or the "Outer Party") are central. Huxley wrote *Brave New World* under the influence of past utopian novels such as *A Modern Utopia* and, *Men Like Gods*. He often referred to *Brave New World* as simply a "negative utopia", as characters within the novel are oblivious to the oppressive, authoritarian, dystopian-like practices, while readers are able to easily identify these themes. George Orwell, however, wrote *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* from a place of fear and concern for the way in which the world, specifically British Democracy, was headed following WWII. The novel's own gov-

erning Party's slogan stating, "war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength" is heavily notable, as in the story it represents the weakening of individual independence and the force of a "propaganda-induced" fear. Both of Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (1949) share the common element of following the crafted society's enforced class distinctions ("Inner party", "Outer party", "Proles", "Man v. Pig").

Nineteen-Eighty-Four is most often referred to as a "cautionary tale" on revolution, which many within our actual and current world view to be holding true.

While books like *Brave New World* and *1984* feature governments that were written with the intention

to convey everyone conditioning to be the same, their modern counterparts portray societies that are far more divisive, in a more economical context. *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* are two prominent examples of this. Suzanne Collins wrote *The Hunger Games* (notably similar in plot to, *The Lottery*), set in a post-apocalyptic version of North America that takes place in an unknown future time. The wealth/power struggle between the very wealthy and very poor citizens of the novel's society of Panem, the use of the Hunger Games as entertainment for the very wealthy located in the capital of Panem (far away from the poor), and the inclusion of a totalitarian government, all place dystopian themes in a modernized, wealth based, context.

Veronica Roth wrote *Divergent* in the same

"While classic dystopias were set based in a world ruled by corrupt governments, a whole new breed of dystopias has come about. The present-day enemy for the genre is corporate corruption."

”

common post-apocalyptic world of Chicago, breaking down 5 divided faction types for the society (Erudite, Dauntless, Candor, Abnegation, Amity), each falling under the control of prominent capital/business-like powers. This version of Chicago's government leads the society to believe that they are only able to fit into one faction, for the full benefit of their city, or else they'll be killed. However, room is left for the "factionless" in this world, made up of those who cannot be categorized into any of the "five factions", resulting in them being left in poverty and/or to conduct demanding work for the society. This is another example of the placement of dystopian themes into a context of a wealth based environment. These two books are often compared as they're commonly categorized under the same young adult dystopian genre and, are both often described to follow the same stylistic structure.

As older dystopias written during the twen-

tieth century are seen to become more and more relevant to issues within today's society, modern dystopia may just be a predictor into what the world may soon continue resemble. The movement aiming to take away women's birthing rights, the implementation of increased national security, and the categorical practices of classifying people within society, specifically based upon race, are all things that 20th century dystopias have foreshadowed. With the preface of an apocalyptic world seeming drastic, modern dystopia has already begun to draw attention to the potential and already occurring issues of big business. While these issues are exaggerated in dystopia they're that are developing to be present within our world, gaining recognition as issues to be debated within our politics today.



IS EQUALITY DANGEROUS?

VONNEGUT'S CLASSIC REFLECTS ITS TIME

Mae Goodrich

Everybody was finally equal. They weren't only equal before God and the law. They were equal in every which way.

These are the opening lines of Harrison Bergeron, a dystopian short story written by Kurt Vonnegut in 1961, which explores the detrimental effects of total equality. The government in Vonnegut's story handicaps its citizens who are smarter, stronger, and more beautiful than others so that everyone is physically and mentally alike. Upon reading the piece for the first time, its message confused me. Admittedly, Vonnegut's portrayal of equality is extreme; however, the concept that there could ever be such a thing as too much fairness was completely foreign to me. History can prove that equal opportunities for all have never truly existed, and many aspects of historical injustice directed towards racial, ethnic and religious minorities, immigrants, wom-

en, people of low socioeconomic status and more continue to thrive today. Especially in our country's current political climate, I hope I am not alone in believing that advocating for justice is always a goal worth striving for. So why does Vonnegut's message in Harrison Bergeron seem to suggest otherwise?

This short story, like so many other dystopian pieces, was written during the height of the Cold War. Following World War II, the Second Red Scare of the 1940s and 50s caused a widespread fear of communism throughout the United States. The publicized investigations of government officials and celebrities by the House Un-American Activities Committee, US Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover created an overall anti communist sentiment among many Americans. A major component of communist ideology was the eradication of social classes, singular government systems and money, which was

supposed to metaphorically level the playing field. Therefore, it makes sense that Harrison Bergeron warns against totalitarian “equality”, which was what many Americans perceived communism to be. After all, the purpose of the dystopian genre as a whole is to inform its readers about possible threats to society, and this story appears to be no different.

Nevertheless, the message in Harrison Bergeron is ironic when the concerns of my generation are taken into account. Today it seems that the presence of too much equality in our society is the least of our worries. Over the course of my senior year in high school, I have come to realize firsthand that there is a lot of inequity when it comes to the process of attaining a higher education. Although there are many barriers that prevent young people from going to college and staying in college, the one that affected me the most is income inequality. While many schools are committed to maintaining a diverse student body, colleges tend to inadvertently favor students from high-income backgrounds who are willing and able to pay the full price of tuition and other associated expenses. Schools try to ap-

peal to these students by adding luxuries like higher quality food programs or newly renovated dormitories, which only increases the costs. Coming from a low-income family meant that my college decision was based heavily on financial realities. Out of the five schools I was accepted to, only one of them was able to give me a price tag that would allow me to get a degree without taking on an unreasonable amount of debt. I know that this is not the case for everyone and it frustrates me. It’s not fair when students are denied a higher education because of factors that are out of their control, namely their parents’ earnings.

Kurt Vonnegut and I are from different eras. Initially, I had a hard time with the idea that society should be wary of too much equality, but I have come to the conclusion that Harrison Bergeron is a product of its time. While the overarching themes of this piece reflect the anti communist attitudes of Americans during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, these themes are less relevant today. Injustice is still very much alive in our society and we should always be working for a more equal world.



LEANING ON THE PAST

DYSTOPIAS BORROW FROM HISTORY

Emma

I’m sure you are all too familiar with the campaign slogan “Making America great again.” Donald Trump’s entire campaign reflected these four words and so far so have his actions as commander and chief. Perhaps the key word of this assurance is “again,” it implies our need to resort to past ideals to obtain greatness in the future. Many of the Dystopian novels I read this year reminded me of this slogan. Although dystopian novels are supposed to take place in the future, they inevitably draw material from the past.

The most important element of these novels is how government manages to control their population. The political structure used often has many similarities to regimes of times gone by.

So while these novels are set in the future, their contents often stem from either current or past political situations.

More often than not these fictional regimes are nothing but slight tweaks to either current or old world systems. One example is the very bare bones idea of fighting and killing for sport or entertainment depicted in *The Hunger Games*. For many parents the brutal games at the capitol seem quite extreme and horrifying, and to many young readers they seem like an impossible situation and thus futuristic. Now, in case it hasn’t clicked yet, let me take you back to ancient Rome when gladiators fought to the death in the coliseum for the entertainment of the people, much like

the children in the arena. These activities in both activities are an effort to assert control and instill fear. As Katniss Everdeen says: "Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch – this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy." This is just one example of dystopian writers borrowing from the past.

A more current example of resorting to the past took place in our most recent political race, more specifically the ideas presented in Donald Trump's campaign. What he means when he says, "Make America Great Again" is fewer immigrants, more manufacturing jobs, and access to cheap energy. All of these concepts are products of a bygone era offering "new" changes to achieve the greatness of days past. Like many dystopian leaders his campaign promises rely on our comfort in the past, as he says, "It's our right as a sovereign nation to choose immigrants that we think are the likeliest to thrive and flourish and love us."

Like Donald Trump, the government in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* has come to the conclusion that we must go back in order to move forward. In this novel women's rights are greatly diminished and controlled in an effort to prevent the perceived problems that come with the empowerment of women. These mandates include everything from restrictions on living, to

the repudiation of women's rights, to dress codes. They have accepted these rules because they feel that there is nothing they can do, not unlike some Americans. The main character, Offred, voices this helplessness in the quote, "It isn't the sort of thing you ask questions about, because the answers are not usually answers you want to know. Anyway there wouldn't be an answer."

Dystopian novels use past shortcomings and successes as inspiration because if they didn't they wouldn't have any material with which to predict our "future". It is easy for us to look at these fictional stories and read them as just that, for the purpose of entertainment. Though if we dig a little deeper into these governments and their societies and compare them side by side with ours, you'll find that they are all the same one way or another. Donald Trump used this same tactic to attract his following during his campaign. His slogan is the perfect balance of preying on both our comfort in the past and our fear in it. Change inspires fear and fear inspires what we may perceive as closed mindedness, but is really just discomfort in the unknown.



“Imagine froze. She shouldn't have said that. She'd let her guard down too much, and now this Corner Observer from hell knew exactly what she was doing.”

The Judging was the foundation on which modern society was built. Each person had a place, a “Path” that allowed them to contribute the most to society.”

“They sounded like something cool people would do back before schools were made great again.”

“A sharp shock from his regulation neck implant shook him back to cruel reality. No one was laughing. No one was smiling. Just pure efficiency.”

“Three more officers surrounded her, and Jupiter saw no way out... She was going to have to wait until an opportunity for escape showed itself.”

Fiction

DANGEROUSLY ALONE

Charon

June was one of the nicest months. In fact, it was the only month. Ever since the Ministry declared time to be simply a construct, it was declared that it would always be June, as it was the “best month” as decided by a popular vote. It was currently one of June’s nicer seasons, when it was warm and sunny. Some people called this time spring, as that was what their grandparents used to call it. However, most of the population decided that tradition was hogwash, and it was just to be known as “warm”.

Currently, the sun wasn’t entirely visible. It was setting, and turning the large city colder as it continued on to the other side of the globe. As it grew dimmer, the bright neon lights shone like glow sticks in a dark room. Bright, siren red. Cold, icy blue. Almost sickening green and yellow. Pink so bright it felt like it was shouting at you.

And really, they all were. Come here, buy this, we’re open.

But that didn’t bother Imogine. She had grown used to it all over the years. In fact, that was never the worst of it. The neon lights were actually one of the most calming parts of her day. This was the time she usually spent (surreptitiously) pondering over things she had read or even (shockingly) making stories of her own.

But this day, as she dragged her feet, she couldn’t even force herself to think of anything but what was ahead. This would either be her greatest achievement, or her final mistake. It didn’t help that she had already been to a meeting and a small brunch that day - about now was when she was usually going home to sleep. Being tired didn’t usually do much (everyone gets tired sometimes), but being tired, along with having so little energy from everything else that day?

No. She thought. She repeated it in the rhythm of her footsteps. That was the word that

always got her through the days, weeks, years. No. She simply refused to focus on anything besides her task. Failure was never an option, no matter how worn out she was.

She eventually made it to the corporative tower. It was right in between a movie theatre and a hotel, which had always made her wonder just what the city designers were even thinking of putting this here. But she could never say those sorts of things aloud - those kinds of questions were dangerous. That’s how you get marked. That’s what makes you get tested.

The building was uncomfortably air conditioned, just a little too cold to contrast the outside. This was normal, and Imogine should have not even noticed it, but it made her shiver. She tried to get to the elevator as quickly as she could.

She was late, but that didn’t matter. She really had no rush - being “just late enough” was actually encouraged in many situations. It’s when to leave that’s the problem.

She couldn’t leave in 30 minutes, or even two hours. Two would usually be acceptable, but it is still suspicious. No regular person leaves until about two and a half, three if they’re especially normal. She would have to aim for two and a half, that’s the earliest she could go without anyone becoming suspicious.

The elevator moved so slowly, it was agonizing. She tried to find something to distract herself with. The elevator music seemed to never end as she waited.

Finally, it came to her floor. Even this far away, she could hear the idle chatter from the gathering. She couldn’t turn back now - missing an event was a big red flag in the eyes of the Ministry unless you had a good excuse, and Imogine was far too tired to come up with anything suitable. She continued to put one foot in front of the other. Taking small steps until it was over was the only thing she could do at this point. She took a deep breath, and contin-

ued down the hallway. She found the room number she found on the invitation - room 596. It had no door, so she could already see the festivities going on inside. People idly talking amongst themselves, the buffet tables with food and of course, a punch bowl. Some people have already begun speaking to Corner Observers - not that there was any shame in that, she was quick to think. "COs are here to help you relax, we don't bite," ran through her head, a fragment of a government-sponsored commercial. She could never get those out of her mind, no matter how hard she tried. Maybe if they didn't have that cheerful music in the background, she would be able to forget them. But that was something to ponder later, now she had to discuss her arrival with the CEO of SleekSoftware, Inc.

He was easily spotted - important persons almost always stayed with the action in events like this, usually talking to multiple people at once. Joking, telling personal anecdotes, and overall showing

off. He had a drink in hand, of course. It was currently in style, and things that are in style help boost your reputation.

Again, one step at a time, she approached him. "Sorry I'm late," She said. "I had to finish up some work and talk with a friend, I lost track of the time."

A chorus of no rung through her head. That was a terrible way to approach someone who got to decide if you got your promotion or not. Thankfully, the CEO just laughed warmly in response. The informality of this entrance didn't seem to bother him.

"Ah, don't we all lose track of things every once in awhile? Don't worry, you're just in time to meet everyone. Our team is very excited to get to know you!" He continued to smile as he offered a handshake. "I know you already know me, but I'm Aaron Howell. Pleasure doing business with you."



Imagine shook his hand, glad that he reminded her of what his name was. She could always recognize faces immediately, but names always slipped from her memory. "Thank you, I'm excited to get to know everyone else, too. I'm Imagine Morrison." At least she gave a good first impression. While she had been able to work around bad impressions in the past, starting off on the right track always made things easier. Now she just had to keep doing good enough until she could leave.

After some small talk with Aaron and his colleagues, Imagine needed a break. She was already exhausted, and being near all these people was even worse than she thought it would be. Of course, she couldn't say that to anyone. The next best thing to leaving was to go to the buffet. One of the best tricks she had ever learnt was that nobody expects an answer from you if you're chewing food. This has caused her some unpleasant stomach aches in the past, when she had needed an excuse to not talk to anyone, but it had certainly helped her stay under the radar.

To her dismay, most of the dishes involved meat. After some panicked scouring, she finally decided just to take a plate full of the cheese chunks that had little toothpicks stuck in them. It looked odd, but she could always explain to anyone who asked that she was vegetarian. That was always an easier topic to talk about, since those conversations usually followed a simple formula. Discuss vegetarianism, why she decided to become one, talk about animals for a while, done. It was refreshingly simple in a chaotic environment like this.

She began to relax, and nibble on some of the cheese. It wasn't good, but it wasn't bad either. Just bland. It had to do, though. Nobody was approaching her so far, so it seemed to be working.

"Oh, hello!"

She froze. She immediately knew who it was

even before she saw the name tag and the notebook. That cheerful smile. The way they said hello. The robotic way they waved to her.

A Corner Observer.

Imagine quickly finished the cheese she was nibbling on. "COs are here to help you relax, we don't bite," rung through her mind again. But she knew that this was a bad sign. COs only targeted people who weren't doing enough. People who were out of line.

"How have you been doing today?" The CO asked, reading from their notebook. "Anything exciting happen?" Their plastic smile never faded as they said these things.

"Oh, nothing much," Imagine wondered how she could get rid of them - she had dealt with COs in the past, but usually only when she approached them first. How do you get one to leave you alone without being reported for behavioral issues? "I already visited a friend today, and it's a bit late for me. I go to bed around ten."

"Hmm, interesting!" The CO's smile grew larger. It made Imagine uncomfortable. "Feeling a little tired, then?"

Imagine hesitated for only a second. "No, not at all! I'm having a lovely time, really. Meeting all these people is a good opportunity for me."

"Oh, that's spectacular!" They looked over at the cheese sitting on her plate. "Hmm, a fan of gouda, are you? May I have one?"

"Um, of course!" Imagine offered one. She hoped that she wasn't making her discomfort with the situation too obvious.

The CO ate it quickly, barely even taking the time to chew. They then used the toothpick to point at Imagine. "So, if you don't mind me asking, if you're having such a good time and all... Why are you sitting here at the buffet table?

All alone?"

She paused. She had hoped that talking



nicely to them would be enough - that it would be okay to just continue easily like this, and be done with it. She certainly didn't expect this. "I... Excuse me?" She managed.

"It's pretty simple." The CO started using the toothpick to clean their teeth. "Sitting in someplace safe, but not really a corner so nobody could bug you... Getting lots of food to distance yourself... I mean, clever, I get it. But that kind of thing won't work forever, you know."

Imagine couldn't even manage words. She thought that she had it all figured out. That she knew all the tricks, that Corner Observers only stuck to what they were taught - talk to people who go hide in, obviously, the corners.

"Like, props to you, you tried, but you can't always run from your problems." They studied the toothpick for a while, before flicking it away, not even trying to aim for a trash bin. "Some of us are kind of smarter than that. And by some of us, I mean me."

"But... I'm having a good time, I really am." Imagine tried her hardest to sound sincere. "It's just that not all of us can juggle so many things in one day."

The CO's bright smile turned into a smirk. "Really? I'd think that with all this excitement you'd be ready to tackle more things. Or that hanging out with others would help you."

Imagine froze. She shouldn't have said that. She'd let her guard down too much, and now this Corner Observer from hell knew exactly what she was doing.

"Hey, don't worry about it! All we need is to get you set up for some simple reeducation. Here, I can even put your name down on the good list if you accept it willingly! It won't even interfere with your job, I promise." The CO's smirk faded into the cheerful smile Imagine was so used to seeing on

them, but she could still see the glint in their eyes that said gotcha.

"I... No." She took a deep breath. "I don't need reeducation, thank you." She felt herself being backed even more into a metaphorical corner as she continued to speak to them.

"Ah, but you can't say no!" The CO shook their head pitifully. "No, no, you can't. I have enough evidence here to report you already! Even without your name, I'm sure the Ministry could identify you with the information I supply. Really, if you just work with me, your reeducation could be done in only two

weeks or so. Sure, the job offer you've got now would probably leave, but we'll ensure you keep your current one, if you cooperate!"

Imagine couldn't handle it. She knew that people who were taken for reeducation never got integrated back into society as easily as that. "I'm sorry." She muttered, setting her plate back down on the table. She then ran. Past the buffet table, through the door, down the hallway to the elevator. She didn't even hear the CO shout at her. She just needed to get away from all this.

They'd catch her. She had never heard a story where an introvert ever got away from the Ministry. But she didn't know what else to do but run. Taking the stairs down was a hassle, but she was still able to get out the building in time to start running through the city.

It was far away, but she knew where the nearest beach was. Now that the Ministry would be alerted, nothing would matter anymore. And she had been meaning to do this for a long time. She didn't even know if she'd make it to the beach. But she kept running.

She could see the headlines now:
DANGEROUS INTROVERT CAUGHT: TAKING
THOUGHT-PROVOKING WALK AT TIME OF ARREST.

"Imagine froze. She shouldn't have said that. She'd let her guard down too much, and now this Corner Observer from hell knew exactly what she was doing."

”



THE VIGILANT EYE

Max

Erika coughed herself awake. The kind of dry, hacking cough you can only get during winter. It didn't last very long, but it doesn't take very long for Universal Advancements clocks to ping. And so it did.

Wearily, Erika rolled over to check advertisement on the display. Some white bottle with a red cap? Blinking the sleep out of her eyes, she first recognised the yellow-red UA logo on the front, and then... ah. Cough medicine, with an option for immediate delivery to her apartment "to avoid leaving one's home at this truly dreadful time." Of course, the clock's microphones would have recognised a cough right away. Grumbling, she rolled away from it to try to fall back asleep. She could just buy medicine tomorrow. Another cough. The clock pinged a bit louder, the display growing just a bit brighter.

Angrily, she turned to face the clock and glared at it, then pulled it over face down. Laying down again, she coughed. The clock pinged once again. Cursing the UA, her lungs, and alarm clocks everywhere, Erika sat up. The clock would never shut up unless she bought the medicine. Or if it was unplugged, but that would reset the clock again. Well then, if she wasn't going to get any sleep tonight anyways, she might as well save a bit of money. Most people would just hit the delivery option on the clock's face and call it a night, but those people were also fine with their every action being recorded and automated. Not me, though. I'm rather alone in cherishing the few moments I have private.

The UA fed all of the data they collected from their mandatory microphones into a central server, and it was sorted into a unique profile for you. What you did and didn't act favorably to, what you bought, and even who you interacted with all fed into your profile. Many of their prod-

ucts would then offer you advertisements based on your profile, tailored for you. Or rather, who the UA thought you were.

Erika stood outside her room as she waited for the elevator, bundled up in a puffy UA jacket. At this point, she was beginning to regret getting up. Why? She was still going to spend money on the medicine. She couldn't "get revenge" on a clock. As the elevator's dial ticked closer to the 6th floor, she kept thinking. No, she wasn't trying to spite the clock. She blamed the UA. Yeah. That was it. But then why am I getting on the elevator? I can see the UA logo on the doors, it's GOING to have another camera, and they're going to keep recording me and trying to manipulate me. So why not manipulate them? Their data collection is automated. The elevator dinged open, prompting her forward. A choice. Erika hesitated for a moment, cleared her throat, and loudly said "I THINK I'LL TAKE THE STAIRS TODAY." The elevator, of course, did not react. Turning towards the stairs, she dashed down.

Erika stepped out of her dingy apartment, the time now 4:12 AM. The city was always different at night. Tall buildings, spotted occasion-



ally with an insomniac or night shift workers. Down there, among those clusters of towers, was a drugstore. Streetlights lit her path. Erika took a step forward, then hesitated under the awning. UA made the streetlights, so it's possible that there were cameras in them as well. Possible? How dumb can I be? The UA would never give up this big of an opportunity. So why should I? Today, I am Erika, 4 AM jogger. Your algorithms can deal with that, Mr. Whoever-you-are. As she ran through the night doing her best to mask her fatigue, she thought about the reclusive CEO of UA. Nobody really knew who

he was, and that was the way he liked it. Alone, unwatched, and rich with both money and privacy, he was basking in the profits from near-constant, universal privacy invasions. It was controversial at first, when UA began to offer a home AI that could respond to commands to order things from UA. To do so, it had to always be on, and what would that mean for one's security? But it wasn't in your house unless you bought it, so it came with little resistance. Then it was updated to offer you products depending on what it heard at anytime, and there was some resistance. But still, unless you brought the little cube with a speaker and plugged it in, it wasn't an issue. But once the UA tasted the profits of a million impulse buys, they began to fit the technology into anything they sold. Because they continued to earn money on each product even after they sold them, they could afford to make all of their products cheaper, better, and at a greater rate. They went from rivaling 3M to putting them out of business in months. And there were complaints, but they were mostly mumbles rather than the great shouts you would expect from the quick end of privacy. Everything people bought was higher quality and cheaper, and so people stopped

complaining. Buildings would even agree to send their security camera feeds to the UA's profilers in exchange for cheaper construction costs, and the convenience store Erika saw as she rounded a corner was no different.

**“Today, I am Erika,
4 AM jogger. Your
algorithms can
deal with that,
Mr. Whoever-you-
are.”**



The store was fairly simple. Sliding automatic doors at the front next to a counter to pay for gas, and lines of shelves throughout. Cameras were placed in strategic locations to cover every inch of the store, their dark eyes capturing everything inside. Coughing again, Erika began to walk to the generic drug section. Past the cheap watches with built-in GPS for convenience, the disposable cameras that sent a copy to

the UA for safekeeping, the small music players designed to attach to your arm as you run, the--Hold on. Erika turned and looked down the rest of the aisle. There were inflatable exercise balls, weights, and some elastic bands. Erika didn't care. She just wanted to grab some medicine and go back to sleep. But 4 AM jogger Erika absolutely did. She wandered up and down the aisle, making sure that the camera couldn't deduce anything but interest. Leaning in and pretending to read the blurb on the packaging, nodding, a strategically placed “Hmmm.” A sudden onset of coughing that wasn't part of the charade. Erika took that as an excuse to leave and go grab the medicine she originally wanted. She found the pill bottles nestled among the rows of identical pill bottles, and swiped her debit card. The plastic covering opened up, and Erika grabbed a bottle. The door closed, another bottle moved forward, and Erika coughed. Stuffing the bottle in her pocket, she turned to leave.

Erika stared at the bottle in her hand as she walked home. Funny how despite all her reservations about the lack of privacy, she had come to depend on the UA for so much over the past few years. Her alarm clock, half the appliances in her

kitchen, and even her PC were UA brand. It simply was the best option available when on a budget. But that didn't mean that one had to take it lying down. Tonight, Erika would start to stand, and nothing could take her legs out from under her. Metaphorically, of course.

Medicine taken, sleep schedule messed up, and back home, Erika flopped back into bed. She pulled her clock over, and saw that it was now advertising a cheaper alternative to the medicine ball she had hmed at in the store. It had updated her profile this easily? That was pretty neat. It meant that she would be able to screw with it again in the morning. But it was already 5 AM. Not looking like a good day for physical activity. Yoga, perhaps? That was just stretching, she could look that up online and see if she got ads for mats, or whatever you yoga'd with. Plans made, she rolled over and closed her eyes.

Erika opened her eyes. Her alarm hadn't gone off. Was it too early? It was supposed to wake her up before seven so she could go to work. She had spent the entire day yesterday downloading Shakespeare and watching yoga tutorials. Sitting up again, she blinked to focus her eyes and looked at the clock. Its screen seemed to display a solid block of red. Wait, no. Her eyes were still blurry. She shook her head and squinted to try to read whatever those black blobs said.

PRODUCT TERMINATED DUE TO VIOLATION OF EULA SECTION 4: END USER FORFEITS USE OF PRODUCT BY KNOWINGLY ADDING FALSE DATA TO USER PROFILE

"What? Who even reads that stuff?" Erika mumbled. Heart sinking, she reached across the table to her phone. Somebody would know how to fix



this. Alex, or Sarah, they loved the UA's products, they could help-

PRODUCT TERMINATED DUE TO VIOLATION OF EULA SECTION 4: END USER FORFEITS USE OF PRODUCT BY KNOWINGLY ADDING FALSE DATA TO USER PROFILE

"Oh. Oh no." Erika looked up and saw the same, ominous red glow appearing from around the corner to her kitchen.

"Oh, no no no."



FIELDS OF ORANGE

Zoe

It was around 6:30 in the morning, so the sun was just barely showing above the horizon. Elizabeth woke up slowly. Her alarm was set to go off in less than fifteen minutes, so she shut it off and decided to get up a little early. It was already seeming like it would be a glorious Tuesday, the weather forecasted to be balmy the rest of the



week.

As she started to eat her breakfast - leftover lasagna from last night's meal - her cell phone rang.

"What's up?" Elizabeth asked.

"Hey, you're opening up the library today, right?" It was Elizabeth's best friend and fellow librarian, Gwen.

"Yeah. I wanted to work early so I could go out to lunch today. I'm looking forward to seeing actual humans again, you know how I get lonely

on Mondays."

Elizabeth was a bit antsy after being cooped up inside her house for all of Monday. The walls of her rental house were a rather sickly shade of green, a recurring background color in the comics that made her nauseated. She again regretted not taking a roommate after graduating college. Phone calls with Gwen didn't satisfy her want for real human interaction.

"If I didn't already live with Lance, I'd move in with you." Elizabeth could practically see Gwen's smile through her phone. "Mandatory Monday Lay Ins move a lot faster when you have someone to talk to that's not over the phone."

The two continued talking as Elizabeth ate her lasagna and then started getting ready. Gwen had just finished telling a hilarious joke when Elizabeth laughed and glanced at the orange clock on her wall. Garfield's tail was almost on the six. She should have left ten minutes ago.

"Oh, Monday!"

"I was waiting for you to glance at the clock, idiot." Elizabeth opened her chest freezer and pulled out a lasagna at random, placing it in the fridge to thaw for tonight's dinner. "I'll go ahead and hang up so you won't be too late. Bye!"

"Bye, Gwen! I'll see you later!" Elizabeth put her phone away and ran out the door to her car. She groaned as she saw the garish, orange fuzzy dice hanging on her rearview mirror, a recent gift from Gwen. Garfield's eyes seemed to stare straight through her, but she left the dice hanging there. According to Gwen, the lack of lovely orange decorations on her vehicle would signify to other people that she was strange.

It really was an ugly shade of orange, in her defense.

Luckily, the drive to the library went smoothly enough. Her ride was punctuated by billboard after billboard after billboard, all containing

that cursed shade of orange in some way.

50th Anniversary of New York's Official Jim Davis Museum: RSVP for this momentous event now!

Garfield's First Ten Years: A Collected Anthology On Sale Now!

Got Old Garfield Comics? Sell Them Easy & Fast With No Hassle!

Elizabeth wasn't running horrendously late, but she still felt bad as she saw a man waiting by the front door with a large box at his feet.

He was rather nondescript in appearance. His jeans were blue and a little baggy, his shirt was black, and he had a dark green hoodie on. Aside from his very large sunglasses everything about the man was unassuming. The glasses were orange, printed to look like Garfield's eyes, and had Garfield's nose and mouth hanging from the lenses by a chain.

He unsettled Elizabeth. Maybe it was because she couldn't see the man's eyes, only Garfield's. It reminded her of Garfield masks she'd seen kids wearing on Halloween, but she could see the man's mouth and his smile was unnerving.

"Is the library ever gonna open, lady?"

Elizabeth turned away from the stranger and unlocked the front door, letting him go in first. He unceremoniously dropped the large box in front of the reception desk and started to leave the library. He opened the door, but before he left he looked back at Elizabeth.

"You might want to be extra careful when you go through the box. I found it in my attic, so there might be some unsightly things in there." He removed his sunglasses and made eye contact with Elizabeth. "Nasty things. Bugs, dust, rodent detritus, the works. Have a nice day."

Elizabeth stood by the desk and stared off into space as the door swung shut. She snapped

out of her stupor as Steph, the new librarian, greeted her and sat down behind the desk. Elizabeth smiled at her before picking up the box and moving to the back room.

"I'm going to look through these donations and get them ready to go on the shelves, Steph. I'll be in the back room if you need anything!"

~

Elizabeth hoped that it wasn't another box full of dirty, ancient, well-used Garfield comics, which were common donations. Everyone assumed that libraries needed more comics, but she worked at a fairly small library that prided itself

on having mostly actual books and literature. The comics section was only in one small corner of the one-room library and didn't have any special editions, just standard Garfield collections.

Going through the box was simple enough work. She just took each comic, entered it into the system, printed out a barcode, and put it in a bin for shelving later. In about

an hour, she was down to the last few comics in the bin. As she grabbed the last book - a reprinted edition of Garfield's first year - a page fell out and fluttered onto the ground under her chair.

After she picked up the loose page and looked at it, Elizabeth's face went blank. She instantly broke out in a cold sweat and nearly dropped it.

There was a knock on the door.

Elizabeth's gut reaction was to take her shaking hands, crush the loose paper, and throw it back into the bin.

"Hello?" She could hear the fear in her own voice, and prayed that whoever was knocking couldn't also sense it.

"Elizabeth, someone has a question about their card and I need your help answering it," Eliza-

"She could be imprisoned just for looking at it, if anyone ever found out. Anyone smart would have burned it before allowing themselves to look at it in its entirety."

”

beth let out a breath that was suspiciously close to a wheeze. It was only Steph.

“I’ll be right out!”

She glanced at the crumpled ball of paper, which looked perfectly innocent sitting in the bottom of the box. Her hands were still shaking as she reached down, picked up the paper, and gently unfolded it. Elizabeth didn’t understand how this small piece of seemingly innocuous paper could be so dangerous. She could be imprisoned just for looking at it, if anyone ever found out. Anyone smart would have burned it before allowing themselves to look at it in its entirety.

“Elizabeth! Hurry up!” Elizabeth was so

unsettled by the paper that she had forgotten about Steph.

“Sorry!”

She steeled herself for another short moment, took a deep breath, and glanced at the lone comic panel.

The Far Side

Elizabeth took three short seconds to think about what to do. She put the paper in her pocket and walked out of the room.



SEPARATE AND PURE

Jordan

For my sixteenth birthday, I became homeless. I was shoved out the door, with my bag eagerly following at my heels. I glanced back at the orphanage, and was met by the cruel glare of the head of the orphanage behind the closing door. The scared faces of young orphans peered out at me through the dirt-smudged windows. The orphanage was run by the government, and the government policy was to carry orphans until they were at least sixteen. Naturally, you were unceremoniously dumped to the street the morning of your birthday.

I turned to the street, garbage-strewn and dusty. I had been given a backpack with my name, Trae, sewn sloppily near the bottom. The bag contained a canteen of water, five meal bars, ten dollars, and a spare shirt. I wrapped the shirt around my face to prevent the inhalation of the dust that filled the air. The wind pushed around plastic-bag-tumbleweed, and threatened the cardboard homes of the many citizens of flagstaff. Outside of the downtown areas, people found refuge among the charred remains of the old neighborhoods. The dust covered all, the dark hair and skin, hijabs and kippot. It crawled its way into

every uncovered nook and crevice that it could find.

I leaned back against the brick building, slid the shirt off of my face, and took a swig of water from my canteen. I looked up, and was met by the artificially perfect face of Avery Blank. The likeness of our president lay on a large poster that seemed to stalk every street corner. His bitter smirk complemented his dead eyes. In large print, the words, “OUR NATION. SEPARATE AND PURE”, framed his face. He was the symbol of everything us in the West had come to despise. He was the founder of “White America”, or as we call it, the WA (pronounced: way). His face was that of bigotry, and his positions inspired plenty of hatred from both sides of the divide. It was his slander campaigns that drove a line between the white citizens of America and us, “The Enemy”, the colored minority. People of color were not his sole target, as he also villainized the major religious minorities, namely, Jews and Muslims. A campaign promise of his was to separate “the clean from unclean”, so upon election, after he managed to transform the world’s most prominent democracy to its harshest dictatorship, he forced the country’s minorities

west of the Rockies. He was the reason there were so many attacks on people of color during the Separation. He was the reason that I was orphaned as a toddler, the reason that my parents were killed. I could feel the anger filling my body, turning my features into acrid scowl.

"Hey kid." A wrinkled hand lay on my shoulder. I was slumped on the ground now, still leaning on the wall. I squinted up at an old man with deep copper skin and a scraggly beard.

"Y'all good?" he asked. I nodded.

"Yeah, just lost in thought."

"Aight, just checkin'. Don't need no more dead kids on the street" He wandered off. I stood up, slid the shirt back up, and slinked into an alley that seemed to be free of wind. I saw a dark and familiar figure. In the alley, in a beat up polo, was my old friend from the orphanage, Jamal. Jamal was tall, maybe six-foot-five and very lanky. He wore large glasses, and had that academic type of face. He had very dark skin, and kept his long dreads in a neat ponytail.

"Jamal?" He grinned.

"Hey Trae, What's up?" he asked.

"Just got out of the orphanage."

"Ah, I see. Best day of your life then, huh?"

"Well sure, it's great to be out, but I don't really know what to do now."

"Let me show you something then." He turned and beckoned for me to follow. I followed. Jamal led me through some of the burned neighborhoods, to an old motel with some broken windows.

"What's this?" I asked.

"This, is march HQ." He spoke with authority, even though I had no clue what he was talking about. I started to ask, but he was already walking forward. He led me into what I think was the office for the motel at some point. Now, it was filled with a large table, covered with a big map, and strewn with various papers. I immediately honed in on the map, which I quickly recognized as of Denver. Denver was the nearest large WA city, a glorified



border town. Arguably the most important city in the WA aside from New York, Denver was home to their western defense. The only way into Denver from the West was by a small trade road, which I saw highlighted on the map.

Jamal nudged me further through the door. A small Mexican kid looked up at me from a chair pressed against the wall. At the table two women were talking vehemently, one wearing a hijab, the other fair-skinned. The woman with the hijab looked up.

"Who's this?" she asked. Jamal introduced me. She walked around the table and sized me up.

"He old enough for this?"

"Old enough for what, exactly?" I asked.

They ignored me.

"I was the same age when you started me!" Jamal said excitedly. She shook her head.

"Still, it's more dangerous now."

"It doesn't matter, he's tough! He can take hatred." At this point, they were both yelling.

"I'm supposed to take your word for that? I've seen people snap!"

"He was orphaned because of these bastards --"

"HEY!" I yelled. The entire room looked at me, startled. "I'm standing here. If you want to know something, ask me."

"Alright." she said.

"So first thing, what are you guys doing?" I asked.

"Oh for god's sake Jamal, you didn't tell him." Jamal shrank against the wall. She looked at me.

"We're going to march on Denver."



RULE OF THE ENLIGHTENED

Aurora

Adèle Lyonne was walking to school on a cool autumn morning - the morning of her eighteenth birthday, September 9th, 2035. She looked to the left and saw the leaves falling off the trees, swirling in the wind like dust in a tornado, brown and lifeless.

She saw the crumbling houses that were still standing, where often those of the Laborer's Path stayed if they couldn't get enough money from working to afford better accommodations. Adèle shuddered as she thought of having to do hard labor for the rest of her life - she was fairly certain that she would be put on the Scientist's Path, but maybe she wouldn't, and that terrified her. Tearing her eyes away from the houses, she looked ahead.

The city — the city of Blessing, capital of Arcadia — was shining magnificently in the morning light, the dawn showing just a little between the skyscrapers. The rose-red horizon stretched across the sky, letting Adèle know that her Judging was getting closer.

The Judging was the foundation on which modern society was built. Each person had a place, a "Path" that allowed them to contribute the most to society. The Judging was what sorted people into their Paths, on the day of their eighteenth birthday.

The Judging, it was said, was the reason Arcadia had remained stable after The War.

Adèle hoped feverently that she would be Judged onto the Scientist's Path, because she had devoted herself to studying science, math, and engineering both in and outside of school. If she wasn't... she didn't know what she would do.

Adèle knew one thing, however — she was excited for, and dreading, her last day at school.

Adèle walked into the school building, named "Blessing's High", and was immediately greeted by a government poster on the wall. It read "If you hear something, do something - Fascists can be anywhere!" Adèle had seen it far too many times, and its grayscale photo of a suspicious-looking man with red lettering on the top and bottom was really starting to get to her.

Adèle knew that the Fascists were the enemy - after all, they had been the ones to bomb out the cities and kill millions in The War. Led by "President" —or more accurately, Dictator— Kushner, the United States military had attacked the protesters against his rule, bombing the cities in which they tended to live. This first strike, in San Francisco,

California, a city that no longer existed, had led to The War, with the Anti-Fascists on one side, and the Fascist Americans on the other.

The Anti-Fascists had won, led by Lord Louis Delanoir, and Dictator Kushner and the rest of his cabinet had been executed publicly. A new nation had been established, one where fascism was not tolerated, and everyone remained vigilant against it. Any fascist was taken into custody, and interrogated about their efforts to undermine the public stability and safety.

Adèle had had several classmates that were revealed to be fascists - none of them had been her friends, and they were never seen again after the day it had been announced they had been found to be fascists. Adèle always assumed

The Judging was the foundation on which modern society was built. Each person had a place, a "Path" that allowed them to contribute the most to society.

”

they were executed or sent to work camps - they deserved it, being fascists.

Adèle had also heard a teacher saying fascist things to another, like “don’t you think the public should get representation in the government?” and “immigrants are taking our Paths”. Everyone knew representative democracy allowed Fascism to take a hold of a nation - that was why there were no elections in Arcadia. Everyone also knew that saying discriminatory, fascist things was what allowed fascism to come into power in the United States. Needless to say, Adèle hadn’t seen that teacher again - she knew that his colleague must have reported him to the Arcadian Office of Anti-Fascism.

As she got into her classroom, Adèle wondered how terrible life would have been living in the pre-modern United States. She shook her head - she didn’t want to think about it.

“...And so, after it was discovered that Bernie Sanders had been collaborating with the Fascists all along, he was arrested and shortly after executed for treason against Arcadia,” the teacher was saying. “After this revelation, the name of the treacherous Bernie Sanders was reviled almost as much as that of Dictator Jared Kushner...”

Adèle sighed as the teacher droned on. Bernie Sanders was the traitor who, after having supported the revolution in its early stages, betrayed Arcadia and tried to overthrow Louis Delanoir. She’d learned about it in each grade since 6th, and was quite annoyed that she’d had to hear it so many times.

“The treachery of Bernie Sanders started a new investigation into the other United States Congresspeople who had supported the revolution, and more were found to be colluding with

the Fascists, through investigation of their private email servers.” The teacher paused, and just as he was about to say something else, the bell rang.

“Remember to write your essays on the Arcadian Charter!” the teacher called as everyone was packing up. “Make them at least 500 words!” Adèle chuckled to herself, knowing that she was going to her Judging right after school.

“Adèle Lyonne, today is your eighteenth birthday, correct?” the chief judge was saying.

Adèle replied,

“Yes, that is correct.” She looked around the bleak courtroom, with overly bright fluorescent lighting and off-white, somewhat yellowed walls. The three judges were sitting behind a desk, the floor beneath them higher off the ground, and they were all looking down at her.

“Let us begin, then.” The chief judge took out a tablet and tapped a few buttons. She looked at it, and then said, “You have studied mathematics and sciences quite extensively, I see, going so far as to perform a few experiments and write papers on them. That is impressive,

I must say. What is also impressive is your balancing of social and professional pursuits. I understand you chair the Blessing High Student Committees on Financial Literacy and Healthcare, in addition to leading the highly successful Math Team at your school. Your accomplishments are worthy of praise. Congratulations.” The man on the right of the chief judge cleared his throat, and the chief judge looked at him, as did the other judge.

“It has come to our attention, however, that you engaged in continual truancy during your first year of high school. Can you explain that?”

“Yes, I can. I was going through a difficult



time in my life, and I felt as if school was pointless. Needless to say, I've gotten past that, and am now fully committed to doing well on the - on my Path."

"I see. Can you also explain the consistent bad reviews your ninth and tenth grade English teacher gave you?"

"He really didn't like me. I did well in his class, regardless, because I was probably doing the best there, so he couldn't rig it against me and not have everyone else be hurt."

"So, you're saying that Mr. Bickelhaupt gave inaccurate reviews?"

"I believe so, yes."

"Well, given that he was arrested a year ago for Fascist speech - I believe it was something about allowing representative democracy and wanting to bring back sports - your story seems likely." There was a brief pause, and then the chief judge asked,

"How would you describe yourself, Adèle Lyonne?"

"Um... I'm a rational, objective person that likes figuring out how things work, and I like thinking."

"What is your favorite leisure activity?" the judge on the right asked.

"It's probably reading," Adèle said, and the judge nodded, looking at the other two.

"Thank you, we will confer on this," the chief judge said, and the three filed out of the room through a back door.

Adèle sat in her seat, fidgeting uncomfortably, heart pounding. She hadn't thought it would be this bad, even though she was almost certain she would be Judged onto the Scientist's Path.

I know where I'm going - there's no way I'm not going on the Scientist's Path! What other Path is there for me? Adèle's attempts to quiet her nerves were mildly successful, and she took a few deep breaths, closing her eyes until she heard the door open again.

The judges filed back in, sitting down in the places they'd been in.

"For the Path Case of Adèle Lyonne, on her eighteenth birthday, we three, certified Judges of Arcadia, assign her to the Scientist's Path. Congratulations, Adèle Lyonne." The three judges nodded

to her, and she sighed in relief.

I'm so glad it turned out this way. Of course, there wasn't really a way for it to go any differently, Adèle thought.

"Thank you," Adèle said, containing her joy. "I will do my utmost to help rebuild Arcadia."

"Of course," said the chief judge, and Adèle went out, a weight lifted from her mind.

A week later, Adèle was returning from her job to her apartment, and opened the front door to see two Popular Conformity Police officers in full body armor in front of her.

"Come with us," one said, and grabbed her arms and handcuffed her. She struggled, but the other said,

"Don't bother, traitor - we're bringing you to see Lord Delanoir himself, and there's no way for you to get out." Adèle wondered what they meant by traitor, and retorted,

"I'm loyal now, have always been and always will be loyal!"

"Don't even bother - you've already been proven guilty." Adèle wondered how, and then realized that she didn't know if any of the so-called fascists that had been arrested from her school had ever had a trial. Adèle's jaw dropped as she figured out that fascist trials didn't need to be publicized, and that no one ever heard from the people after they'd been accused of being fascists.

"This is how you do it... you're no better than the fascists!" Adèle accused as she was patted down. "No - you're worse than Dictator Kushner's government! Pretending to be against the very thing you are -" She was shoved in a squad car, thoughts racing about what the country she'd grown up in actually was - and how it was so different than what she'd thought. "So this is how I die - finding the truth." Adèle laughed bleakly. "I guess this is what I wanted all along - to find the truth. And that truth is death."



PEAS IN A POD

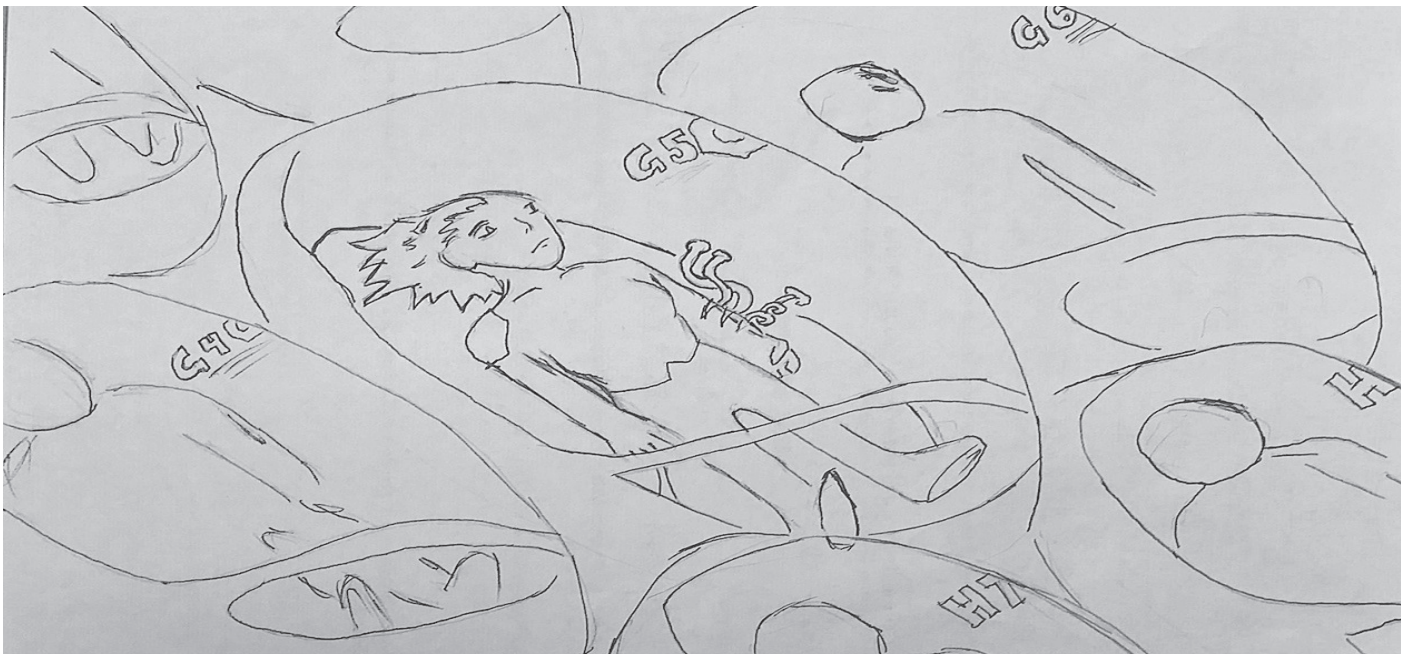
Sovigne

Jupiter woke suddenly, starting upright and hitting her head on the sloping ceiling. Looking from side to side, the only thing she saw was the almost-translucent, eggshell white color of her pod. Relaxing slightly, she laid back again, rubbing her forehead and taking care to avoid lying on the tubes that connected her right forearm to her pod. The only thing she could hear was the synchronized breathing of the hundreds of people

YELLOW SERVICE TUNNEL WHEN POSSIBLE STOP PROCEED CALMLY TO THE YELLOW SERVICE—

“An anomaly... I should report this.” Jupiter smiled to herself. “Or maybe not.”

A blaring horn sounded through the space. The lid of her pod opened, and a deafening mechanical humming spread throughout the atrium. Sitting up, Jupiter felt the tubing retract from her elbow. All around, hundreds of other pods were



surrounding her.

Something was wrong. The others should be waking with her. And yet, their breaths continued their rhythmic rising and falling. Leaning over to examine her intravenous tubes, she saw the sight she always did in the crook of her right elbow: the tube on the right pumping clear fluid into her bloodstream, the center tube pumping orange, and the left tube slowly pumping blue. As always, her arm felt cool to the touch. Jupiter brushed her left hand over her arm, feeling the transition between plastic and skin. She turned her head to the monitor, watching her heartbeat gradually speed up. A message scrolled along the bottom of the screen: PROCEED CALMLY TO THE

opening and ejecting their inhabitants. Each person moved mechanically, eyes slightly glazed as they dressed in their work clothes. Peace officers studded the edges of the room.

Filing out of the atrium with the other workers, Jupiter gazed through the top of the Dome. Although it was eight in the morning, it was dark out. Clouds of dust broiled against the glass surface. Dust storms happened every morning, the result of the widespread desertification after the collapse of pollinator species. The remaining vegetation was found in Domes, immense glass structures that covered acres upon acres of soil where food stuffs were planted.

The Dome this week was an orchard. Jupi-

ter and the other thousands of migratory workers traveled from Dome to Dome on railways, sleeping in their pods while they traveled. In each Dome, they walked from plant to plant, pollinating each flower with a small dropper and pollen collected from other plants. It was back-breaking work: the only rest the workers got was when they fell exhausted into their pods at the end of the day, long after the setting of the sun. But their drudgery was for the good of the nation, their work necessary to produce the food to fuel the population that had survived the nuclear war.

Jupiter stayed on the outer edge of the flow of workers, her head down. She felt a sharp pinch to her side. Jerking her head to the left, she saw a woman with dark hair and eyes, wearing the brown worker's jumpsuit.

"Follow me!" the woman hissed.

Jupiter shook her head. "I will not leave my post. I know my duty. We all have jobs to do."

The woman sighed, rolling her eyes. "Look, cut the act. We can do this the easy way or the hard way. Did you wake up before the others or not?"

With that, she pulled Jupiter through the stream of workers and into a service tunnel with a yellow border.

"What do you intend to do with me?" Jupiter asked indignantly.

"Jupiter, our scans showed that your brain chemistry was rebelling against the alimentary fluid," the woman said.

"I think you've got the wrong g—" Jupiter started.

"There's no need to be coy. Let's go."

The woman led Jupiter through a maze of service tunnels. If there were signs giving her the directions to turn, they were not visible to Jupiter's eyes. The two stopped in front of a locked door. With a wave of a pass, the woman pulled open the door and led Jupiter into a small room

stuffed with boxes.

"Normally it's considered polite to introduce yourself," Jupiter snarked. "You already know me, but I don't know you."

"It's Periwinkle."

"Seriously, it's Periwinkle?"

Periwinkle snickered. "Almost as bad as Jupiter, huh? Makes you wonder what they're on when they pick our names."

"So actually, what am I doing here?" Jupiter asked.

"Something's always felt wrong about this place, right? It's unnatural, everyone moving through their days robotically, without much recognition of what they're doing. I'm a part of the resistance. We want to save the workers, give them their freedom. Right now, everyone is a slave."

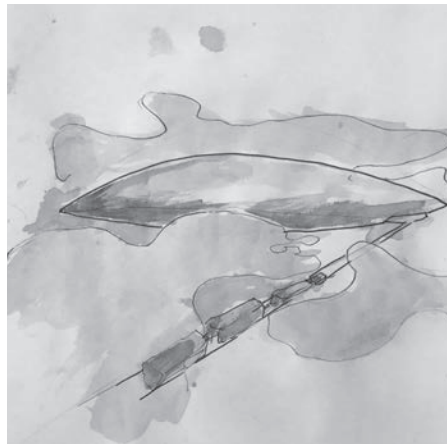
"Give me one reason not to report you right now. Why should I trust you?"

"You've developed a resistance to the sedative pumped into the workers every night. That's why you woke up early and why you are more aware than the average worker. You were already a

part of our movement, you just didn't know it yet." Seeing Jupiter's skeptical look, Periwinkle continued. "To be honest, it's likely that the Government already suspects your status. Don't waste the time you have left in the fields." With this statement, Periwinkle pulled something out of one of the boxes. To Jupiter's surprise, it was a military-quality taser.

Periwinkle led Jupiter back out through the tunnels and to the area where her pod group was working. Leaving the tunnels, Jupiter was able join the last group of workers shuffling towards the lines of trees.

Today their job was to collect pollen from the blossoms of the fruit trees. A few people unloaded receptacles from a truck, while the rest grabbed their pollen collection brushes and carefully strapped on their metal pollen repositories.



Jupiter moved towards the truck and started to help unload the receptacles. Glancing around, she saw that there were far more peace officers present than usual. One of the trucks had no workers unloading the back, but three peace officers sitting in the front cab. Jupiter smiled at the worker next to her and walked quickly towards the supplies. Over her shoulder, she saw several officers coming up behind her. Reaching down, she grabbed one of the pollen repositories.

Before she could do anything else, she felt an iron grip around her wrist. A black-clad peace officer glared at her.

Jupiter swung up the repository, hitting the officer in the side of the head. He dropped like a stone, his hand slipping from her arm. Three more officers surrounded her, and Jupiter saw no way out. The taser was heavy in the pocket of her jumpsuit, but she couldn't get to it with the peace officers holding her wrists

and shoulders. She was going to have to wait until an opportunity for escape showed itself. Jupiter widened her eyes. "I can't believe he grabbed me! I was so surprised, my arm just came up!"

"Shut up. We're taking you to the Corporal," one of the peace officers said. "Hopefully you have a good explanation for your fraternization with the resistance."

"So I was planning to come to you and report this treasonous behavior. I just wanted to do my job first," Jupiter finished, hoping the Corporal would believe her.

The Corporal's eyes glinted. "How wonderful that you came to your senses and decided to bring this to me."

"I was just doing my duty Ma'am."

The Corporal's voice was a purr. "You do realize that your alimentary fluid was compromised, you wouldn't have woken early otherwise.

We'll have to do something to remedy this." Her voice hardened. "I still don't understand why you didn't come to me earlier. You knew something was wrong."

Jupiter shifted her weight from foot to foot. She was caught before she had even begun. "I am willing to do what's necessary to protect the stability of our Nation, Corporal."

"I was counting on that." The Corporal laughed, her bell-like tones echoing around the sterile silver room. "You're unstable, Jupiter, you can no longer be a reliable worker. You understand what that means, don't you?"

"All right, obviously the act is up," Jupiter growled. She reached into the pocket of her jumpsuit, pulling out the taser Periwinkle gave her.

"Ooh, scary," The Corporal smirked.

Jupiter leaped at her, but was stopped, slamming into an invisible force.

The Corporal snickered. "Did you think there weren't security measures in place? Standard safety procedure. Makes my job easier when dealing with aggressives."

Undeterred, Jupiter shot her taser, the two electrodes shooting out and hitting the barrier. White sparks lit up the Corporal's startled face as she pitched backwards. "Sleeping gas! Now!"

A quiet hissing filled the room. Jupiter ran towards the door, but tripped over the fallen Corporal. She blinked slowly. Everything suddenly felt... heavy. Her eyelids drooped and she jerked her head up. Periwinkle's taser slipped from her hand. She slumped to the ground, and everything went dark.

“Three more officers surrounded her, and Jupiter saw no way out... She was going to have to wait until an opportunity for escape showed itself.”

”



THE DEVOS SCHOOL FOR THE GIFTED

MAKING EDUCATION GREAT AGAIN

Thomas

Erik woke up with a jolt as the bus hissed to a stop. He peered through the window and saw the drab concrete school. The DeVos Jesus School sign hung in the gloom. He could see the boys and the girls lining up, the boys on one side of the door, dressed in their brown pants and red hats, while the other side has the girls, all dressed in their long skirts, shawls and bonnets. Once again, late. Great.

It was all great again these days, and it had been since the first national pride day. Life was great, jobs were great, the inner cities were great, and school was tremendously, superbly, and bigly great.

They all filed off the bus, into the crowd. As he passed the others he heard whispers. Everyone turned to watch him take his place in the line. They didn't look at him specifically, they looked at his jacket. The jacket was old, made of some colored animal hide. The sleeves were brown, emblazoned with symbols. The back was maroon, with a large number twelve on it, and above that were some mismatched letters spelling "BICKELHAUPT," clearly a mess of gibberish. If you really looked close at the symbols on the sleeves "mock trial 1986-1987" "mathlete 1988-1989", he didn't know what they meant, but he liked the sound of them. They sounded like something cool people would do back before schools were made great again.

He thought back to when he bought the jacket. He had found it perusing the back of an antique store while looking for books. The owner seemed surprised when he asked about it. The store clerk took a suspicious look around to make sure no one else was there, before leading him

back into the deep storerooms where no one might overhear.

"This is a relic from a time gone by." The store clerk looked ancient as he uttered "a time when I was a boy."

"The jacket used to be for what we called students, they would get them for participating in activities back then. Not like the NRA: School Edition, or Junior Border Patrol like today, but activities like track, theater, soccer, and speech. Stuff long forgotten since school became great again." Erik peppered him with questions about what school had been before the ministry of education.

He stayed and listened for several hours before he left, quickly glancing around to make sure he hadn't been seen buying anything.

But none of that mattered as his classmates peered at his jacket. He made his way into the building. The morning

began as every day started and ended, with the pledge of allegiance. He looked around, the pale faces of the people around him looked towards the flag with complete conviction. As he looked around he realized he had forgotten an essential school supply. He had left his AR-15 at home. He felt himself blushing, knowing that this mistake would ruin his day, as if it wasn't bad enough already.

The day went by with the same usual tediousness. They started the day with literature; today they studied the bible, just like every day. After that he was chewed out by the principal for endangering forgetting his rifle. After that, he moved into math class. It was a bore, but even in a dystopia where I can make anything however I

"They sounded like something cool people would do back before schools were made great again."



want, math is still confusing. So his tale picks up at the next class, PSEO. You're probably feeling comforted, knowing that PSEO survived into our coming future, however the only PSEO option available was at Trump University. After this he had art class, covering the usual material: deals. As the class reached its forty seventh utterance of the word tremendous, he began to lose interest. He looked out the window, thinking about how much of all of this was necessary. He wondered what schools were like in other countries, the ones that still existed. He was told they were fraught with errors and evils, but somehow that seemed less convincing today. Suddenly the bell rang, and everyone headed to lunch.

Erik chose not to go to lunch. Watching to make sure no one was looking, he stole his way back up to his history teacher's class and snuck in. His teacher expected him, and greeting him as he looked over his shoulder to make sure no one saw him, saying "Let's get started. We have much to do if you want to be ready by May." He made sure the doors were locked and the blinds were closed. He moved his desk, exposing the cache they had built into the floorboards, and pulled out a dusty old tome. The book was showing its age. A relic from a forgotten time, it had been cut at, singed, and watered. At one time

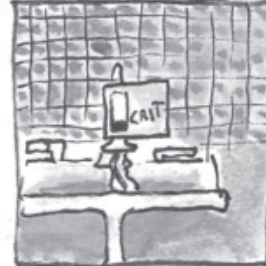
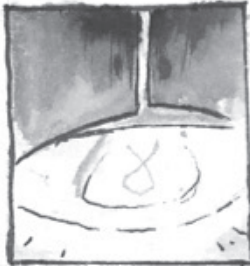


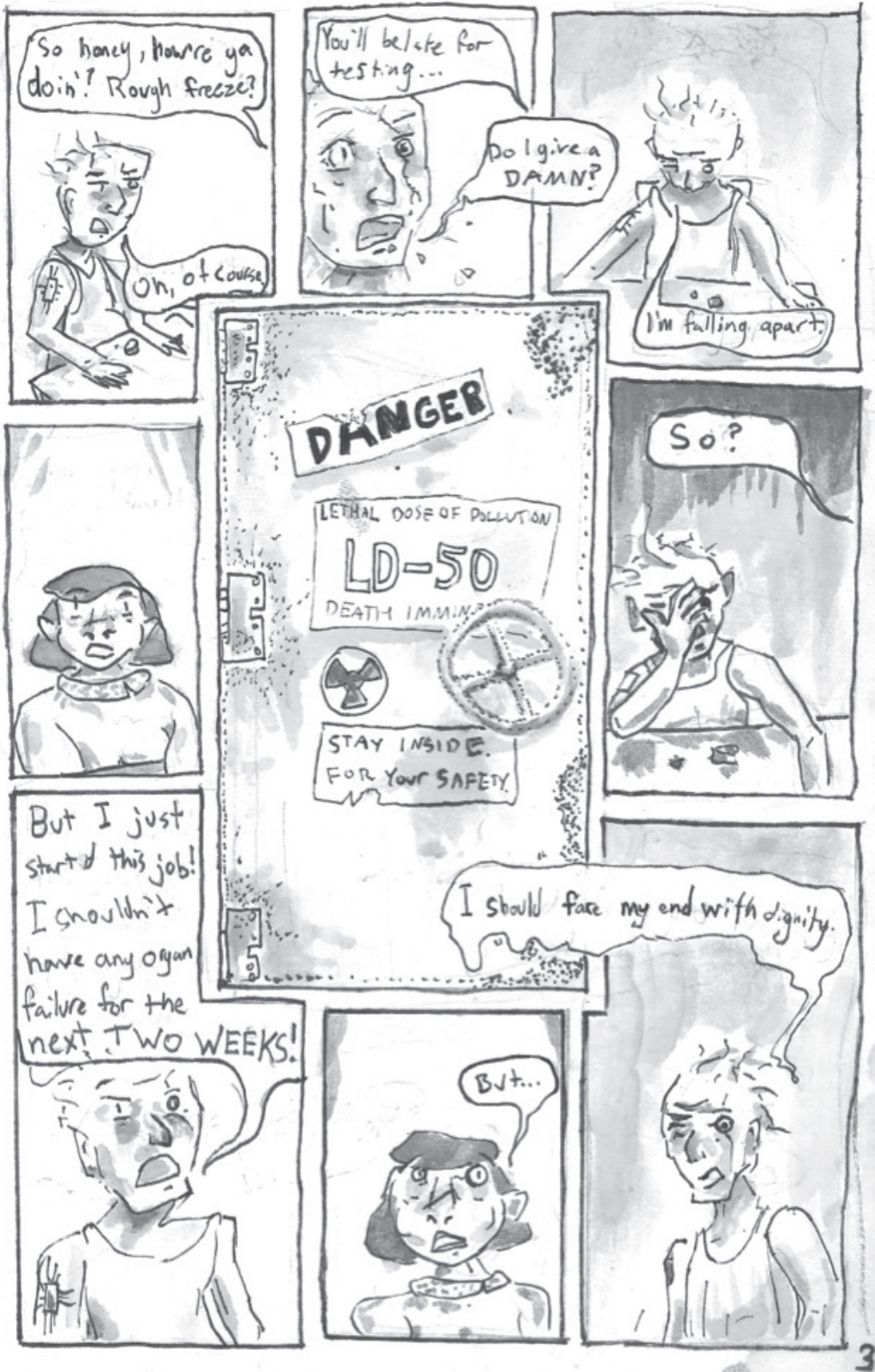
it was probably white and orange. Between the scratches in the cover and the stains and drawings left by long dead people you could read "AP US History." The book was one of a few non-regulation books left; most had been rewritten when education was made great again. It showed the years of wear. Not a corner was left unturned, not a page was left without drawings. But the information was still there.

They began quickly, picking right up where they left off from last time. They had made it from America's inception all the way to a time called "the sixtees." The book was engaging in a way that others weren't. Erik had been enthralled since he read the constitution, the original, from before the great ammendmance. The book was full of things like this, a perspective on an unimaginable world. It talked treason, from discussing American war losses to something it kept returning to called "rights." These weren't the rights Erik was used to; these rights were about more than just bearing arms. Sometimes the book would pair "rights" with other things too, such as civil, women's, or even gay. Needless to say, if he or his teacher were found with this they'd be executed.



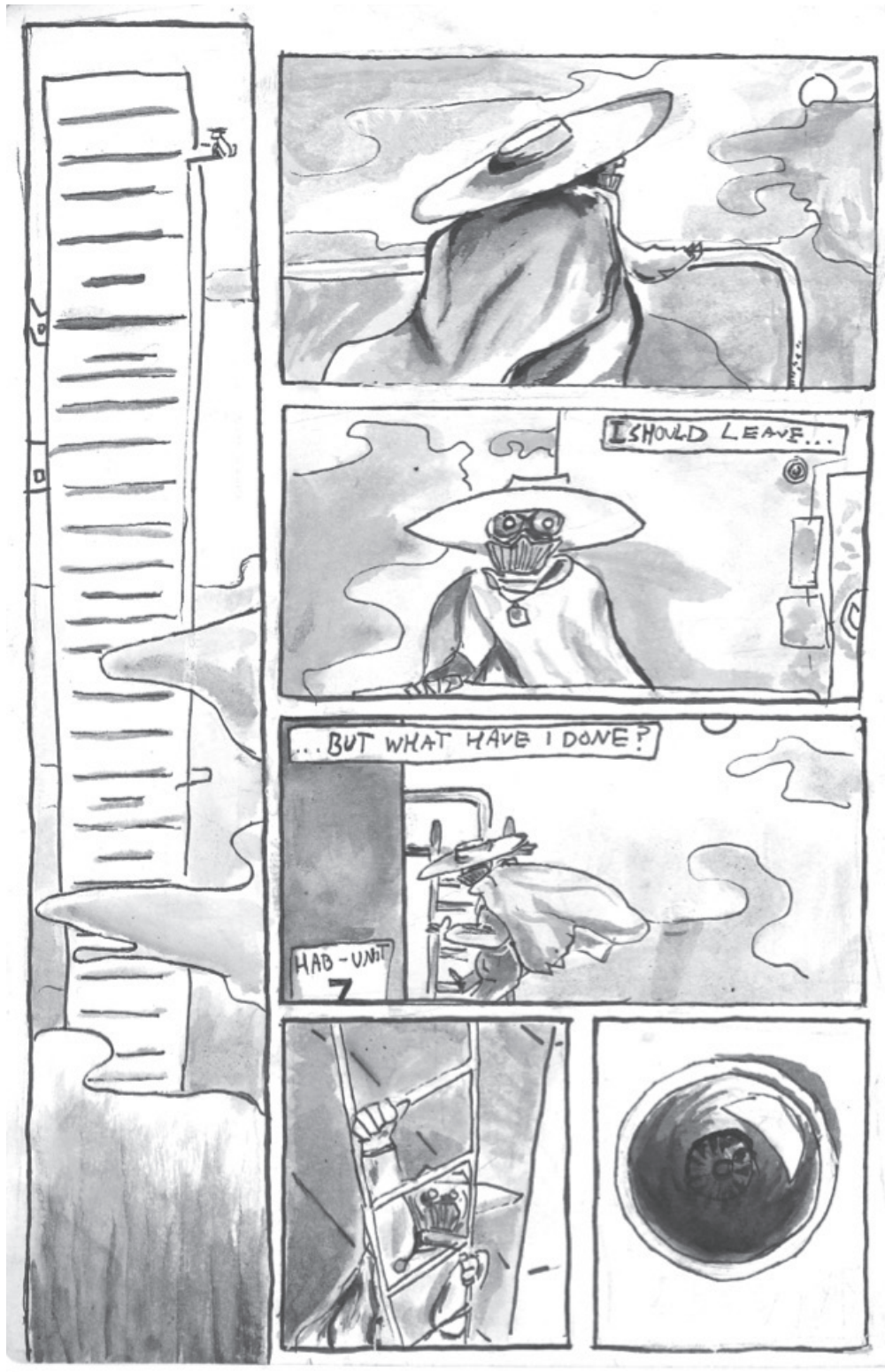


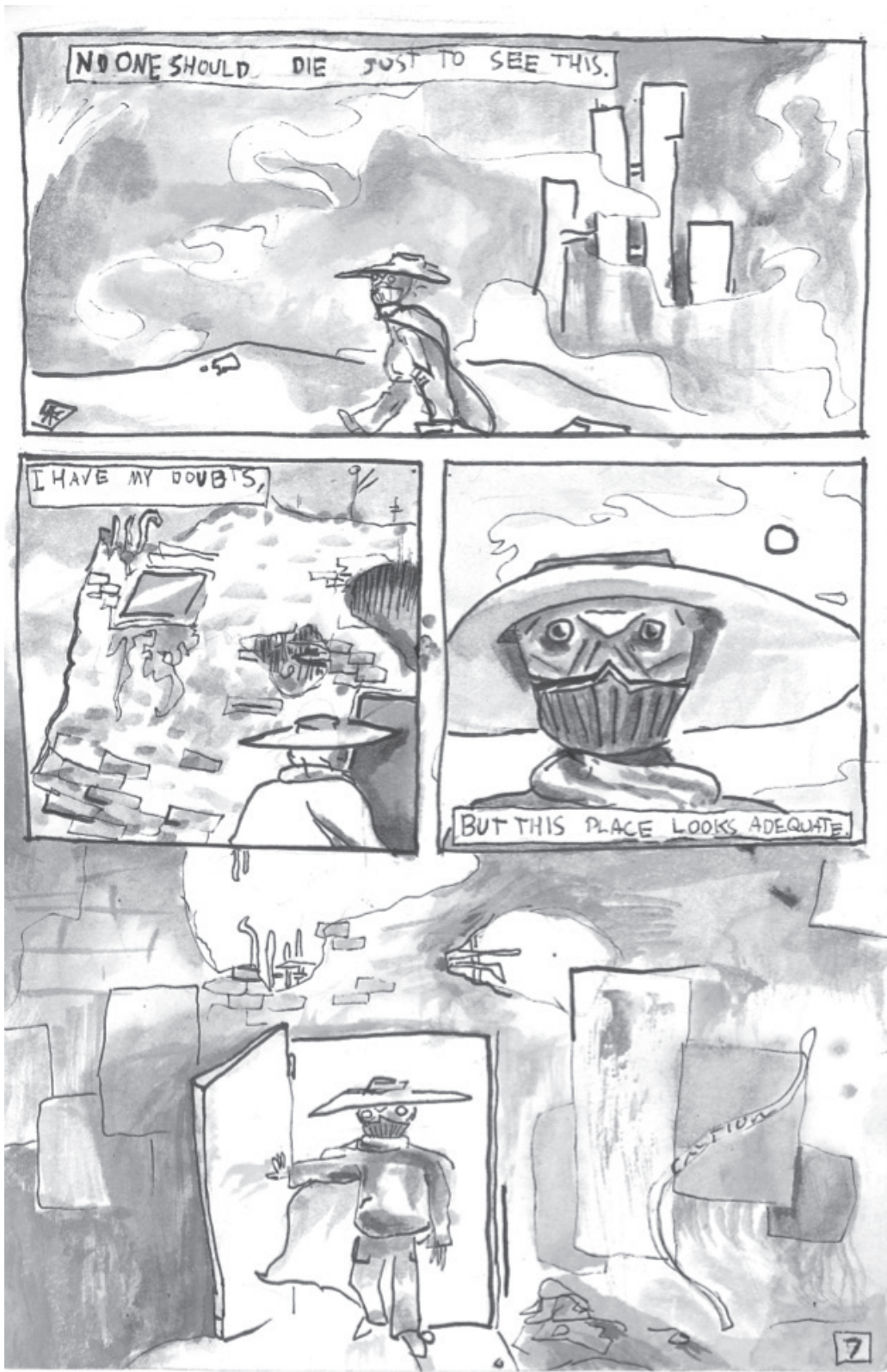
















now a hit vidseries

RETROSPECTIVE
2027



Yeah, she saves
the world, but

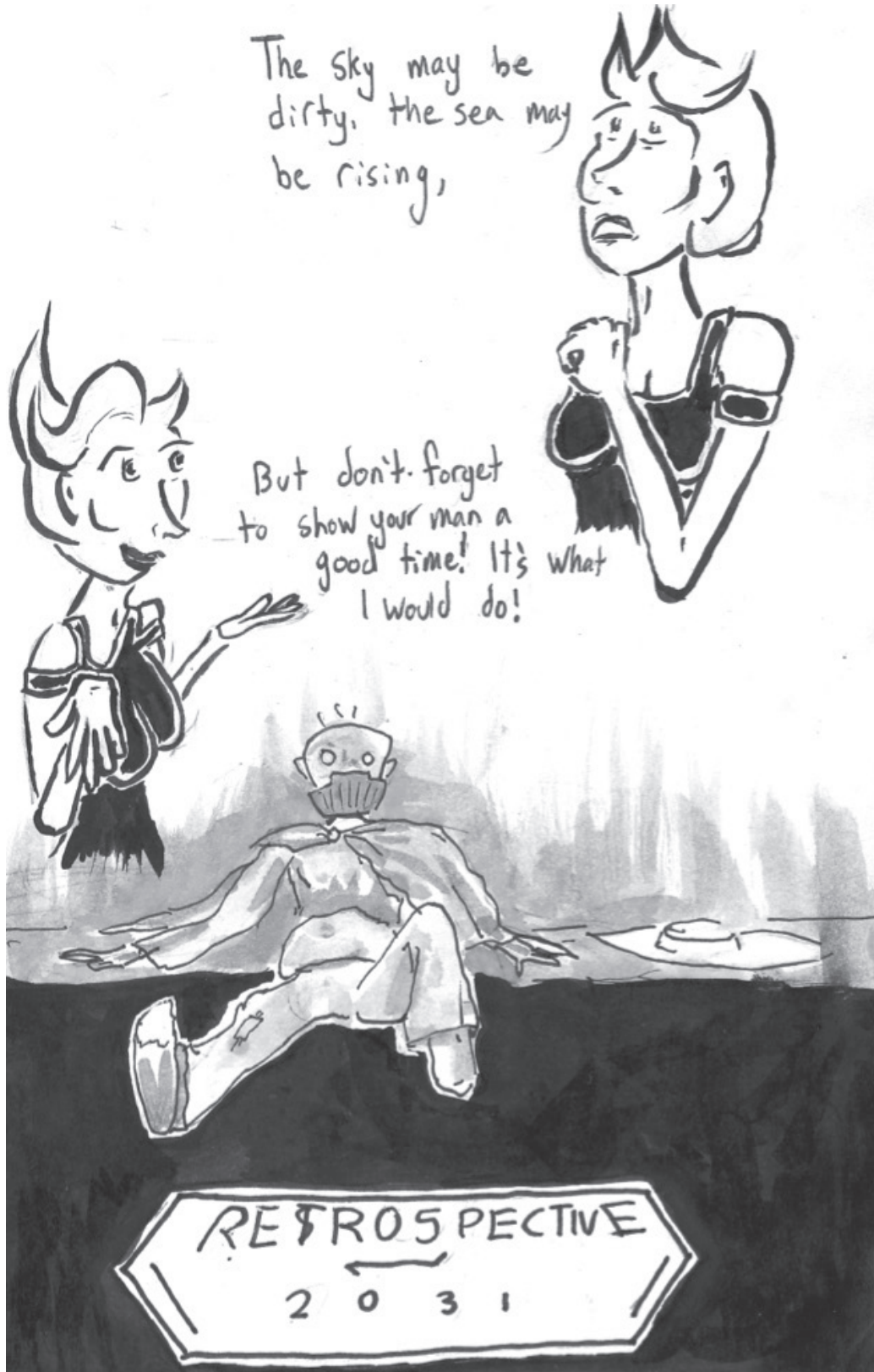
WHO WILL
SHE CHOOSE?

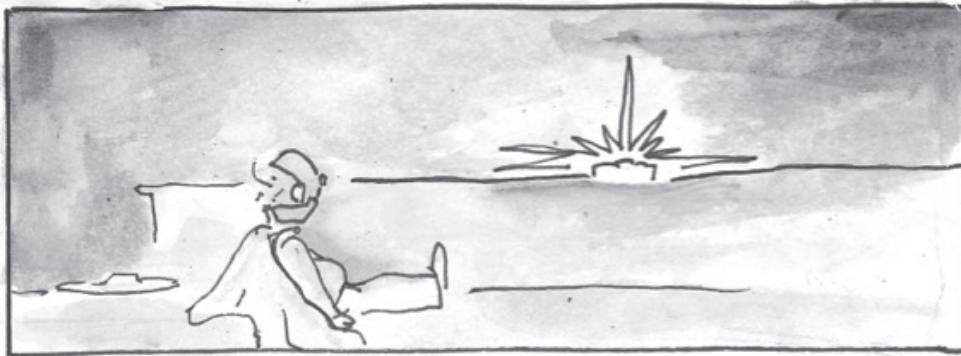
READY FOR REBELLION?



LOOK LIKE
MARY A

RETROSPECTIVE
2028





f.i.n.

X-Dorf - writing
 X-Dorf - art
 X-Dorf - all the good ideas
 Leo Bicklehaupt - Adult responsible, gorgousness
 Moebius - Everything.
 Ridley Scott - Taught me how to see

Thanks, guys.

Charon Mosseaux - Support, gorgousness
 Zoe Gale - Gorgousness
 Caryl Mosseaux - Best Library Priestess
 Ricky Ormann - Rock on, dude.
 Wet paint - Funding my artistic insanity
 Aurora - For jumping me. Thanks.
 Peter Kramer - Getting this thing off the ground.

“HAPPY”

Evan

Gus opened his eyes to the sound of his alarm clock blaring. He fumbled around his cluttered desk until his hand landed on the small, plastic box, and flipped the switch that killed the harsh monotone noise. He sat up rubbing sleep from his eyes and looked outside; blue sky, as always. He always hated that one of the panels of the sky near his house was dead, mainly because his gaze was always drawn to it and distracted him almost daily during his morning routine. He brushed his teeth, got dressed, grabbed breakfast, and headed out of his flat. After locking his door, he turned to see the dirty electronic screen hanging on the wall at the end of his hallway. The screen showed a smiling child with the caption, “BE HAPPY HAPPY HAPPY!” in cheesy, bold lettering. He walked down the numerous flights of stairs to the street sluggishly. He hated the fact that he had to wake up at six every morning so that he would make it to his job by seven, but he kept his feelings to himself. He knew the rules: Be Happy, Buy Happy, Live Happy. He followed rules two and three just fine, mainly due to the fact that the Happy Corporation owned everything: housing, food, water, transportation, etc. But he felt that he couldn’t really live happy.

“Enough of these rubbish thoughts,” Gus thought to himself, “Just put on a smile like you always do, and carry on with your day.” Finally snapping out of his thoughts, Gus looked up to see he had arrived at his work, the water purification plant. He put his belongings in a locker and continued to his position on the floor.

“Same lousy job. Every day,” Gus thought, “Why am I even doing this? Who is this for? This is more water than this city can drink, so where is the

extra water going? Why is...” Gus’ thoughts were interrupted by a firm hand grasping his shoulder like an eagle clutching a mouse.

“Gus!” the deep, gravelly voice boomed, “What do you think you’re doing?” Gus turned to see his overseer looming over him. His build was that of a lumberjack, with the facial hair to match.

“This is the third time this week you’ve been lost in your head Gus, go see The Boss.”

“Uhh... um... yes sir. Right away sir,” Gus stuttered. He knew what this meant. He hadn’t been following the three rules and they had finally caught on.

The Boss’ suite was lavish. Marble floor, dark oak desk and table covered in a clear lacquer, and surrounding the table was a circle of red velvet covered chairs. Gus timidly entered the room, secretly hoping he would not be noticed. He knew his hopes were

in vain. The Boss, who was scratching something down on his official looking paper on the desk, stopped writing abruptly. The quiet was almost deafening. Gus stood frozen in place, his heart pounding in his head.

“Ah! You must be Gus. Please, have a seat,” The Boss said motioning to the chair in front of his desk. Gus, still frozen in place, stood motionless for a few seconds before blinking and shaking his head.

“Y-yes sir. Thank you sir,” Gus managed to force out while hastily sitting down.

“Gus, we have noticed that on multiple occasions you seemed unhappy or discontent with either your job or your life. We are deeply concerned that your behavior might rub off or get noticed by your peers. Because of this you have gotten your first strike-”

Gus swallowed; his mouth went dry.



“First... strike...” Gus thought.

“We will need to take the proper precautions to ensure-”

“Oh god! What does that mean? What’s gonna happen to me?”

Gus, lost in his thoughts, had forgotten to listen to The Boss until he heard in a loud voice, “Gus! Do you agree?”

“Um- oh of course! Sir.”

“Good! Then let’s proceed. Follow me.”

Sluggishly, Gus stood with The Boss and trailed behind him with the look of a puppy caught

tearing up a shoe. He kept his eyes focused on the floor in front of him as he dragged his feet forward. After some distance, they arrived to a set of sand colored doors with polished brass handles. The Boss grasped the handle and pushed forcefully against the weight of the doors.

“Please wait here. I’ll be right back.”

As The Boss pushed his way into the room, Gus managed to catch a glimpse of what was inside. He began to feel faint.



TRADEMARK YOU

Flannery

It started as a way to avoid identity theft. Fingerprints and DNA were not enough. Names became one of a kind, adding the year of birth to the end and changing the spelling. Just last year, it became illegal to own an object not on the national registrar, punishable by reconcentration....

The ball bounced slowly down the sidewalk. Leighleigh J. 46’ ran after it. Finally it started to roll to a halt, in front of the atrocious house that belonged to Old Sally. Nobody knew the reason that the government let the house stand. Its disgustingly boring beige walls, with the white trim, the brown mat that said “WELCOME” in all caps, and the white painted wood fence that had not been maintained for decades. Leighleigh J. 46’ couldn’t even look at it. It reminded her of the house that her Great Gran grew up in. But that was in picture, one of those physical papers, the glossy square ones that always stayed the same that they used way back in the teens. That was history. This was not. This was...this is... normal she thought. She didn’t even know what what word ment. It was just another bad word that one of the older kids used at the playground. She picked up the ball and looked at the house. Even standing by it made her feel uncomfortable. She dropped the ball and kicked it mid air, allowing it to soar through the air like a bird, back to Zaruh

S. 44’, who was still waiting.

“Hurry up! By the time you get back over here it will be time for me to take my color meds!” Zaruh S. 44’ getting antsy and started bouncing on one leg.

“I’m sorry, I just don’t want to scare Old Sally. What if she...”

“What if she what? She old like 120 sum. All she does is sit there and drool with her eyes closed.”

“You’ve seen her?” Leighleigh J. 46’ couldn’t believe that Zaruh S. 44’ had done that . . . what if her mother found out? Was that grounds for reconcentration?

“Yeah” Zaruh S. 44’ stopped bouncing and smirked. “I dared Bennei G. 45’, but he was too afraid. I couldn’t be a chicken like them, so I snuck a peek right through her kitchen window.”

“Wow, I didn’t think she was still alive.” Leighleigh J. 46’ looked back at the house trying to make it not noticeable.

“Honestly, didn’t look like she was. Just sort of sittin’ there with this brown, like a #F8ECC2 type thing”

“Haha very funny, I know that’s the color of physical paper.”

“Yeah, but this was a lot of it.” Zaruh S 44’ held out her little pinkie finger. “But it was folded

down the center. It was really strange.”

At that moment the 13:00 bell rang. Every door on the block opened and dozens of voices rang out in a chorus: “Lunch Time!”. All the kids in the street filed into the appropriate houses for the afternoon meal and meds. Leighleigh’s was no different. Her mother hung out the front door of the house like all the others.

When she got to the door and her mother smiled while holding the concave polygonal door open for her. Leighleigh couldn’t wait to keep counting the sides. Her mother wouldn’t tell her the number, said she had to figure it out on her own. She turned back to wave at Zaruh S. 44’, but the triangle door was already closed across the street.

They sat down at the table.

“Daeighseigh J. 21’ how was your day?”

“Oh it was wonderful! I got a lot of work done around the house and talked to Jaemes QW. 15’ about going out this evening. Did you have fun with Zaruh S. 44’?”

“Yeah! We kicked the ball around!”

“That sounds fun dear. What’s that in your hair?” her mother pointed to a fuchsia ribbon wrapped around remanence of the bun that was in Leighleigh J. 46’s hair.

“Zaruh had two, one in each pigtail so she gave one to me.” She smiled and stroked the tail of the ribbon.

“Zaruh S. 44’. Sweetie, you know that that is her color. That ribbon is registered to her. If you

want to keep it you have to regis-...did you say she had two of them?”

Leighleigh J. 46’ looked down sheepishly “Yes, one in each pigtail...”

Her mother stood up and ran to the windows to close the shades. “You know that’s against the rules! That was okay when you were younger, but you’re 11 now, you need to have your own original ideas. What if someone saw you? You

wouldn’t want them to take you away now would we. Now let’s get rid of that atrocity.” She came over to Leighleigh J. 46’ and carefully took out the ribbon. The phone rang.

They both froze.

Daeighseigh J. 21’ slowly pressed the answer button “Hello? Yes, she is right here.... ribbon...no I haven’t seen a ribbon...” She looked over at Leighleigh J. 46’ and nervously fidgeted with her skirt. “My daughter is not a liar.” She hung up.

Burn it. Burn it now. That was all she could think. If the FP saw it, Leighleigh J. 46’ would be sent away for conditioning. She couldn’t handle that. Not again. Everyone knew that once the FP were involved, routine life

would stop. Leighleigh J. 46’ would go away, and she would be left alone in the house, where they would assign someone to stay with her. Her reputation would be ruined. To raise a child that had to be reconditioned?

No. This ends with the ribbon.



THE YELLOW JACKETS ARE COMING

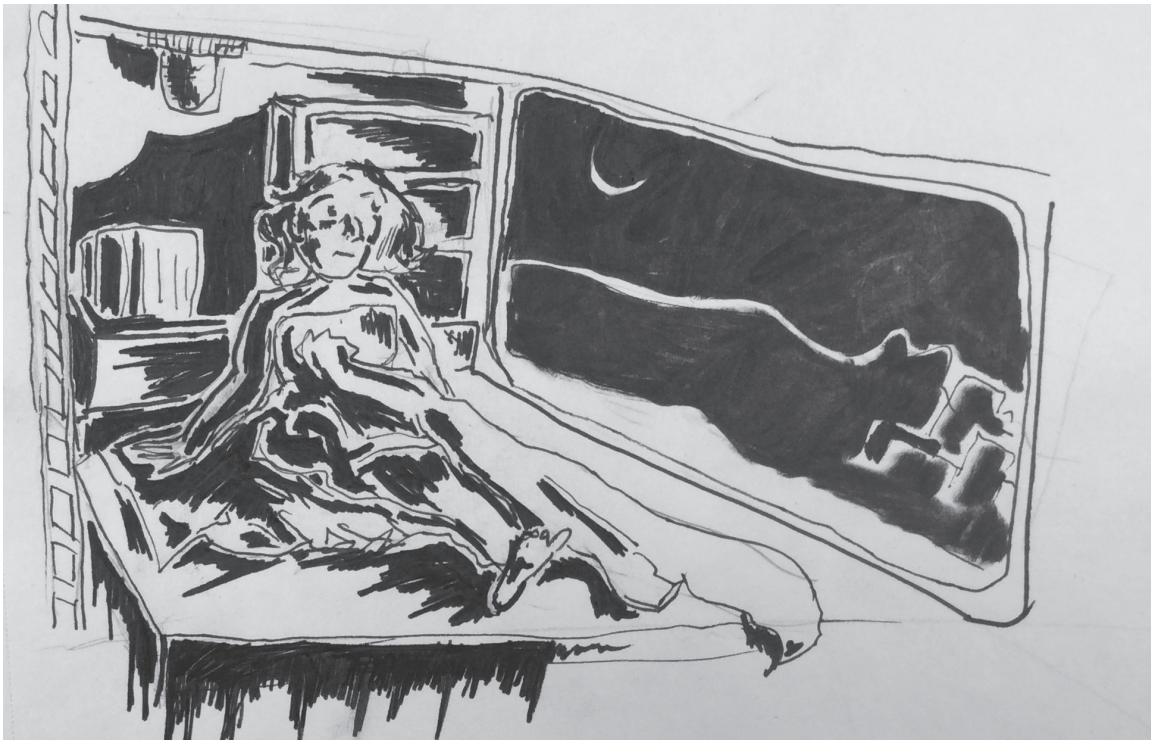
Marisol

I woke up, startled. I do not know what startled me, a dream or a sound. But outside my window is dark and I know that I must go back to sleep. If I do not I will be tired in the morning and have to give up my free time at the community center to compensate for my slowness. I love badminton, one of the many sports that we can play at the community center. It is my favorite thing to do, besides work of course. Everyone must work; we are productive and enjoy what we do. Everyone is equal and receives the same education. A chip is placed at birth with all of the necessary information programmed to dispense at the proper time as determined by the Corporation. Anyway sleep is a must in our society. Past generations of humans got very little sleep which limited productivity.

In the morning I am awoken by the soft sob-

bing of my roommate Emily. Apparently Rose was taken sometime in the night by the Yellow Jackets, an elite group selected by the Corporation to eliminate threats to our society. Rose lived in the room below. She was nice. The establishment has three floors as does every other. We will need to clear out her room later to ensure none of her illegal thoughts corrupt us. I do hope that Emily stops crying. She's going to get in trouble for wasting time. I decide to go clean out Rose's things as Emily does not seem to be able to stop crying.

My stockinged feet fall silently on the hardwood floors that span the entire complex. The dark wood is meant to be relaxing, but it can give the rooms a bit of a foreboding feeling. I walk into Rose's room and immediately see why she was taken away. She had not cleaned her room in weeks.



There were clear signs of depression, a forbidden feeling. Depression was what ruined previous societies; these people were lazy and did not contribute to society. A society cannot function properly with sad and slow people. "If you do not want to contribute to society you do not need to be in it," is the Company's motto. I think it is fairly reasonable; I certainly have never felt discontent. I mean, I have my moments, but I always pull myself together very quickly. I try not to dwell on things.

After throwing Rose's things in a recycling bin in the back of the house I walk back inside to start my day. I have recycling duty today so on go the work gloves and heavy boots. A high functioning society like ours cannot have garbage, even things the depressed once used can be useful somewhere else.

Breakfast is quiet this morning, most are thinking of Rose I assume. She was well liked in our complex. I hope that no else is depressed. After all we were harbouring at least one of the depressed amongst ourselves. We will be under surveillance for a while for this infraction. After breakfast we all leave to do our jobs for this week and everything seems to go back to normal. Emily and I even have a friendly chat about the lovely weather this morning.

As I walk from house to house making the usual recycling rounds, I hear a scream. This is

something I have only heard once before. In our society mothers are with their children for the first four years, then the children start to work, obviously not as much as us teenagers, but some. During my Separation one of the mothers refused to let her child move on. It is one of my earliest memories. She kicked and screamed horrible things at the officials of the Separation. The Yellow Jackets had to drag her away. This sound reminds me of the agony of the mothers' cry. I follow it to a small courtyard off to the side of a complex.

The courtyard is fairly isolated, surrounded by thick greenery, trees and the like. Peeping through the dense growth I see a young woman a bit older than me with very blonde hair and brilliant clover green eyes, being taken by Yellow Jackets. As I look around I see many being taken, this seems to be some sort of uprising. No one has ever dared to stand up to the yellow jackets in my memory, not even the mother at the Separation. Looking back at the woman I see a Yellow Jacket looking directly at me. The woman also sees this and seems to be yelling at me to run.

Allowing my instincts to take over I sprint to safety. Attempting to control my ragged breathing I count to ten slowly in my head, 1...2...3...4. My concentration is broken by the sound of footsteps approaching.



BEWARE OF DISTRICT 7

Eli

It was a frigid day, and Joel Hex rushed towards the shelter of his home. As he sped through the streets he passed countless storage facilities filled with records from the other districts. Each building was aged and dull looking with bright posters pasted to the sides. These bright posters were laid out with a yellow background and read out the message, "Food shortage, consume less" in bold black letters. Inside of these storage facilities, district 6 workers sorted and filed millions of papers from the other 9 districts.

Wind blew miscellaneous papers about

the empty streets as Joel turned the corner towards his apartment building. With a great pull he opened the the heavy metal door. Inside he was hit with the pungent smell of some foul smelling carpet and his neighbors' Spam dinner. Down the hall he passed door after door each with the same yellow poster stapled to it, "Food shortage, consume less". Inside his apartment, Joel couldn't eat. He knew a dark secret about the emergency Spam rations district 7 provided and he was not going to expose himself to it. Instead of sitting there afraid like he had done for the past week, he was going

to get the secret out and expose district 7.

He began writing. "Hello, my name is Joel Hex, if you do not know me I'm the head of district 6 records department. My job is to confirm that all outgoing records report the accurate amount of export. More specifically to ensure that the reported amount of food sent out from district 9 is correct. As all of you know, there have been massive food shortages. I can confirm that this is because of a widespread crop failure that is occurring in district 9. However, what you don't know is—"

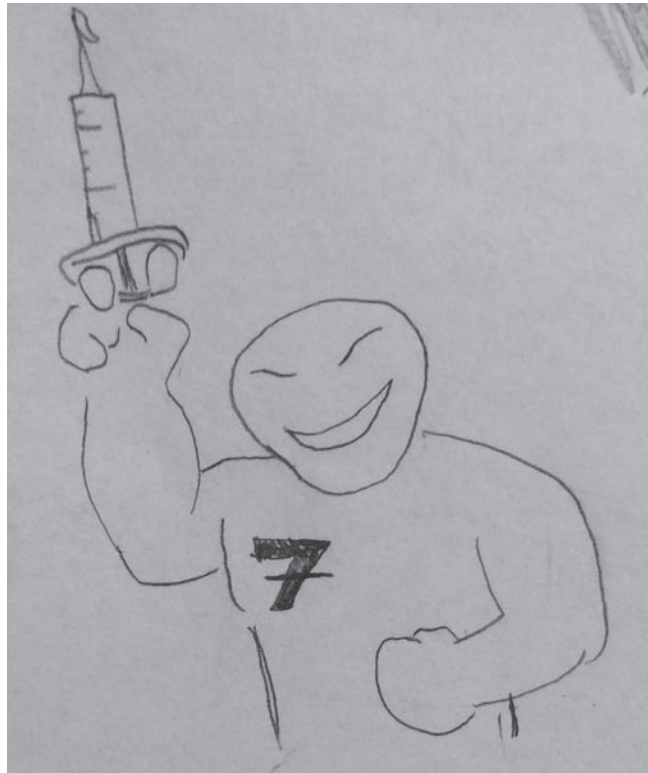
BANG, BANG. Suddenly, he felt his heart jump in fright. There had been two knocks on his door. His normal reaction would be to get up and answer, but give his current situation he was more nervous. "Just a second," Joel responded as the knocking continued. He got up and looked for anything that could be used in defense. Shaking, he grasped a paperweight and slowly approached the door. Each step felt like an eternity, his heartbeat was louder than every knock on his door.

He took a look through the peep sight and calmed. It was one of his neighbor's young children, he had most likely come on his parents' behalf to beg for food. "Get out of here," Joel shouted, "I have nothing to give you." Joel saw the kid walk away in disappointment and went back to work. Looking down at the last word

written he began again. "However, what you don't know is that district 9 has been shrinking. Not the size of the district, the actual population has been reduced to almost nothing. So how could an whole district vanish? That can be answered by actions done by—"

BANG, BANG. Again the knock on his door. "Another beggar, this is getting unbearable," Joel said to himself angrily as he walked to the door. "Look, I don't have any food!" he stated as he swung open the door. But he stopped in his tracks, these weren't his neighbor's kids. It was 3 large men with 7's on their upper right chests. Joel was frozen, two of them grabbed him while the third said, "Hex, we've been watching you for some time now, frankly I'm baffled that someone in your position could be so blatant about your research. With such an important position do you think no one would be paying attention?" A sharp pain spiked into Joel's neck, they had injected him with something. Blackness took over Joel's world as he was dragged through the hallways of his building.

So why was Joel Hex so afraid of district 7? Why should have district 9 been afraid of district 7? It's a simple reason. Because Seven Eight Nine.



FRIENDS, FAMILY, FOOD

Faith

Max opens his eyes from a not so very good night of sleep. He sits up in his bed of dead leaves and mud clutching at his throbbing back. He looks over at Alexander, who's only a year older and dressed in a battered hawaiian shirt and ripped jeans, still in a deep sleep. Max shivers as the morning air hits his face and freezing mud seeps between his toes. The mountain top was always a nice place to hide from the savages once called people, but still it's never a warm place to be. He still grabs at the scar on his back from an attack from a cannibalistic human when he was younger. He's 18 now, or so he thinks.

That was the day he met Alexander. There's not a lot he can remember simply because he doesn't want to. For the most part he recalls Alex throwing a sharp rock at his attackers' head. The next thing he knew Max was calling Alex family. Max hears the calming flow of the river not far from him and walks over to it. He looks at his reflection in the crystal clear water. His curly brown hair a mess and his face full of dirt. His black shirt full of holes and grey pants covered in mud. What looks back at him is nothing compared to who he used to be. There was a day when savagery was a crime and hate was resolved with love. Max begins to cry silently as he places his hand on his groaning stomach. It's been seven years since the government people announced cannibalism was acceptable. They used to shout from the street, "Friends, Family, Food: It's all the same!" In his innocent years the saying meant little to him but, to his mother he could see the disgust on her face every time the words were uttered from someone's mouth.

Max was taught that people are friends and family but never food. As a result he's been forced to slowly starve himself. Every once and awhile on a hike he'd find a box of crackers at a dirty road-

side truck stop at the bottom of the mountain but normally he eats dirt and leaves. To think that overpopulation created an end to the world's food supply was baffling. Still staring at his reflection in disgust tears drip down his face. Max submerges his head in the water and holds his breath wondering how long til he'd pass. The thought of simply the end made Max's heart fill with joy. He'd finally be with his family after years and years of loneliness. Eventually he lets the water to enter his mouth and soon it fills his lungs. Memories of Max's existence flash before him. He remembers eight years ago his mother dressed in red on a warm Florida morning. She kisses Max and hands him a pile of pancakes as high as the Eiffel Tower. That's same day moments after he finished his breakfast he heard on the radio a bomb dropped on the capital.

You'd of thought it was a terrorist attack but, actually it was the states turning on each other. Max recalls the newsman announcing later that day, "Florida has bombed the capital because of the neglect to fix the recent food shortage." The very next year a siren goes off Max's mother scrambles some things, mostly boxes of dry food, and places them in a car. She pushes Max into the shiny yellow four doored Ford and they drive away from their once loved home. His house was a single level white house with blue trimming. He made a fort in the backyard where he use to play till the sun went down. Still, as they drove away, his mother said nothing to him. Tears flowed down her cheeks and fear struck her like lighting on a pole. Even at ten years old he knew what was going on but, what unsettled him was the fact people were being killed and consumed because of the shortage. They spend a week in a campground hours from home. The last memory Max had with his mother was her being forced into a green army helicopter along

with several other individuals screaming their loved ones names. When the helicopter flew away all that remained good turned evil. Max was alone and scared with no one left in the world. As he started to walk back to the car an old man with a long white beard and a large belly who had a similar appearance to Santa stopped him. He looked down at Max scratching his head and told him to stop crying. The man sat him down and asked him if that woman was his mother. Max wiped the tear from his eyes and nodded. The man smiled as he leaned forward to Max's ear he whispered, "She's food now." Without hesitation Max ran until his legs gave out. The thought of his mother ripped to shreds piece by piece by army officials rolled through his mind every day. After numerous minutes underwater Max becomes weak and the thoughts turn to blackness filled with nothing but beautiful silence.

Suddenly Alexander slaps his hands on Max's shoulders pulling him from the water. Smiling Alex says "Oh, good morning buddy."

Max replies "Hey Alex." Max forces his tears deep inside.

Alex looks up at the sky and still smiling like a mad man he asks "Wanna go on a walk? It's a beautiful morning for hunting."

Max shrugs his shoulders and Alex picks him off the ground. "Come on boy, we're young. Hunting is in our blood."

Max shakes his head and tears again flow from his eyes.

"The hell is wrong with you!" screams Alex as he loses his temper.

Max refuses to look him in the eyes.

Alex furiously shakes Max until he screams "I'm

tired of hunting it's wrong I refuse to eat another human being. Do you know how disgusting it is Alex? Hmm? Do you know what it's like to feed on another person's flesh. Do you ever sit and wonder as you attack and consume someone. When you take your blade and puncture it through their beating chest. Then as they lie there barely living you sink your teeth into their arm. Think about it. That person you're eating had a life. Maybe not a great life but it was a life and you took that away from them."

Alex suddenly spaces out which is common for Alex. As he stares at the ground he thinks

about what Max just said about taking a life away. He remembers his father taking him fishing on the Mississippi. Catch and release his father always taught him. They'd take their tiny blue fishing boat out into the middle of the river. His dad was an older man around 60 when the savagery broke out. He was a large overweight man with grey colored hair. His mother died of cancer when she was young. They lived in a small two roomed cabin in



the woods 10 miles from the closest city where he went to school. He remembers the day the sirens went off. His father left that same afternoon to get some food supplies from the market. He was late that day, and they were supposed to go fishing, but when he came back he was covered in blood and bite marks. Tears flooded from Alex's eyes as he held his father in his arms and cried on his scratchy red flannel as he bled out on the wood floors.

Alex shakes the memories from his head and pushes Max to the ground. He angrily replies "You know what Max? You're just selfish. You're sitting here starving to death. The government gave the thumbs up on eating people because, there is no other option. The

world is overpopulated and the animals died out. What are you expecting people to do, eat the goddamn trees?"

Max stands back up. "Well that's not a bad idea actually."

He walks to the nearest tree and shoves a handful of dry crumbling leaves in his mouth.

"How does that taste? Good?" says Alex sarcastically as he crosses his arms.

Max swallows the leaves and with a bitter taste in his mouth replies "It tastes pretty damn good. And hey, it's better than being a freaking cannibal."

"I'm not a cannibal," replies Alex before he storms off leaving Max alone in the woods.

"Where are you going?" yells Max.

"Oh, wouldn't you like to know," says Alex as he looks back at Max who stands in place with an angry look on his face.

After pouting for an hour Max walks the same direction Alex was going. He picks up a stick and hits it against the dark grey boulders as he walks. He jumps from rock to rock down the mountain he

calls home. He follows Alex's muddy footprints until he reaches the base of the mountain where the footprints disappear. He looks out at the forest of tall leafy trees. Max hates the feeling of loneliness so he calls out for Alex. He climbs halfway up a tall sticky oak tree. He calls Alex's name over ten times, hoping to spot him.

He never finds Alex, nor does he reply to the shouting. Suddenly he begins to worry which triggers his anxiety. Max climbs

down from the tree and curls up in the fetal position on a warm rock closest to the direction he assumes Alex went. After several hours of rocking back and forth Max assures himself that Alex will be back. His intense anxiety attack eventually ends leaving Max with

the feeling of butterflies in this stomach. He quietly waits for a good six hours when the anxiety attack comes back. The sun disappears and the sky turns to black and there's still no sign of Alex whatsoever. Still, with all signs pointing to the worst, Max reassures himself that Alex just decided to camp out somewhere else for the night. So Max decides he must do the same. He curls up with his head in his lap and sleeps on a large bolder close to the base of the mountain. He lies there hoping the frigid air will force him to forget about the fact that all he had to eat that day was a handful of dirty leaves.

He's left with his thoughts that yell unspeakable things to him. Thinking of a generation too stupid to fix a problem but smart enough to make it. Thoughts of pulling the plug on humanity dance furiously through his throbbing head, but before thoughts turn to actions Max blacks out from exhaustion and hunger. Drool drips from his mouth as he lies motionless on the rock. The night is empty and quiet.

"The world is overpopulated and the animals died out. What are you expecting people to do, eat the goddamn trees?"



TIMID NEW WORLD

Sam

Glibbers Chardface stood dumbly at his optimized workstation at the gray turtle-neck factory, denied even the basic dignity of sitting. It was a bleak, cold, dry, typical April day, the obvious worst month of the year. It was April first, the most sensitive day of the year since all jokes were outlawed by the Reforms. The man reloaded the itchy fabric into the machine and it was consumed. He glanced around the floor, all the other workers monotonously intent on their unskilled labor.

Chicago was finally completely uniform. The entire city was a collection of the exact same 20-story building,

creating the appearance of a large gray cube that was only permeated by a square lattice of sensibly numbered streets. No streets had names, only a logical alpha-numerical cataloging system in tune with the rest of the optimized nation. Everywhere was like this since the Great Reformation. Self-expression and entertainment were extinct.

Rays of yearning light grasped through the small windows at the top of each floor of the standard turtle-neck factory, longing to shine on happy flesh again. "Let me touch a human!" the light said, "The world totally sucks now!" The harsh wind that terrorized the streets nodded in agreement.

Chardface's hand absent-mindedly drifted into his pocket, where he kept his secret note, the last remnant he had of the world past. He imagined smiles on the faces of all his cohorts and laughter filling the air. Everyone wear-

ing flamboyantly colored t-shirts and rolling on the floor. The Blood-Red flag of the Controllers that hung on every wall wrapped around his shoulders like a cape. He was jumping, laughing, dancing and everyone was--

A sharp shock from his regulation neck implant shook him back to cruel reality. No one was laughing. No one was smiling. Just pure efficiency. The world had now been liberated to

maximum product output. There was no more distractions of entertainment and comedy. Humans were all now constantly doing what they were meant to do: Work in cold, dark, factories.

"A sharp shock from his regulation neck implant shook him back to cruel reality. No one was laughing. No one was smiling. Just pure efficiency."

”

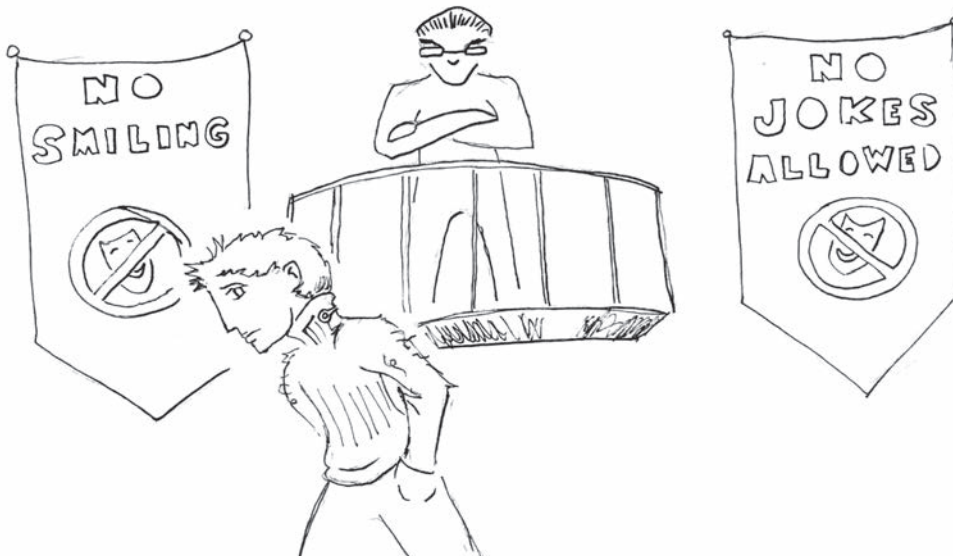
He let go of the small slip of paper he had been clutching in his pocket and unloaded the overdue t-shirt from the clogging machine. The buzz in his neck died down as he returned to his work, stoic on the outside, unhinged underneath. The dull, persistent itch started up where the shock had been, but Glibbers didn't even try to humor it, knowing from experience that any effort to relieve it would be in vain.

Chardface reached over to the console at his workstation and tapped the screen. It lit up and two options appeared on the monitor: "Clock Out" displaying 3:46 remaining, and "Restroom" with two uses under it. He touched the toilet icon and stood up from his misshapen seat even though he didn't need to go. He walked past all the other frowning faces of the people working at their machines, subconsciously knowing they would never smile in their lives. He increased his pace, holding his

head in his hands and making a beeline for the bathrooms.

Glibbers stumbled through the swinging doors and almost collapsed against the sinks, overwhelmed. He had episodes like this from time to time, of hopeless longing for a different life. He began calming himself down. He stared into his eyes in the mirror and splashed water on his cheeks. Then he slowed his heavy breathing and did what he always did in these situations: reached into his pocket and grabbed the small piece of paper.

Slowly and methodically he unfold-



own face in the mirror and dared a treasonist act. His lips, closed tightly together, began to quiver up at the corners. His eyes glowed with hope as the smile broadened. It grew and grew and his teeth began to show. Euphoria coursed through his body and the joy of smiling spread from his mouth to his fingertips. He was overcome by it and couldn't stop.

The sound of a flush erupted behind him.

His expression quickly turned to terror and shock as he shoved the picture back in his pocket and whirled around. Anthony, his co-worker, pushed open a stall door with one hand and hiked up his trousers with the other.

ed it, eyes affixed on the creases but ears on full alert. It was a photograph, faded over the years since its capture. It showed a theater at night, people flocking in from the street under a marquee that read two glorious words: Second City. He gazed longfully at the artifact, his last fragment of the way things were before. The Second City of the myths, where people would come from miles around to laugh at the masters of comedy. He blinked for the first time in a minute and a single tear rolled loose from his left eye.

He looked up from the photo back to his

Chardface knew Anthony, but only as much as he knew everyone else, they were acquaintances. He gave Glibbers a typical lazy and depressed look-- eyes half closed, mouth spread in a line-- and began to move for the door.

Suddenly a crazy thought appeared in Glibbers' mind, something even more heretical than a smile, something written on the other side of his photograph. Here in the bathroom where the controllers weren't constantly monitoring them, he saw an opportunity. His hand shot out and he grabbed Anthony by the wrist. "Wait," he said, a frantic look in his eyes, "Listen to me Anthony. You have to listen."

"What's going on?" Anthony said, sud-

denly very confused, “Is something happening?”

Once again, Glibbers reached into his pocket and pulled out the photograph. This time he flipped it over and began reading the hasty scrawl on the back aloud. “Two peanuts,” he read, taking slow cautious breaths, “were walking down a dark alley.” He looked up at Anthony’s face, confused and worried. He took a deep breath and read the final line “One was a-salted.”

Chardface anxiously looked up at his one man audience, realizing he had no idea what would come next. First Anthony let out a quick breath through his nose. His mouth reluctantly curved upward on its own accord. A silent laugh started up. His lips cracked open and it became vocal, like a virtuoso bird released from a gag and letting out his beautiful song. More and more Anthony began to laugh uncontrollably until his whole body was consumed by a guffaw. The happiness was so refreshing and contagious that Glibbers let out some anxiety and began to cautiously join in.

Then Anthony’s head exploded.

The sound was deafening. His neck implant had sensed his unlawful deed and activated, spraying blood and bone fragments all over the bathroom. It went from a blank slate to an all-red Jackson Pollock in seconds. Glibbers stepped back in total shock, his clothes covered in the remains of his late friend’s brain. For a moment he just stood there, completely aghast at what had just occurred.

The frozen moment was interrupted by the sound of the bathroom door opening again. Another man walked in and said “I came in to see what all the ruckus was--” then he saw the horror. And Glibbers, covered in blood. “You... You...” he struggled to get words out. “I’ll tell! I’ll tell! You killed him! I’m gonna tell!”

“Two peanuts were walking down

an alley and one was assaulted!” Glibbers shouted back, at the end of his very short, fraying rope. The unfamiliar laugh started slow in this new guy too. Glibbers didn’t stay to see the end.

He ran past him as fast as he could out onto the factory floor. A second earth-rending blast shook the lavatory behind him. Workers all around the room froze as he dashed past, sporting an uncustomary crimson.

He reached the exit doors, locked. They were always locked during work hours. He pounded as hard as he could, but to no avail. Some people rose up and began to surround him as he collapsed to the ground.

“My god.”

“What did he do?”

“Is he a murderer?”

“So much blood...”

“T-Two p-p-peanuts,” Chardface choked out through a stream of tears, not knowing what else to do, but horrified by the possible effects of his next few words. A dark figure in red tinted glasses pushed to the front of the crowd, one of the controllers. “Walked down a... a... an alley--”

“Stop,” the agent said, and knelt down in front of the cog collapsed on the floor. “Why was six afraid of seven?”

“Wh-why?” he stammered.

The agent leaned in close to whisper in his ear, and Glibbers noticed for the first time that they wore no neck implant.

“Because,” they whispered, “Seven. Ate. Nine.”



VIRTUE POINTS

Matteo

CARL

The car in front of Carl cut him off and Carl pushed down on the horn. He opened his window and yelled some naughty words at the car in front of him. He wrote down the custom license plate of the car, "THE ORDER", so he could report them for a point reduction. Carl made a mental note to make a Youtube video about some of the strange political cults that had been showing up recently.

Carl enjoyed his Youtube channel but mostly disliked his day job. He worked as a paid test subject and researcher for NessGen pharmaceutical. The drug he tested the most was something that came in a trademark pink bottle called OpenNess. A drug that made you believe what other people told you. After the effect wore off what you learned stayed with you. People would willingly buy OpenNess when they wanted to stop believing opinions that were, "harmful". Carl was mostly immune to the drug except in higher doses, typically put straight into the bloodstream. Today he had taken a bunch of a new version of OpenNess and convinced himself that spiders are cute and adorable.

Carl looked out his car window at a billboard that read "Charles Astrophel's tips for gaining virtue points quick" and had the name of a website on it. Carl secretly hated people with high virtue points and Charles was famous for having one of the highest virtue point scores ever. One of Carl's friends had sent him Astrophel's self help book and he only made it as far as the 2nd chapter before putting it in the little free library in front of his neighbor's house.

He turned on the news. It was an interview with the president about America's magnificent recovery from a time of bigotry and closed mindedness. After the interview an automated voice read off the names of the people at the top of the virtue leaderboard. Carl sighed and turned his radio to the music channel. The pop songs blasted with lyrics about power, politics, and love. The songs kept to the party line as much as possible. Music had lost its sense of rebellion. Any rebellion would have to

be well hidden like in Shostakovich's 5th Symphony. When Carl was younger he had listened to lots of classical music before you could lose Virtue Points for listening to it. Apparently classical music was too associated with the upper class to be anything but evil.

It was raining outside when Carl got home from his job. He opened his personal computer to view his government issued, "Virtue Points" score, it had finally dropped into the negative.

"Damn it," Carl muttered to himself. "I was over 1000 a few months ago." He checked his watch, in a few minutes his boss would have access to his point total. Carl would probably be fired from his job, because no one would want to buy something from a company with a low average employee point total, because their point total would go down as well.

The United States virtue point system had been implemented around 23 years earlier in 2024. The official story was that the point system was designed so that consumers, and companies could be protected by only working with virtuous people. The creators of the law argued that it followed the First Amendment because in theory the government did not treat people with differing point totals differently, only companies and individuals were allowed to do that. He suspected it was a tool used to create uniformity of ideas.

Carl was very young when the point system was created and had grown up with it. His parents had argued nonstop about it until the divorce, when his mother was given full custody because of her significantly higher point score. When Carl was in high school the associative point bonuses had been created and Carl had stopped hanging out with some of his friends because of the point bonuses for only interacting with people who had similar point totals to him.

Carl had lost his points for two main reasons, his online comedy videos and the fight with his boyfriend. Carl decided to remove the videos before they did any more damage. The videos had

started out as an deconstruction of the point system and he had been curious what he could get away with. He had stayed up late with the lights off working on the videos. At first they were a success and he had managed to keep his true identity hidden and separate from his online one.

He had bragged about it to one of his close friends. She must have betrayed him for a point bonus.

“No, no, no.” He couldn’t think like that; maybe he had forgotten to use a proxy at the coffee shop where he uploaded his videos. Maybe they were suspicious that he had not chosen to give up more of his privacy in exchange for bonus points and had used that information to put him on a watch list.

He went over to his Youtube channel to delete it only to find out he had already been banned. Now that Youtube knew he had a low virtue total they could finally justify banning him. Carl’s boyfriend had broken up with him over the associative point total system; he hadn’t wanted to associate with him either.

SYLVESTER

Sylvester was one of the few people whose Virtue Point total was not recorded by the government. His point score was so much better than everyone else that the government had asked him to work for them and wiped his score from the leader board. He was 24 when he helped them develop the association system. Sylvester had based the system off of something he had learned from a video game case study while studying game design in college.

One video game, World of Warcraft, had a system that lowered the rate people gained expe-

rience the longer they played. Each day you would progress at a normal speed in the beginning but at a decreased speed the longer you played. This system was despised until the developers repackaged it as a bonus and it became super popular. What they did was call what was previously the normal speed a fast speed and what was previously the decreased speed the normal speed. This was mechanically the same but people’s perspective of it was totally different.

Sylvester’s association system worked the same way, instead of penalizing people for associating with people with different scores, you could reward them for doing the opposite and have people’s point scores go down naturally over time. Each year Sylvester and his friends had added more ways to gain points and made the monthly point drop larger and larger. The trick was to make the most insidious parts of the system seem like rewards, and everyone likes rewards.

Unfortunately some people’s points had dropped so low that they no longer cared about the point system. The greater good had to be taken into account and the need to help these people was so great that Sylvester had decided leave his job to create a Moral correction camp. Anyone who went to one of Sylvester’s camps was guaranteed to never go into negative points again.

One rainy day Sylvester met with one of his potential clients at his favorite coffee shop. The shop’s point total was so low that few people dared to eat there. The coffee shop was one of a few pieces left from the old world, before the point system. The owner of the coffee shop was an old man who insisted on serving every customer with the best



damned coffee they could get no matter who they were. People went because of the coffee, points be damned. Few people worked there and only if they really needed the money. Sylvester suspected that the owner of the coffee shop was wealthy at one point but Sylvester and his friends took bets on how long it would be till he went bankrupt. Sylvester appreciated the effects of the virtue point system but was fascinated with the era before the point system. Sylvester brought his client to a booth in the corner and ordered an espresso.

"Hello," said Sylvester, "My name is Sylvester."

"Like the cat?" asked Carl, glancing at the cartoon cat patch on Sylvester's suit. Carl loved old cartoons as a kid, even some anime before you lost points for watching.

"Yes, like the cat," said Sylvester, "Look, ignore the patch, it is just a gift from a friend. Please stay on topic or I will decrease your point total."

"Don't care. My points are so low it doesn't matter anyway. I could go out on the street corner and tell people about the evils of the point system," said Carl. "I could make any joke I wanted to." Carl leaned in and whispered, "Even one about a minority."

Sylvester smiled, a big smile Carl suspected had been practiced in a mirror, then he spoke.

"You don't really hate the point system that much, do you? Think about all the things you have done to get more points, doesn't that make you a hypocrite?" Carl seemed shaken and nervously poked at his food. "See that guard over there?" asked Sylvester, pointing at the large man in a suit outside of the restaurant. "If I hypothetically asked him to beat you up, no jury would convict me. I have a higher point total and siding against me would result in a loss of points."

"Fine," said Carl. "I'll come to the camp."

Sylvester smiled and told Carl where to catch the bus to camp. Once Carl left, Sylvester made a phone call on his prepaid cell phone.

"Hello Lydia, I got the youtuber to join the program."

"Thanks, together we will bring so much change to the system," said Lydia.

"I have done everything you have asked of me. I could get in so much trouble if the govern-

ment found out the things I have done for you," said Sylvester.

"Just know that virtue points will be transformed into something stronger. You have done well to earn your place in the Order. Once we control the narrative, we will control reality. Just get my younger brother into the camp, afterwards I will tell you everything, you deserve that."

"But your brother will not voluntarily come to the camp."

"I don't care."

"Fine, I will get him by force, but it won't look very good."

Sylvester hung up on Lydia and gestured for his bodyguard to sit down across from him. He pulled up a photo of Lydia's brother on his other phone and showed it to his bodyguard.

"This is the man we need to get," said Sylvester.

"Why?" asked the bodyguard.

"It is a favor for an old friend."

"This will be a very hard man to get, Sylvester. What did this friend do for you?"

"When I was injured in the 2030 rioting, she took me to safety and showed me the trick to getting my famously high point score. She said it was a family secret."

"I don't suppose you could tell me what it is?" asked the guard.

"It wouldn't be a secret then would it?"

"I see your point. Do we have the manpower to get this guy?"

"I can't use too much government funding on a side project so it will just be me and you."

CHARLES

Charles Astrophel liked to stay in his apartment on weekends. He hated interacting with people more than was necessary. The last time he did a book signing someone had pulled a knife on him. Even though Charles was very sure that person could not pull a knife on him again, he had started taking more safety precautions. He never went outside without hiring a bodyguard for the day, and he even had a smart security system that could play some quiet but noticeable noises when someone suspicious approached his apartment.

Charles woke up at 6:00 AM to the sound

of his alarm clock and rain. He hit the clock angrily until it was too afraid to make another peep. He pulled out his phone and checked his fan emails. Everyone was very polite, even the people claiming that he was a con artist. Bullying on the Internet had been virtually eliminated after the introduction of the point system. The state ran a campaign proclaiming that online anonymity was a thing of the past. While that may not be technically true, most people believed it.

He pulled himself to his feet and brushed his teeth. In the mirror he smiled his signature grin and giggled to himself. He looked pretty sophisticated in his designer pajamas. His train of thought was that if the government was going to be watching him all the time he might as well look nice.

He pulled the cap off of the pink bottle on his counter and swallowed the sugar pills in front of where he thought the hidden camera was located. He turned on the TV with a voice command to a news channel, walked to the fridge and poured himself a huge bowl of raisin bran. Sometimes he got so caught up in his work that he forgot to eat lunch and dinner.

Once he was done eating, Charles lay on his bed in his high rise apartment looking at his phone. It was a free room he had been given for his high point score. It was so high he wondered when the government was going to ask him to do something. He had written books on how to get more points, he even had banner ads on websites proclaiming, "The one easy trick to get as many points as Charles Astrophel".

In reality he would never give away the tricks that got him so many points. Charles felt a little guilty, like a parasite leeching off of people who wanted to be better. Charles loved the guilty thrill he got rising towards the top 100 leaderboard but hated the point system for its effect on society. Charles would show them once he got to the number one spot. Once you got a high enough point total the game changed from trying to get more points to sabotaging people with more points than you on the leaderboard. He sent an mp3 file to a newspaper containing a "leaked conversation" between some of the people with higher scores than him. He had made the file on his computer but the government might still lower their points after public outcry.

He was planning to release a book about the point system and how it drove people to do horrible things. He would release the book on his website once he got to the number one spot and if the government tried to make him look evil at that point they would have to admit their point system was broken.

Charles laughed at his cleverness and then grabbed a pillow from the stack of pillows next to him to muffle the sound so that his smart tv would not hear him laughing so hard. Once he collected himself Charles put his phone on his bedside table and grabbed his laptop; Apple had given it to him for free in exchange for promoting it. He connected to the internet with his VPN and started writing in his book. He stored the book on the Cloud so it wouldn't be found if his personal items were searched. He grabbed his earbuds and put on a playlist of music he bought off of the digital black market for a few bitcoins.

He was writing fast, in a trance, he looked out the window every once in awhile and the sun jumped across the sky. He finished the final chapter, and went back to start re-writing again. He was almost done, only editing now. He worked faster than ever before. It was dark when he was done. He tore off his earbuds and got up to brush his teeth feeling suddenly very tired. He thought he heard a buzzing noise and told himself he should stop working so hard.

Charles heard a knock on the door, maybe someone had decided to give him something. With his toothbrush in his mouth Charles walked over to the door. "Come back later!", he yelled through the door. But they kept knocking. Charles looked through the peephole and saw two men in suits. Charles sighed and pulled open the door.

Carl-

The bus to the camp was half full and most people were sitting by themselves. After thinking for a moment, Carl sat next to a teenager. The other people looked very threatening and Carl wondered what the others had done to get low point scores.

"So what's your name?" Carl asked the person sitting next to him.

"Jess."

"I'm Carl. Sorry, but how old are you?"

"I am 18."

“A senior.”

“Yup.”

They sat for a while. Carl thought it looked like Jess was mustering up his courage to say something. Jess laughed, “Points don’t matter do they? I can say whatever I want now.” Jess kept laughing for a while before coming to a sudden stop. “You probably think I’m unstable don’t you?” said Jess, “Don’t answer, I don’t want to know. So what are you in for?”

“Disagreeing with a person with a higher point score than me and running a Youtube channel with the intent to spread immoral positions.”

“That’s cool, what was the username? Maybe I followed you.”

“Ozymandias.”

“Oh, I loved your videos, man. The editing was very impressive.”

Carl felt a pang of guilt, “Sorry about my videos, how many points did I make you lose?”

“I didn’t lose any points from watching your videos. I always used a proxy.”

“Why are you in here then?”

“When I tried to start a book club at my school, some of the books were on the toxic book list. When we got found out, I took most of the responsibility. I hoped my friends would be safe from point deductions. It hurt a little, how much they tore into me to save their point score.” Carl and Jess talked a little more before the bus got to the camp.

The first thing they saw when they got off the bus, was Sylvester standing next to a man dressed in red. The man in red gave a speech about how he was planning to fix them. He also told them that they could only leave the camp if their point score became positive again. He said to call him Boss and be careful to not lose any more points.

Boss finished his speech by saying, “Tonight you guys get the night off, try not to lose any more points by talking about prohibited subjects, tomorrow the real work begins.”

Jess-

First thing in the morning, Jess woke up in a bunk bed to Carl’s snoring underneath him. Jess climbed down and shook Carl awake. They walked silently down to the mess hall. At breakfast, the boss gave another speech, “Hello, we have a special celebrity joining us today, someone who abused the point system for his own profit.”

Jess asked Carl, “Any idea who it could be?” In walked Charles to the booing of the people at the camp.

Charles held his head low, in the camp uniform he looked so pathetic compared to the version of him that Jess had seen on TV. Jess whispered to Carl, “One of the girls at my school had a huge crush on him.” Jess couldn’t help but giggle loudly at his own joke and the boss singled him out as the first person to be taught for the day.

Jess was brought into a cold room and handed a collar with a wire attached to it, a VR headset with headphones and instructed to put them both on by an employee of the camp. Once he had the headset on he thought he felt a needle stick in his arm. The employee explained, “First we will be fixing your sick sense of humor, if you laugh we shock you. It will start out mild but if it takes longer to fix you we will increase the voltage as necessary”.

Jess saw through his headset that he would be watching one of the comedians deemed damaging to the youth.

Really PewDiePie? God, this guy is old.” Jess said as he felt the collar buzz a little.

“Remember you lose points for talking about religion outside of an appropriate government sanctioned setting,” explained the employee. Jess discovered that PewDiePie was not the only comedian on the reel and a few of them were pretty funny.

CARL

After Jess left the mess hall people ate a bit longer before following Jess. Carl was pulled away from the group and told that he would be doing an

“Remember you lose points for talking about religion outside of an appropriate government sanctioned setting”

”

alternative penance for the day. Sylvester greeted Carl, "Follow me to my office".

Sylvester led Carl to a small tent containing a desk with a computer. Sylvester told Carl to make himself at home and pulled a microphone and a webcam from the desk. "I want you to start making videos about the benefits and history of the point system," said Sylvester, "I trust I won't be disappointed." The guard from the coffee shop whispered something into the ear of Sylvester. This time Sylvester's grin was real and strangely more unnerving. Sylvester left with a wave. For some reason Carl did not want to disappoint him.

Carl decided to start planning the video series. He decided that episode one would be called, "Sesame Credit, the fall of Trump, and the Chinese Deal". After a few hours of research, writing, recording, and editing, Sylvester's body guard came to bring Carl to the mess hall for lunch.

At lunch Jess muttered, "I don't want to talk about it." while rubbing his neck.

Carl told him that he was creating videos for Sylvester and Jess seemed annoyed. Charles sat down at their table, Jess looked at Charles, sighed, got up and left, slipping his steak knife into his pocket.

"What's his problem?", asked Charles.

"Don't think he likes you. Seems like he's in a bad mood today." said Carl.

"What about you?"

"What."

"Suppose you don't like me either."

"Nope."

"Well one day the public will love me again."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I am going to change the world."

"Don't you lose points for that?" Carl leaned in and whispered,

"You and me together are going to get out of here and bring anarchy to this broken country. I know who you are."

"How do you know who I am?"

"If I found out your real name and picture, you really need better internet security. Love your video's though. Anyway, talk to you later. I'm going to go take a nap. I haven't slept for a while."

Jess-

Jess left lunch early and wandered past the guards in a daze. He was bored and thought he would snoop around the camp. He walked by the parking lot and saw a car with a weird custom license plate. He stopped when he heard talking coming from one of the tents. Jess used the knife from the cafeteria to poke a small hole in the side of the tent to look inside. Sylvester sat at a desk with a woman. She pulled something up on her smartphone and told Sylvester to read it. Sylvester scrolled through the phone for a bit, then stammered, "I know I that I owe you my life, but If this is the plan, you, you are insane. I... I can't, I won't."

The woman insisted, "Next time we talk, I want to talk to the Sylvester who can do it." she poked the patch on his jacket, "I know he is inside there somewhere, and when you are finished with the next step, I will talk with him."

The woman left and Jess quickly hid behind the tent for 65 heartbeats. Jess looked through the hole again and saw Sylvester lying on the floor in a ball. Jess thought he heard him crying. Sylvester pulled himself to his feet and swallowed a handful of pills from a pink bottle. Next he pulled a shock collar from his desk along with a VR headset and sat down and put them on. Jess walked away confused and strangely peckish.



ASHES TO ASHES

Diego

It was a typical morning for me. My alarm woke me up at 6:30, so naturally I snoozed it for another 10 minutes before hauling myself out of bed. I took a nice hot shower, watching the mirror fog up, and the steam rise. I got dressed, and made myself some eggs and bacon, and quickly scarfed it down as I was now running late. I opened the cupboard, and grabbed my medications. I am a kidney transplant recipient and need the medications to survive. I put my plate in the sink, grabbed my backpack, ran out the door, and hopped into my car.

It was abnormally dark out for spring time in the morning, but I didn't think too much of that at the time. I turned on the radio and started to head to school. As I was driving through the town on my normal route, I noticed that there were a lot of people stopping at gas stations, and there were a lot of police patrolling the area. Now I don't live in a dangerous part of town, there are a lot of white picket fences in my neighborhood, so the massive police presence caught my attention.

As I pulled into the parking lot, I noticed that there weren't many cars parked, and no students were meandering around the front entrance like they usually do. I parked my car, and headed to the entrance, checking in at the office, with my typical excuse of oversleeping. I walked to my first hour class, and the hallways were eerily quiet, except for what sounded like the news on television. Every classroom I walked by, I could tell that the lights were off, and I could see the dim light of the TV shining underneath the door.

I finally arrived at my classroom and opened the door. As I entered the room, I saw everyone gathered around the television. No one even noticed that I had just walked into the room. As I got closer, the pictures on the TV looked much clearer, and the words the news reporter were saying started to enter my mind. "Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming have been engulfed in molten

lava... No survivors have been found within 1,000 miles of the explosion." What explosion? Were we attacked? Was World War III about to start? I continued to listen, "The Yellowstone Caldera has erupted, causing massive pandemonium, and wiping out several cities along the way... The National Guard has been mobilized to several nearby cities in a rescue effort and to help prevent rioting and looting... Scientists say the ash will cause the crops to die, power plants to shut down, and possibly cool the earth's temperature by a significant amount. The effects could last for years..."

I couldn't believe what was happening. All of this? Overnight? The pictures on the screen that accompanied the news report didn't make it any less fathomable. What once were homes to thousands of people was nothing more than a wasteland. The man made skyscrapers, the little houses, the businesses, the people, all gone. No warning. Right when humans felt like we had become god, mother nature reclaimed what was rightfully hers. No one could survive the eruption within 100 miles. Even if they survived the initial blast, how would they escape? They are surrounded by an ocean of lava.

All of a sudden, the power went out. There were screams of terror, and I myself was scared out of my mind. Could it affect us all the way in Minnesota? We're known for lots of snow, some minor tornados, and maybe floods, but being affected by an earthquake and ash? Never would I have imagined we would have to be worried about that. I pulled out my phone, and my heart sank. I couldn't get a signal. It wasn't long after, that the rest of my class found this out as well. As we twiddled our thumbs and tried to calm down some people, a small rattling noise could be heard. I stood up, and walked over to the window. The rumbling was getting louder and I could see a black cloud in the distance. It was like the dust bowl storms except pitch black. It was getting

closer, and I realized that this was the aftermath of the eruption. This ash was headed straight for our school. Before I could even process all of this, the black ash was closing in on us. I turned around, yelling “EVERYONE GET AWAY FROM THE WINDOWS AND FIND COVER!” I headed straight for the closet, and when I opened it, I found my classmate, Delaney, huddled in the corner. I quickly shut the door behind me, and sat next to her. I felt her hand touch mine and then close around it. I had only really talked to her once, but it didn’t matter. We were both terrified. I closed my eyes and waited. It was so loud I couldn’t even hear my own thoughts, and the next few seconds felt like hours. I could feel the impact of the ash hitting the side of the building, the glass breaking, screams of pain and fear. I felt the ash hit the closet door, and easily break through it. I was able to catch a quick glimpse of what the classroom now looked like. The people I was just talking with were now covered in a blanket of ash.

Before I could take it all in, me and Delaney were thrown against the closet wall, and more ash came through the door, and it broke the wall, pushing us into another classroom. I held Delaney’s hand as tight as I could. It felt like a million bees were stinging me, but instead of small stingers, they had small knives. It was warm. Actually, it was hot. My clothes were burned, tattered and torn. I looked up and saw a desk right in front of me. I couldn’t move, or change my path, as the current of the ash was so strong, I just braced, and then I felt my head hit the edge of the table. Everything went black. Blacker even than the ash. In all that chaos, I didn’t hear, see, or feel anything. I just existed. I was at peace.

I awoke lying on top of a car. What happened? How did I end up here? So many questions ran through my head. I had a bad headache, and my body felt as if it had been set on fire. Somehow

I was still holding Delaney’s hand. My vision was still blurry, but when I was finally able to focus my eyes, I looked over to check on her. I gasped and sat up, falling off the car. I was holding her hand, but it wasn’t attached to her body, and she was nowhere to be found. I stood up slowly, trying to figure out where I was. I saw a gas station sign in the ash, and realized that I had to have been carried at least three miles away from the school. I was only a mile from my house or so. I was so dizzy and nauseas. I knew that I was probably concussed but I had to push on.

I stumbled my way for what felt like 100 miles but was probably only 10 feet or so. All of a sudden I heard screams for help. I looked around,

but I couldn’t tell where they were coming from. I took a moment to compose myself and stood up, and looked around and I realized that the screaming was coming from all around me. There were fires that stretched for blocks, bodies strewn the street, and screams echoed across the town. I felt terrible, I wanted to help so bad, but I knew that

“I couldn’t move, or change my path, as the current of the ash was so strong, I just braced, and then I felt my head hit the edge of the table. Everything went black.”

”

in my condition I was barely able to help myself, let alone help someone else. I pushed forward, trying to find landmarks that could tell me where I was. I finally saw a bunch of dead animals. I knew that my house had to be near by as at the end of my block there was a pet store. I felt so disheartened. All these animals and people that were gone. I made my way through the piles of bodies, and debris, when I heard a whimper. I could tell it wasn’t human, it had to have been a dog. I looked around, and could barely make out what looked like a little dog. I limped over to it, and bent down. It was covered in glass shards. I don’t know what came over me, but I picked it up. I carried the whimpering dog down the block, and found my house.

What about my mom? She was out of town in New York for a work meeting. My dad? Who

knew if he had been affected. It had been a month since he disappeared. I couldn't think about it, I had to focus on trying to stay healthy. I walked up the steps and opened the door, falling to the ground as I did. I managed to stand up, and carried the dog upstairs. I went to the bathroom and immediately checked to see if the bath still worked. It did. I stripped down, and placed the dog on the ground and hopped in. It felt amazing. The cold water cascading down my body, it felt so good on the burns and the cuts, it felt cleaner. After about only 30 seconds, the drain clogged. I just reached down and threw the muck over the side of the tub and had to repeat this once or twice till I was clean.

I reached down scooped up the pup, and proceeded to rinse the dog until it was clean as well. I then walked us to my bedroom. I walked over to my closet and pulled out my first aid kit. I carefully pulled each glass shard from my body, and covered it with antibacterial cream and a bandaid. I looked like I was wearing polkadots. Next, I turned my attention to the dog. It was a female doberman pincher. She was so small and fragile. I started to take out the glass shards and worked hard to clean the wounds. One was really deep, in her hind leg. I sewed it up the best I could. She didn't fight me much when I put the needle in with no anesthetic. She was too tired. I was too tired. I patched her up the best I could. Echo. That was going to be her name.

I wanted to lay down and fall asleep but I knew that lack of water would be my worst enemy in a few days. I went down to the kitchen and grabbed whatever container I could find, and hauled it upstairs. I filled everything I could find with water and set them up all around the house. I knew I couldn't hold out alone, I needed to find other survivors. Sooner or later people are gonna be hungry and violent and there's no telling what people do when it's literally survival of the fittest. I walked to my parents bedroom, opened the closet where the gun safe was. I was never told the code, however, my dad was very protective of her, and would probably leave a note somewhere in the room in case of an intruder. I searched through all the drawers, and the dresser. I checked under the

bed, and then I looked in my moms make up kit. I finally found it. 18-19-46. I walked over to the safe, and carefully opened the safe. Inside were three guns; a Smith and Wesson 686, a Remington 700, and a Mossberg 500. There was a plethora of ammo to go along with the guns. I reached down, and picked up the holster for the revolver and put it around my waist. Underneath the holster there was a piece of paper. I picked it up, and immediately recognized the handwriting as my dad's.

Dennis, I don't have much time to write this, as they are coming for me. Something catastrophic is going to happen, and it's only a matter of time. I wanted to tell the world, I wanted to keep everyone safe, but they couldn't let out the secret. The world's natural resources are low, and all the governments are working in conjunction to figure out an alternative resource. Everyone is oblivious. People think that the world can sustain the population of 13 billion, but it can't. We don't have enough fossil fuel. I was recruited by the government to help solve this issue. We have been working at Yellowstone, trying to harness the energy from the supervolcano. We have been using dynamite to blow chunks out of the volcano. I warned them that this could trigger the volcano, but they won't listen to me. I told them I was going on TV to tell everyone. They are outside. Keep your mother safe, and don't come for me.

Much Love,
Dad

I sat there in shock. Had he known this was going to happen? Who are "they?" Where did they take him? Was he even alive? Didn't the news say it was a "natural disaster"? It threw me off but I would have plenty of time to dwell on it later, I needed to find survivors.

It was awkward trying to walk around with the gun at my side, but I managed. I headed to my room, and grabbed my backpack, and emptied everything out. I walked back to the gun safe, and loaded every gun. I put the some extra ammo in my backpack, hoping I wouldn't have to use it. I went back to my bedroom, and knelt down next to Sam, who was asleep on my bed. I petted her,

and gave her a kiss. “Don’t die on me Sam. I need you.” I turned around and walked downstairs, and opened the front door. The heat from the outside hit me like a blow dryer except 100 times hotter. I slammed the door shut. I guess through all the confusion earlier I hadn’t really paid attention to the heat. It didn’t matter anymore. I had to find other people, other survivors. I quickly opened the door, and rushed out side, slamming it behind me. I wanted to keep my house as cool as possible. It was dark outside, almost as dark as night, but the fires across the town helped illuminate the landscape. A lot of the screaming had died down, but there were the occasional yells for help. I wanted to check on my friend, Aedan, who had graduated a year prior to me. He only lived about a mile from me, so I started to walk towards his place. I trudged through all the ash, which was starting to harden, and I walked past several limbs that were separated from their bodies. It was shocking to see the damage. The smell was horrible as well, all these bodies were charred up, and the smell of burnt flesh flooded my nose.

After about a mile, I reached his house. The door was cracked open so I slowly pushed it open, unholstering my gun, and entering his house. I crept inside and swept through the main floor. Nothing. I knew that he had to be upstairs holed up in his room, just as I had been. I headed upstairs, trying to be quiet, but the stairs creaked under my weight. I reached the top of the stairs, and noticed that all the doors were closed, except for one. I walked to the front of the door, and listened, but couldn’t hear any sound coming from behind it. I put my ear against the door, and heard the sound of a shotgun cocking. I swung around so my back was against the wall, and felt the shotgun blast hit the door, splintering it, and destroying the wall behind it.

“AEDAN, IT’S ME. DENNIS.” I couldn’t tell if I was actually shouting, my ears were ringing and I felt light headed.

“What the hell Dennis, don’t creep on us

like that! I almost blew your head off!” I stuck my head out and looked into the room. I saw him and his parents huddled in the corner. I opened the door which now had a three foot hole from the shotgun blast.

Aedan stood up, and I quickly walked over to him, and we hugged. He looked at me from head to toe, saying, “Jesus dude, what the hell happened to you.”

“I was at the school when it hit, I thought I was a goner for sure. I couldn’t find any other survivors, but their screams...” I trailed off. “Are you planning on staying here?”

“Yeah, we don’t really have any other choice, most of the cars are destroyed and even if we could, we don’t know where to go too, we can’t get a radio signal and the cell phones aren’t working.”

I walked over and leaned on the wall, looking out the window. “I have an idea, but I need your help.”

“What were you thinking?” Aedan said, as he joined me in looking out the window.

“I need to get more medications. I only have two and a half weeks of medication left and then my kidney will start to shut down. I have to go to search the pharmacy. I need you to watch my back.”

“I will, but we should have a base, like some place we can buckle down and keep safe.”

“Your house or my house?” I asked.

“Probably yours, it’s where all your meds are and it’s on a hill so that will help us fortify it.”

I looked at Aedan and his family. “Well, grab everything you want to bring because looters will probably be sweeping through the neighborhood.”



RUNNING AWAY

Mayme

Part One

There was fog every where, thick and warm. My school was a block away and all I could see was a light grey cloud descended upon the ground. In my county formerly known as Minnesota, the once great Mississippi is now full of oil. The mall called the Mall of America was bombed and now is just rubble. As I made my way through my high school, I finally reached the red room. Our president disrespects women. He believes that men should not have to deal with women when they are on their periods. So he made it a law that all schools and business should have a room for women when it's "their time of the month."

"Hey," my friend greeted me with a smile.

"Hey Salacia how was your drive here?" I asked. The red room itself was like a small room with red walls (how original). I

took my bandanna off my face revealing my freckled face. I put the bandanna on the table.

"It was crazy, the fog was as thick as pea soup," she answered.

"Oo now I want some soup," said my other friend Rose. I fixed my hair making sure it cover the gold capital T on my uniform which was a symbol for the president. At my school you have to either wear a navy blue sweater or sweater vest, a white button up shirt (long or short sleeved) and if you're male you must wear khaki pants, if you are female you must wear a blue plaid skirt. My friends hate that rule, I don't mind it so much; yes I would much rather wear pants when it's cold or be able to express myself through clothing in general, but skirts themselves don't bother me.

"He believes that men should not have to deal with women when they are on their periods. So he made it a law that all schools and business should have a room for women when it's "their time of the month."

”

Another rule at the school is the white boys have to sit in the very front, then the boys of color and then all the girls have to sit in the back. The secretary of the board of education Betsy DeVos don't think that females "are not the bread winners." Now I'm only five five and a lot of the boys are five seven or taller, so I can barely see the board some times. At least I am not four nine like Rose or five two like Tyra, but it's still annoying.

In the red room it's a nice lounge area except

for the far west wall were covered with bathroom stalls that were maroon colored (also very original). I sat on the table plugged in my earbuds into my ears and worked on my science. The techno music blasted through my earbuds and into my ears. I started tapping my foot to the beat. Then I heard someone yell "Talano!" Rose ripped my right earbud out and pointed to

our supervisor, Carol. "What are you working on!" She snapped at me. Goodness she is annoying, I rolled my eyes and showed her my science textbook.

"Watch your tone!" She said obviously ticked off.

"Umm I didn't say anything."

"Watch your attitude young lady." Today it's my attitude, yesterday was my blue hair, and tomorrow who knows what. Spending five days in the red room with that woman is exhausting. When the day was done I wanted to scream and shout.

I put my hoodie on and my purple bandanna on my face. We wear bandannas on our faces because of the toxic air. As I walked home, the

fog that was once a light grey, was now green. The grass was all shriveled up and full of weeds. I looked over at the once great Mississippi, now grows dark green almost black from the oil. A few years back the president allowed an oil pipeline go through a Native American burial ground and a lake that gives water many people in North Dakota. It leaked oil and now there is no longer a lake there and the river, is ruined.

A car zoomed past me, as if they were running from the cops. The cops haven't been so helpful, unless you are a rich white person. If not, you better shut your mouth and don't look them in the eyes.

I opened the door to my house, my cat greeted me with a meow. I picked her up "Hello Kattunge," I walked up the stairs. Every step I took the stairs creaked. It sounds like frogs singing in a choir. I took a right at the top of the stairs, and walked into my room. I laid down on my bed, next to my bed was my desk with photographs. One was a picture of my friends and I and the other was the one of my girlfriend and I. I took a deep breath. It hurt remembering how I might not get to see her again. My girlfriend Adriana and her family moved back to Argentina when the president was elected. The picture was a great one of her, I could almost hear her laughing, with that smile of hers and her joyful coffee colored eyes. Me on the other hand, I had let Adriana talk me into dying my hair light pink with hot pink tips. "Ugh," I said and tried thinking about something else. Kattunge rubbed her face

against mine, I chuckled. "I should probably feed you little one," I said and walked over to her food bowl.

"Hey Aria, we're home!" My mother shouted from the door.

"Hey mom, I'm up stairs," I shouted back.

"Your father is at an after school meeting... can you help your sisters put the groceries away?"

When my mom asks you to do something there is no other answer than yes.

"Sure I guess," I answered. I went down stairs and helped my sisters put the food away. Even with all the crazy stuff that's happening in the world my favorite thing to do in the world is be with my sisters, Izzy and Lizzie (Isabelle and Elizabeth). They make putting the groceries away as if it's the most fun thing to do. My sisters look like the definition of European, light blond hair and pale skin. Izzy has blue eyes and freckles across the bridge of her nose, while Lizzie has green eyes and freckles everywhere on her face. They are four years younger than me, they are 13 years old now but they will always be my baby sisters. We joked

and laughed while we put the food away.

That night we ate dinner like a normal family not knowing what tomorrow would bring.

My first class I have is English. Now English is so much fun it's the only class that breaks the rules of the seating chart. We sit in circles of mixed genders. My English teacher believes that it's better to create discussion about the subjects. "Okay, discuss about the seance 4 and 5" said my teacher. Rose's hand shot straight up like a firework. "Please may I go to the restroom? I



really have to go!” She asked frantically. Our teacher nodded and laughed. As we were discussed the scenes, two men came in. One was wearing a fully black suit and brown, buzz cut hair. The second was in navy blue pants and royal blue jacket (which bugged me because they weren’t the same shade of blue). They talked to Mr. Bryson, his expression went from happy to stricken. The two men shook his hand then left. “Aria, Salacia, and Tyra,” he said with a sharp tone. I looked at Salacia, we had the same confused/worried look on her face. We followed Mr. Bryson outside of the classroom into the hallway. “What’s going on” I asked, he turned around sharp and said, “Girls the immigration officers are looking for Rose”

“WHAT!!!” We all said at the same time.

“But her mom is in the process of becoming a citizen?” Said Salacia, we were all shocked.

“Now this hasn’t been confirmed but nothing is now a days” he said “The president doesn’t want anyone to become citizens. He believes we should be exclusive. Take Rose out of school and go somewhere but not to her home they will have cops staking out there they believe she is at home.”

I went to auto pilot mode. Just relying on actions. “Okay Tyra get Rose, Salacia let’s get our gym clothes get dressed in those so they don’t know we are supposed to be in school and and let’s... let’s run to café Casas” I said Frantically. There was a long pause, then I started to run. Salacia ran after me. We got to the lockers, I unlocked my locker grabbed my gym clothes (which we were aloud to express ourselves), my purple bandanna, and my black hoodie. Then I ran down the hall to Tyra’s locker. I looked at my text messages. The text was there:

57,45,2

I had to do it twice before it opened. I grabbed her hat, bandanna and gym clothes. Rose and Tyra met us at the back doors “Tyra told me what’s going on. Did Mr. Bryson really say that?” She asked still in disbelief. “Yes, so we need to go now!” I said strictly. I started into her eyes, daring her to argue with me. I pushed open the door and we all

ran.

We ran until we couldn’t see the school. I took a deep breath. “Okay let’s keep going,” said Salacia out of breath. We took the long way for some reason. As we got to the café, we went to the bathroom to change. Then, we sat at a table while we wait for our drinks to be made. I folded and refolded my bandanna over and over again. “So the immigration officers came and said they were looking for Rosalina Ocampo, Mr. Bryson lied and said ‘she didn’t come to school’ and then told you to take me out of school?” Said Rose. She was shaking. Salacia put her hand on Rose’s, but Rose shook her off. “I’m fine,” she lied. I folded my bandanna; it was a nervous tick I got from my dad. I was trying to come up with a plan. We sat in silence for a long time.

They can’t do this. they can’t take my friend away from me. “We need to get you out of here.” They all looked at me.

“We have to bring you to the Supreme Court when they talk about getting rid of the president. He is trying to get the states of America to be part of Russia but be under his rule till he dies and they are voting to see if that should happen or not. We have to tell them what he is doing to the children of America, we have to tell them our story.”

“What are you talking about Aria. You think we can just leave middle county and go to the capital!” Said Salacia.

“We have to!” I proclaimed

“No! I don’t want you guys to get arrested just because of me!” Said Rose

“It’s not just for you Rose this is happening to many families! And for what!? It’s not right!”

We were quiet for awhile. A cop came over to our table. My friends looked into their drinks. “So where do you ladies go to school?” He asked me, luckily I take a college class so I took out my ID and said “McClenny College sir” he took a look at my pass and nodded his approval.

“I think Aria is right, It’s not right, but how would we even get to the capital?” Said Tyra. Her brother is a non citizen. Me and her are both half

Swedish (hence her name) but she is also half Nigerian and that's where her brother was born. It must be hard to hear that he could get deported even though he is trying to become a citizen. "I have money we can take a bus to edge of middle county to the city of Chicago, than take a train from there to eastern county to the city of Philadelphia then take a train to the capital?" I suggested. Again the table was silent then Tyra raised her hand, I raised my hand, Salacia raised her hand, we all looked at Rose. She looked at all of us and then said "Alright all do it."

We all stayed at the café for two hours, discussing what our plan was. Then we left and went home to pack. When I got home I ran up stairs and started packing. Kattunge jumped up on my pillow and started to purr. She was probably curious why I was home so early, but she was happy I was. "Hey Kattunge I'll be gone for a while. Sorry but it's for a good cause." I grabbed some clothes tons of clothes, some pajamas and another hoodie. I went into the bathroom and grabbed essentials, my grapefruit acne wash, my toothbrush and toothpaste, my hair brush, and mascara (just in case I felt like wearing it) I put all of that in my second pocket of my backpack. As I went back to my room, I looked over at my picture of Adriana and me, I put it in my backpack, and walked back to the bathroom with my light purple bandanna. I started to wash it. No matter how many times I wash it, it still smelled like my grandmother. It was my grandmother on my father's side. As I rubbed the bar of soaps, I thought about her, who she was, and what she would say to me. She'd probably help me with this give us money for the tickets. I rang the bandanna out, then I put it to my face. I miss you Mormor.

When I was done packing I wrote a note most of it in English, but at the end I wrote in a secret language only my sisters and I knew, telling them I will call them every night at 7:00 pm to let them know I'm okay. Then I heard the door open, I

knew it was my dad because he did have a meeting today. I zipped up my hoodie, put my backpack on and went down stairs.

"Aria what are you doing home so early? I didn't even see you on my ride back," he said with a surprise smile. I took a deep breath. "Dad the immigration officers came for Rose" I said strictly, his bushy eyebrows went up.

"Oh no, but I thought her mom was in the process of becoming a citizen?"

"Yes my friend and I are going to get them to understand that these laws are going against the people," a look of fear washed over my tall skinny professor father.

"Now Aria I get it, you are upset about losing your friend, but there is no way we are going to let you go to the capital. It's dangerous"

"Dad! Going outside is dangerous, we have to cover our noses and mouths to be able to breath!"

"You are not going," he said raising his voice a bit.

"Dad, you don't have a choice, you can ground me, make me go to my room, but I will go, there is no way I wouldn't"

I stared intently into my father's eyes. His green eyes slowly getting watery. He took a deep breath. "You're getting older now and you need to make your own choices to follow your own path. This wouldn't even be a discussion if your mom was here... you better go now." I ran into my dad's arms just as I did when I was a little girl. I pressed my face into his shirt, my warm tears soaking it. His breathing was shaking as he said, "I love you so much Aria, so so much. Now I want you to listen... If you get into trouble run... okay just run." I gave him a tight squeeze and then ran out the door.



THE BLOODY GAME

Aubrey

“Thirteen hours 37 minutes and 42 seconds left, and it seems that Hunter here will be able to commit his crime! Now won't we all cheer him on people!”

The roaring cry from the audience overwhelms my speakers, and swallows in the silence of my apartment.

“Hunter! Hunter! Hunter!”

The camera switches back to the player's camera, or according to the host, 'Hunter's Camera.'

It shows Hunter, standing right behind his victim. Her name is Celeste. Earlier the host described Celeste as a single woman, in her mid 20s. Hunter looks down at his hand. He's shown tightly gripping a large kitchen knife. He looks at Celeste, and when he is about to attack the woman, with her back facing him, she turns around and screams. Mixed with Celeste's and Hunter's scream, Hunter's knife stabs directly at Celeste's left upper chest. She screams at such a horrible high pitch that I have to cover my ears. Her scream is sharp and so high pitched that I think my glass of juice will break and shatter. At this point, Hunter sounds as if he has started to cry and he seems to be apologizing.

“I'm sorry... I'm sorry... I'm sorry...”

The camera is shaking, meaning Hunter is shaking from impact. It wouldn't surprise me if

he is, no person in their right mind wouldn't be traumatized. The camera switches back to the host with his big pearly smile.

“Well, it looks like Hunter is almost done! All he has to do is finish her off! It won't take our friend here too much effort, did you see that first stab?! Those trips to the gym really showed up tonight, am I right audience?!”

The camera stays at the host's face while the crowd roars with excitement. As the host is cheering the crowd on, I can tell my face is blank. Maybe because I'm too tired, maybe because I've lost hope in people.

“Ok! Let's see what'll our player do next!”

The camera cuts back to Hunter's camera, and shows him checking Celeste's pulse. It seems

that he pulled out the knife out, since he's now shown grasping a bloody knife. His breathing is shaky and heavy, it had sounded heavier when he seems to find out that she's still alive. Hunter slowly gets on his knees. He raises the bloody knife up in the air and holds it there for a while. Occasionally small droplets of blood drop onto Celeste's clothes. Still breathing heavily, he is quiet, but I still hear him mumble, “sorry” to the woman. The crowd cheers and roars like wild animals. Hunter is crying when the camera cuts to the host.

“Wow people, now was that exciting?! Our player Hunter here, definitely deserves his

“ Hunter looks down at his hand. He's shown tightly gripping a large kitchen knife. He looks at Celeste, and when he is about to attack the woman, with her back facing him, she turns around and screams

”

gift after that performance! Well it seems that our target Celeste is no longer with us, after that finishing act Hunter showed us tonight! Give our player here a big round of applause for committing the crime!”

The host along with the audience are clapping and howling. And all I am thinking about is the scream. Celeste’s loud, ear piercing scream keeps replaying in my head, like a broken song. I turn off my television, get up from my couch, and walk by my window. I look outside and the streets are filled with people, family, friends. Cars drive by my apartment building very often. The city seems like it never sleeps. There’s always something happening, good or bad, something.

A small family catches my attention. Looks like a father and mother with their young daughter, just came back from the amusement park. The girl is carrying a heart shaped, red balloon. Reminds me of when my father and I used to visit carnivals and amusement parks. The small smile that was planted on my face fades away with the realization of how our world runs. Anyone on that street can be a criminal, or a victim.

Ever since that one day, my view on the world has changed. I rub my eyes, and head to the bathroom. It’s getting kinda late. I look at my clock and it reads 22:27. I brush my teeth and finish washing my face. I look at myself in the mirror and stare at the 9-digit serial number tattooed on my neck. I touch it, feeling the bump of each and every single number I’m defined by. I remember the day I got stamped. I had just turned three. Just a week before, I blew out the candles on my cake. And then I was resting on a medical bed with bandages on my neck. I felt no pain, I was asleep for the surgery. I stared at myself, analyzing both my eyes. At



work, my coworkers have complimented my eyes multiple times, even a couple of customers when I brought up their order. In my opinion, I hate my eyes. Hated them ever since I was 3. I no longer have privacy. I’m constantly watched by them. The only time I can have a peace of mind is whenever I sleep or close my eyes. What I see, they see. What I can’t see, they can’t see. Before the surgery, the doctor told me that the reason I was getting surgery was to ‘fix something’. I nodded. After surgery, while I was recovering the doctor told me what they

'fixed'. The doctor explained the serial numbers on my neck and the small cameras implanted in my eyes. I nodded.

I finish whatever I had to do in the bathroom and as soon as my head touches my pillow, I fall in a deep sleep. A nightmare.

In the dream, it's night time. My father is pacing back and forth, both hands grasping tightly onto his phone. I'm sitting on the couch crying silently, not keeping my eyes off the clock. Between us, a coffee table empty but a clock perfectly centered on top of it. It is only five minutes before 23:30 and five minutes before I no longer will see my father. I am so deep in my thoughts, that I don't notice him sitting right next to me.

"It's okay Jane, you can stop shaking. You're going to be alright."

I don't notice I am shaking until my father points it out. I look at him, his kind icy blue eyes. I give him a big hug, not wanting to let go. I could hear his heartbeat, he may not act like it but, he too is scared. I can hear his fast heartbeat, clear as glass and loud as drums. As my father pulls away, I make a mistake and look at the clock. 23:29. My eyes widen and I want to say something but, nothing comes out. Instead my father gives me a warm smile and gives me one final hug.

I'm just sitting there and waiting with him, It feels like forever until it happens. How did I know? I feel his body get heavier and heavier, for every second it goes by. That's when I close my eyes and hold onto him, as the night passes. I wake up sweaty, my breathing unstable. Suddenly my phone has a notification, based on the sound, it is an email. Still a bit tired, I slowly reach for it. I open my mail and what was sent, brings out the same feelings that I felt when my father was picked.

'Jane Doughe. Serial Number, 93412065. Congratulations, you have been chosen by the lottery. You have, 3 Weeks. Your crime, slaughter the

family that live across from you. If you successfully accomplish your crime, not only will you be shown in our world famous show, "Crime Chase". But also will be receiving a reward for your achievement. Gift will vary on your performance. If you unsuccessfully accomplish your crime, by the end of the time limit, the container in you will release the poison and you will die immediately. Good Luck.' I hear nothing but silence. I'm frozen, I can't move a single muscle. Not even a blink. I am staring into empty space, until I receive another email, which snaps me out of it. I clumsily open the second email, this time a timer is counting down.

'7'

"What do I do?"

'6'

"I can't do this!"

'5'

"Why me?"

'4'

"What did I do to deserve this?"

'3'

"Dangit! Dangit! Dangit!"

'2'

"What if I..."

'1'

"I just have to..."

'Begin'

I guess the game starts now.



YOU FOR YOU

Fua

“Kyaru! It’s time to get up!”

The gloomy gray sky made me want to go back to bed. My room darker than it was at night. I turn over onto my side and look at the poster on my door, reading, “YOUR BIG 17, COME AND CHOOSE YOUR DREAM!” That’s right... Choose my dream. You mean the ones already chosen for me? Pathetic.

“Kyaru! Get to the lecture hall! They can’t start without you unless I let them know that you can’t go!”

Just tell them I won’t go then... No one really wants to be there except for the Geniuses. I get up from my bed and stumble over the unwanted items laying on my floor. All items owned by jlj|l are considered jlkjl by hte ljdjlkj. Kicking away the the clothes and jewelry to make my way to the door, I rediscovered the necklace that mom has been trying to sell for eight months now. I decided to pick it up and put it on as I forcefully left from my bedroom. Just walking through my house feels unwanted with all of it on the floor. I try to secretly brush past my mom to get out of the house but--

“You’re only going to wear a tank top and shorts?”

I turn around trying my best to smile, “No. I’m wearing more than that, but it’s none of your business, right?”

“What? That necklace? You think that necklace is going to cover you up?”

I leave the house before she says anymore and head through my favorite route to the lecture hall, hoping to meet some of my most favorite merchants.

“Hey, Kyaru! Where’s that sweater I gave you yesterday?”

“Oh . . . Someone took it from me . . .”

“That’s not nice! Which kid was it? I’ll talk to their parents!”

“Someone from the city. I’m not sure who it was.”

“Hmm. If it was someone from the vil-

lage then I could’ve done something. Sorry that happened, honey. Here, have this cute overshirt I just recently made. It’s a new style that kids are craving over because of the galaxy design and it’ll really go with that necklace you’re wearing. It’s beautiful on you!”

I put on the overshirt and head on down to the next store.

“Zwalele, Kyaru! How are you this morning?”

“I’m doing well. Just a little chilly.”

“Oh, here, dear. These leg warmers will keep you from catching a cold!”

“Thanks, Ms. Sazzy Merchant! I’ll make sure these don’t get taken as well as the other 11 you’ve given me before.” I quickly leave before she says anything else and snatched a pinch of glitter on the way to the lecture hall. I held my hand out in front of me as I run and let the air do the work with the glitter. While running, I also found a belt on the way. Putting it on my waist before entering the lecture hall, I take a deep breath and enter.

“Turn to page 4,789 and read about your dreams. You will all be turning 17 sometime this year, so it’s good to choose your dream before the most special moment of your life, am I correct?” I close the door with a loud bang and headed over to my seat as Lorigine Teacher glares at me. I can already smell her breath crawling into my ears. “Ms. Kyaru. Why are you late? Did you forget to turn on your alarm last night, again?”

“No, I was thinking too hard about my dream this morning as I was washing up. Please excuse my tardiness.”

“Ah, I see. I’ll only excuse it if it’s a reasonable dream. So tell me, what is your dream, Commoner?”

I hate it when she does that. Makes me want to shave her head right down the middle.

“My dream is to be a singer. Where I can express my feelings to another person through music. Say the message that cannot be expressed

without music.”

There was silence in the room for a good minute.

“Kyarū COMMONER, I suggest you to look in the books to choose your dream. Alright everyone. Let’s continue our lesson and turn to page--

“I don’t go by the books. I go by my guts. It’s my dream, not yours.”

Again, there was silence in the lecture hall. Dahlie Gift, a close friend of mine, whispered to me softly, but with the silence, everything sounded like a shout. “What are you doing? You know you can’t do that,” she said.

“Ms. Teacher here doesn’t go by the book either.” I gave a small smirk. “Page 2,790. Teacher. Must be Genius. Has to teach through the book page by page with her students. MUST WAIT TO TEACH UNTIL ALL STUDENTS ARE IN CLASS UNLESS TOLD THAT THEY ARE NOT COMING.”

“COMMONER,” she said with her loud, husky, stinky voice. “MEET ME OUTSIDE OF THE LECTURE HALL, NOW.” She quickly repositions her stance and clears her throat. “The rest of you may continue with the reading on page 4,789.” She glares at me and quickly turns around to head to the door. I get up and walk slowly through the aisles while the other kids look at me as if I’m the Mistress of all evil, Horned Witch. The only person I’d poke with a needle is that Ms. Lorigine Teacher. I could care less. I finally make my way out of the lecture hall and---

“Alright, where is he, young lady?!”

“Who?”

“The man in the dumps! Where is he?!”

“Look, Teach. I really have no id--”

“Just. Tell me.”

She looked like she was about to cry. Her hands were on my collar, clenched the tightest they could get, and her legs were slightly shaking. She was clearly upset.

“Ms. Lorigine, is this man you are talking about in the book?”

She was silent. She looked me dead in the eye.

“You must never tell any of the other students about this talk,” she said while opening the door into the lecture hall. I head in slowly while

thinking about ‘the man from the dumps’. Just who is this man from the dumps?

“Hey,” Dahlie looked at me with a worried face, “You okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Why? Something happen?”

“Well, yeah! You just walked out of the lecture hall without permission and came back in like nothing happened!”

“I... did?”

“Commoner, are you finally ready to turn to page 4,789,” Ms. Lorigine said with a calm voice, “because if you are not then I suggest you to leave for the day.” She gave me the look of something I’ve never seen before. Something like... it’s only between us.

Chapter 2

RIIIIIINNNNNNNNGGGGGG!!!!

I wake up to my alarm with my eyes still drooping. 4:31 AM? When did I ever make an alarm this early? Turning to my left, I look at my calendar. May 15. May 15?! It’s already May 15th?! I quickly rush outside my house, hurdle over the dying rose bushes in my neighbor’s yard, and climb up the village’s hill. Excited every month for this moment, I sit at the peak of the hill and pluck at the grass that is left there. I wait, and wait, and wait. Waiting . . . waiting . . . waiting . . . THERE! A sight that everyone needs to see, something that everyone needs to do once in their life, that is . . . THAT IS TO SEE THE SUN COME OUT!

“GET OFF THE HILL. I NEED TO PLANT GRASS SEEDS WHILE THE SUN IS HERE.”

I leave a little disappointed since I had to leave so early. My neighbors don’t really like me, so they just like to find reasons to yell at me. I head back to bed and fall back into sleep deeply.

CHAPTER 3

“HONEYYYYYYYYY!!! IT’S TIME TO GET UP-PPPP!!!” My mom is already screaming...

“Look at what day it is today! My little girl is finally grown up to take on her own job! So what are you going to be? Tell me, tell me!!”

“Umm...”

“An intern? You know they have the highest paying job, right?” She looked at me with such a bright face and giggled a lot. She doesn’t really do this unless she sees money coming on its way. But I guess I can’t really blame her since she grew up poor and still is poor.

“No, actually. I have something else in mind.”

“Oh okay. That’s okay! That’s fine! Maybe a merchant then? Being able to sell valuable things unlike us who have to sell the unwanted, right?”

“No.” She looked a little uneasy. Probably because she couldn’t see money in the future anymore.

“Okay. So, what do you want to be?” She started to look at me a little more serious than before. I guess she’s expecting me to say another career outside of our zone. “Before you say anything, I just want you to know that I support your choice, okay?”

“What if I said I wanted to be a singer?”

She hesitated, “A mom supports their daughter no matter what. Come on! Get ready and let’s go to the hall!”

We headed out to the lecture hall for the ceremony. For some reason, my hands started to sweat a lot. Why was I so nervous?

flashback

“Alright, where is he, young lady?!”

“Who?”

“The man in the dumps! Where is he?!”

“Look, Teach. I really have no id--”

“Just tell me.”

flashback end

“Who’s the man in the dumps.....” I quickly cover my mouth after realizing I was thinking outside of my head. Luckily it was all under my breath, so no one heard me.

“Kyaruu!” Dahlie was calling at me. “Let’s go in together!” We head inside and sit at our designated seats. Dahlie was 27 seats away from me. I started to feel nervous again and then suddenly, I blanked out.

CHAPTER 4

“Alright, hun. I’m leaving out for the business trip.”

“How long will you be gone this time?”

“I don’t know. It’d different each time. You know that.”

Is that my dad? I haven’t seen him for so long... I can’t remember his face anymore.

“Kyaruu. Daddy’s going to go away for a little bit. Mommy will still be here though, okay?”

“Don’t tell her that if you don’t know how long you’ll be away for. She’ll be waiting for your return in a week or two.”

“Look, honey. I know you’re upset that I have to go back again, but--”

“It’s for the people. I get it. I know.”

I remember my mom being mad at him, but why can’t I remember his face? A 5 year old should be able to remember a family member’s face, but then again.... I haven’t seen him since then...

“I’ll try to come back in time for your ceremony, okay? I promise.”

“HAS EVERYONE MADE UP THEIR MIND FOR THE PATH THAT they will take?”

My ears started to ring. Did I fall asleep? Did I lose consciousness? What happened to me?

“heY,” Leslie Commoner tapped my shoulder for my attention, “stANd up.”

I looked around and saw every other student standing. I stood up, my ears still ringing and my eyes shaking.

“You oKay?”

I looked at Leslie and felt peace. Maybe I was thinking too much and by looking at her, I was able to stop thinking about everything that was stressing me out. I was able to stand firmly finally.

“Number 1. Please come forward and choose your career. Allow Robot to guide you the rest of the way during this process.”

He did some kind of number code or just some code in general. Does every last name have a different code? Is this how they stop you from choosing a career outside of your zone? My ears started ringing again. 8...5...3...8.... why is this repeating in my head? I look down at Number 3, Julius Gift, typing in his code. 8-5-3-8. That must be it. But... how did I know that and why was it in my head to start with?

“CAREER PATH CHOSEN: ACTOR. CONGRATULATIONS. YOU ARE NOW PART OF THE ACTING AGENCY: TRAINING PROGRAM. YOU MAY RETURN TO YOUR SEAT.”

“Number 4. Please come forward and choose your career. Allow Robot to guide you the rest of the way during this process.”

8-5-3-8, 8-5-3-8, I have to remember that number.
8-5-3-8, 8-5-3-8!

“Number 51. Please come forward and choose your career. Allow Robot to guide you the rest of the way during this process.”

All I have to do now is remember this code, so I can access the Singing Career. I WILL be able to access this code and become a singer.

“Number 59. Please come forward and choose your career. Allow Robot to guide you the rest of the way during this process.”

I look at my seat number just to make sure it was me that they were talking to. SEAT 59. I guess that’s me... I get up from my seat and head down. I feel the heads turn and the eyes stare. Especially Ms. Lorigne.

“COMMONER, will you behave today?”

I look at her and enter in the passcode. 8-5-3-8. I locked in. I was able to see all of the things that Gifts could do. I was amazed by the many choices they were given. Actor, singer, performer, contortionist, composer, producer, director, lyricist, etc. So much more than just a choice of being a water girl, towel girl, intern, and merchant. I decided to be a little sassy towards her, especially since I don’t like her, “I don’t know. Am I?” I clicked ‘SINGER’.

“Kyar. Commoner. How did you get in? And why did you do that to your mother?”

“My mother?” I quickly look around the lecture hall to make eye contact with her, but I couldn’t find her.

“Your mother is on the ground floor. She’s waiting to see you before she has to go. You should go see her before it’s too late.”

“Where are you taking her?! This was never in the book!”

“The book doesn’t need to reason things out with you. You should just listen to it. You should’ve picked a career that wouldn’t have affected your family.”

“No one ever told me!”

“We told you to pick a career from your zone. Is that not enough?”

I looked around for my mom again and I

still couldn’t find her. Where did she go?

“Your mother isn’t here anymore. She won’t be for awhile either.”

“But where IS she?”

“She’s okay. She’s safe. She’s in another place where she can become educated on how to raise children correctly.”

“PLEASE TAKE YOUR SEAT.” Robot sure does have some nerve to talk to me when I’m having a mental breakdown. I go down and take my seat. I’m a little shaky from the shocking information given to me from earlier. I don’t think I’m the only one though.

“Number 85. Please come forward and choose your career. Allow Robot to guide you the rest of the way during this process.”
She clicks in her code.

“CAREER PATH CHOSEN: PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE. CONGRATULATIONS. YOU ARE NOW PART OF THE ATHLETIC: TRAINING PROGRAM. YOU MAY RETURN TO YOUR SEAT.”

She went back to her seat quietly, staring down at the floor.

“As your teacher, Merrel Strength, I’m very content that you’ve chosen a path within your zone. If only Kyaru could be like you. Different at first, then changing to similar. I’m very proud. Now, Number 86. Please come forward and choose your career. Allow Robot to guide you the rest of the way during this process.”

Dahlie went down with confidence. Her hair up, chest out, back straight like a ruler, everything about her was confident. She typed in her code and, “CAREER PATH CHOSEN: SINGER. CONGRATULATIONS. YOU ARE NOW PART OF THE VOCAL PERFORMERS: TRAINING PROGRAM. YOU MAY RETURN TO YOUR SEAT.”

“Thank you, Dahlie. As your teacher, I’m sure you’ll make it far in your career.”

“Before I head to my seat, I just wanted to say something very important.”

“Please do.”

“Kyar. You will never make it to the top if I’m here. A Gift and a Commoner cannot compare. Do you get it now?”



LANDMASS 5 GLOBAL HATCHERY

