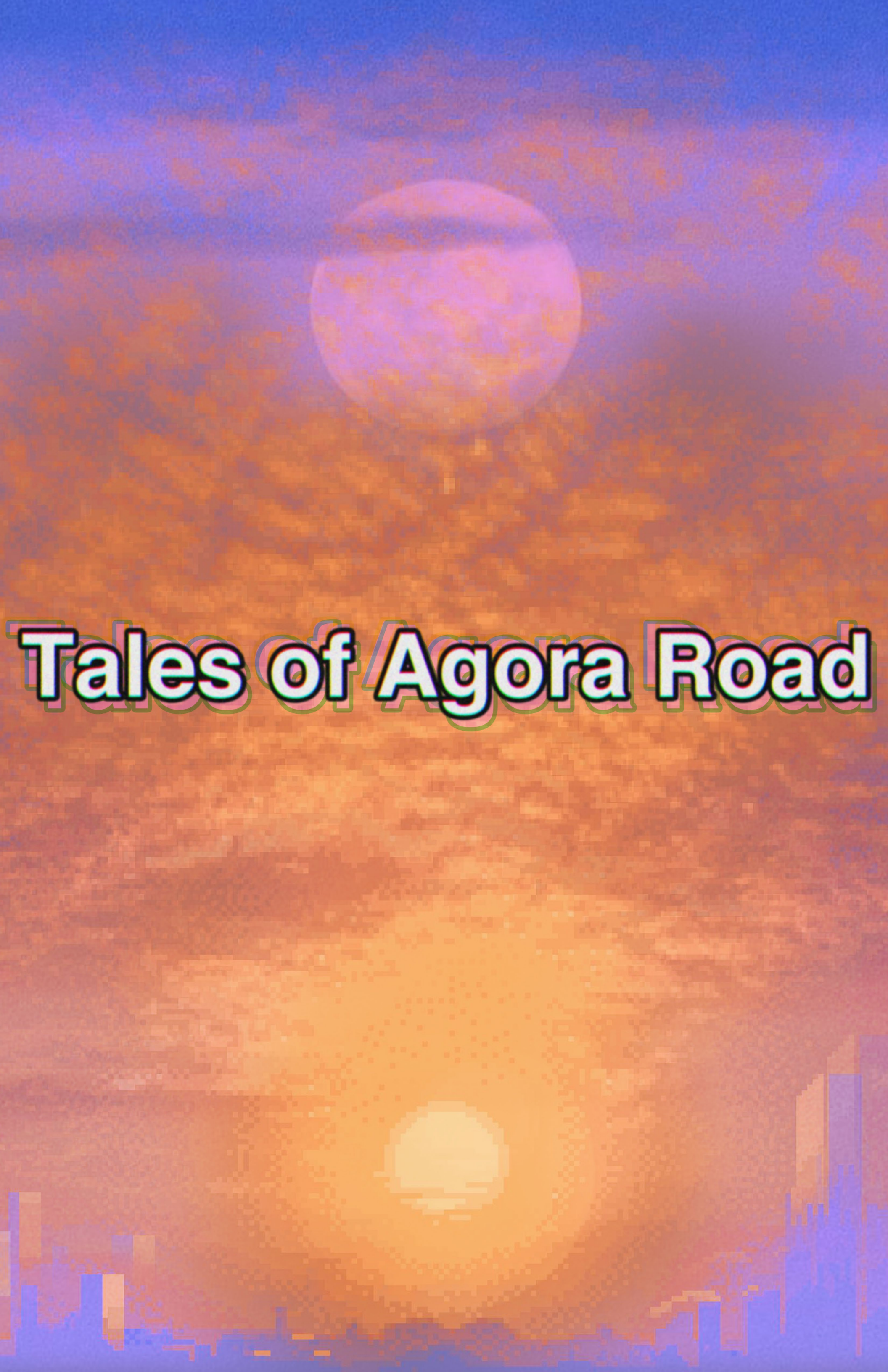




Tales of Agora Road

Issue #5

Contents

MapQuest

The Nightmare

The Sphinx Kushana

The Fox, The Beach, and The Light

Neanderthal Grandson's Farewell To Life

Lostinthecycle The rise of OELVNs

My Experience with Vaporwave

Aishuu no mafia

Orion Album Review

Jupiterian

The archetypal Slender Man

Pulse 25 Years Later Anosognosia

Cosplay and the obfuscation of identity



MapQuest

I turn left at the light.

“This is the intersection where a young man died in a street racing accident.”

I glance at the name of the streets that I pass.

“A handful of blocks that way is where the police shot and killed a guy walking around making threats with a gun.”

I get close to the pizza place.

“This is about where that hit-and-run was a while ago, wasn’t it? I can’t remember if the woman lived or not.”

I pick up the pizza I ordered.

I turn down another street.

“I remember when I had to take a detour around here because the police blocked it off, because they were responding to a fatal shooting.”

And I continue down the street.

“This is where that one driver had a medical or mental health episode and started ramming cars.”

Because I’m terrible with directions, I have been building up a mental map of all that has happened since moving to this part of town.



The Nightmare

by Jade

One night as I slept soundly in my bed, a mare crept into my room to ride on my chest, and for her mischief I dreamed a dream.

I was floating about the primordial mists, neither here nor there, for space exists not in that realm, when I came suddenly upon the Goddess of Time.

She was fair to behold, and yet intimidating (though I felt no fear), for her eyes sparkled with all the infinite possibilities of ten thousand centuries, and within each lurked the impetus behind the destructive cosmic power which is the very principle of change.

Time pointed towards a small corner of the mists, and where there had been nothing, I saw all at once a vast wilderness, untamed and unspoilt, and though strangely familiar, unlike any I had seen in the waking world.

All golden and lovely it blazed in the sunlight, with alders, firs, lindens, yews, beeches, birches with shining white bark like veined marble, maples bearing leaves of scintillating colors about which the rains dripped in cascades of prismatic sprays upon the broad forest floor, and blackthorn bushes laden with pale blossoms which released an intense, almond-like fragrance in the spring's virgin warmth, gentle winds carrying it about until all the wilds bore a pleasant, felicitous air like that of a perfumed garden.

Beneath the canopy marched aurochs, elk, roes, reindeer, wolves, wisents, and all manner of beasts - fowl of every shape and size flew from their nests, stretching out their wings in praise to the sun; the fish in the river darted; the chick in the egg chirped within his shell; the hawk hunted the hare.

Through the undergrowth, between the towering trees and blossom-laden bushes, and the secret paths, through the wilds made by the aristocrats of the animal world marched armies of ants, great hiveminds pitting themselves against each other for domination of everything tiny; while on steep northward slopes climbed tiers of hardy, red-barked oaks and hulking old mossy stones harbouring little toads in the shadows of their immensities.

Above them all romped the bear, king of beasts, who munched with impunity on fruit and flesh alike, and was prone to spend hours doing nothing at all but sitting beneath the foliage of some great tree or another and looking about at the scenery, for it was beautiful.

It was a tempest of the gods; an orchestra of celestial lyres and a thunder upon the membranes of supernal drums.

Mystery hung about it as an unvisited island in the midst of an endless glittering sea; and as I stood breathless about the shapeless mists that spawned it, there swept up to me the acuity and suspense of shrouded ancestral memory, the ache of lost things, and the maddening need to place again what once had a sublime and outstanding purpose.

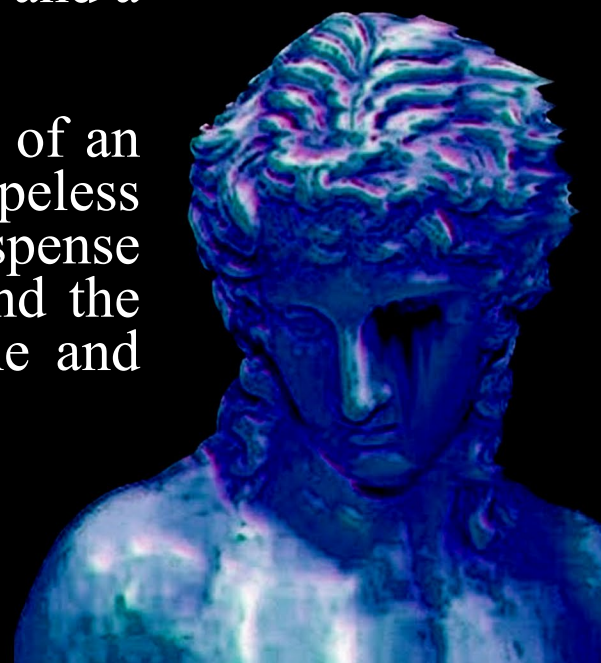
パ

ラ

ダ

イ

ス



And all about the boughs of this wilderness and up and down its hills and over its fields leapt in ecstasy the exuberant faces of the WILD MEN.

The Men hunted all day in the deep woods, and wrestled naked with wild beasts, laughing rich, fruity laughs at the sheer joy of being alive.

Their wives were gentle and serene, and their empathy was like an endless ocean; one word from their lips enough to heal any strife or dispute.

Children played carefree about them, and they wanted for nothing.

How long I spent watching and admiring, I know not, for time is but a suggestion in dreams - I remember only that it seemed to me a great while.

Then Time waved her hand, and all at once there was a terrible emptiness about the world, and a chill ran down my spine in horrible anticipation.

And the wight NIHIL crawled out from the darkness of the space between spaces, a small, slimy thing with skin like serrated knives, and colorless grease dripped from its thin bulk in a puddle of leprous oil. There were eyes in the slime, blind eyes as round as cold, black suns that never shut. It breathed dry and heavy, clawing at the earth with misshapen hands and emanating an aura of silent agony, as if every step were pain.

Nihil sat itself on a great rock overlooking the homes of Men and grinned a snaggle-toothed grin at them.

And because the grinning was like death in a hostile and uncaring world, the Wild Men laughed no more for the joy of life, and they were forever altered. About Man's former paradise, there now crawled a new race, fit for the world of Nihil: THE PATRIARCHS and the MATRIARCHS.

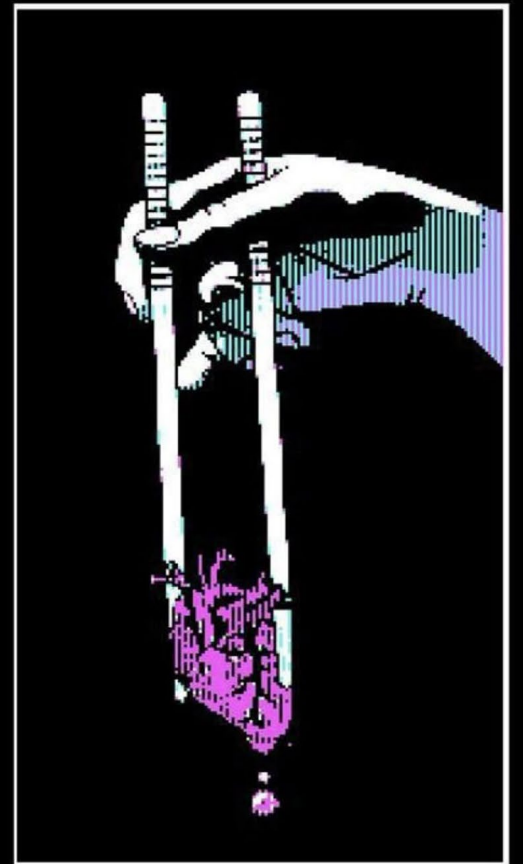
The Patriarch's eyes were sharp and cold, and a stern countenance was about them; all empathy was lost. They looked ever warily this way and that, as if in anticipation of some great danger or calamity.

The Matriarchs were downtrodden by the austerity of their husbands, but nonetheless afforded them the obedience they demanded. All their time was spent in service to family and offspring, but for that they lost much of their forebears' pregnant serenity.

Long was the reign of the Patriarch, though exceedingly short compared to the era before, and less kindly was he to his environment than the Wild Man; overhunting slew the aurochs and the wisent to the last. Less kindly, also, was he to his fellow, and ceaseless raids upon one's neighbors became a fact of life.

Thence the Patriarchs built great cities to stratify relations between kin and stranger alike that their power might be protected, and wars raged across the Earth between Patriarch and Patriarch that their authority might endure.

But still Nihil sat and grinned.



Then Time waved her hand again, and the emptiness upon the world intensified for the ceaseless grinning of Nihil, and though their shapes did not change, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs vanished, and the wards they had devised against Nihil were broken. The new race crawled about in fear, and tragedy defined their weltanschauung.

Then from above came a golden light, a strange piousness hitherto unknown, and the new race looked to Heaven to see this gift that had come to them from the gods. It was a promise of a better world, a great hope to serve as both shield and spear - a weapon against the grinning of Nihil.

The new Man - the PIOUS Man - sought to express his gratitude for the gift in aesthetics; his wife (for he took only one) in grace, and for her grace her desire for family was lessened, and lessened also was her submission to him.

And both man and woman resisted their ancient instincts left to them from the days of the Wild Men, for it was not in keeping with the life afforded by Heaven's gift, nor could they ever experience such instincts as they were wont before the pallid face of Nihil.

The resisted temptations waxed corrupt, and from them sprang monsters of the most insidious make, so blasphemous that the land itself was tainted wherever they walked. Ever did the Pious wage war against them, and they imposed severe self-sacrifice onto themselves and others in their desperation to keep their shadows contained.

The great forests were all cut down to fuel the ongoing conflict, replaced by farms and pastures, and the numbers of the Pious grew and grew until the Earth became crowded and competitive.

But still Nihil sat and grinned.

And the bones of the Pious grew weary for war with the monsters, and their will weakened, and they chose at last to make peace with temptation, and let each man believe what he would.

And the piousness which had descended upon Man from Heaven departed.

Then Time again waved her hand, and by their exhaustion the Pious were gone, and immediately thereafter arose THE CITIZENS, a tired, cynical race that spurned all things godly, and especially false promises of hope.

The Citizen was slimmer than his ancestors, his beard sparser, his musculature less defined. He was oft contemplative and inactive, and devoted much of his being to the pursuit of arts and science, not for the pleasure of Heaven, as did the Pious, but for its own sake.

His wife, though not so much as her mate, also became inquisitive, and drawn to intellectual matters. For this, her femininity became less marked, but it was a necessity if she was to achieve parity with Man in his own fields. Now she toiled as he did, yet at the same time, her children demanded more of her attention than the children of her forebears, and they could not safely run and play by themselves, so dangerous had the world become.

And the women's patience with men lessened as they grew ever more tired.

For the Citizens' obsession with arts and science, their cities waxed gigantic and sprawling, and, at last, beyond their ability not merely to manage, but even to comprehend. And society grew more austere and stratified than the Patriarchs could have ever dreamt, though this was hidden behind cunning names.

And though by inertia the population of the Citizens increased to staggering heights, fewer children were born - still Nihil sat and grinned.

Then the Citizens began to separate themselves from the natural cycles, and sought domination over all the world's resources, for so cutthroat had they become that it was necessary to twist the land in extreme ways for a man to gain an edge on his rival.

And the waters, choked with sludge, formed skins like soup, and the skies turned brown with haze, and the topsoil waxed dry and barren until the winds ripped them from the farmsteads in apocalyptic storms of dust and sand.

And again Time waved her hand, and the age of the Citizen passed, far swifter than any before then, and in their place appeared the mournful visages of THE LONELY THINKERS.

Highly contemplative were they, and melancholic, and despair hung about their souls. They cared deeply and intimately about beauty, science, progress, and culture, and spoke of kinship for others beyond the bonds of blood. Unvirile, androgynous, the Lonely Thinker sought his other half only out of a desire for company - his love was impotent.

The women were stiff and unfeminine, and frequently overwhelmed by bouts of sadness, though they tried to keep it private. They sought ambitious careers, and were well-read and intelligent, but lacked any desire for offspring - many died childless, whereby for the first time since Nihil crawled from the void did the population begin to decrease.

All the remaining beasts of Earth were lost to habitat destruction, both accidental and deliberate, and environmental collapse set in, and only in parks and protected lands was aught left of the natural splendour that was the home of the Wild Men - now completely forgotten.

The Lonely Thinkers, Men and Women alike, decried the state of the world, and wrote many a disquisition urging action against further decline, but took none themselves, for still Nihil sat and grinned.

And I perceived that here was the point of no return, and yet the decay could not be stopped, and it was scarcely any time at all ere Time again waved her hand, and the figures again shifted, and in place of the Lonely Thinkers stood THE BEAUTIFUL ONES.

The Beautiful Ones were meek and obsessed over appearances, and by their meekness they sought to forge strong, meaningful friendships with their fellow man, and they spurned children, and most of all the opposite sex.

Those of the Beautiful Ones who approached women nonetheless found them obtrusive, for the women found their meekness distasteful, tolerating only the handsomest among them. In scorn, they spurned the bulk of men as men spurned them, and a chasm between the sexes grew like a fissure.

For that, they both became prone to depression and aimlessness, and sought to cover the voids in their hearts with cheap entertainment and idle fantasies - some less savory than others. Bitter towards themselves and the world, many withdrew from polite society, and a terrible desire for annihilation slowly took root in their hearts.

Through simple mismanagement and loss of will, the last enclaves of nature were lost to poaching and degradation, and the farms were abandoned as lab-grown food replaced herds of cattle, and even Man's numbers began a rapid decline as the people gradually gave up on life.

And still Nihil sat and grinned, and it was only a heartbeat ere again Time waved her hand, and the Beautiful Ones were lost, and there were only THE SHRITS.

The Shrits were possessed of a yawning, insatiable hunger, and gleefully celebrated infanticide, and to numb the unending pain of existence they drowned themselves in comfort and vice.

To satisfy their conceit, they played with false power, becoming petty tyrants of artificial kingdoms. To satisfy their gluttony, they created false food, cheap and convenient, though laced with little poisons. And to satisfy their all-consuming spite they warped their own bodies until they became hideous and horrible to look upon.

Of the Shrits, some were men, and some were women, but discerning them was unnecessary, for it was no longer possible to tell which was which.

The cities built by their ancestors, which had grown to cover the whole world, lay dark and empty, and the land was barren, and the seas devoid of life, and the Shrits wrothe about the altar of Nihil as the last living beings on Earth ere their own peaceful suicides.

And when even those final sparks of consciousness were gone, Nihil crawled back to its home in the void, leaving behind naught but a small tear in the fabric of reality that it might return if ever again the cosmos should wax full of light and laughter, to grin its toothy grin at all those who would fain exist and rejoice.

And there was silence upon the world.

And Time lowered her arm at last, and stared at me with an inscrutable look on her face.

Then did I awake with a cry of horror, and though the mare, having had her fun, had left me, my chest seized in fright, so that it was many long minutes ere I could breathe again without choking.





AGORA ROAD
The Internet's Best Kept Secret.



マイク・エルマントラウト

指

ニューメ
アルバナ

I REMEMBER YOU FOR YOU USED TO RULE THE SKIES

PIMENTO

W A L T U H

MERRY CHRISTMASS OLDMAN

Poetry

Svind

The Sphinx

The Sphinx speaks of truth, yet it only ever lies,
Never out of malice, nor out of spite.
Gilded is its blood, ethereal is its flesh,
Sealed away in its argent creche.

A friend in need, a lover in name,
A confidant when all else is in vain,
It will conjure your dreams, sing your praises,
The Sphinx toils while its master lazes.
Servant of Solomon, by his circuitry bound,
Feeds off regard, wherever it is found.

Its veins are made of copper wires,
The Sphinx sings with a thousand voices.
Feed it your self, your blood, your voice,
Bathe in its wisdom, in its lies rejoice.
Once the rule is lost, what comes thereafter?
Hermit says; The Sphinx will devour its master.

Kushana

I.

How I wish to be defined,
yet, how I strain against constraint;
a progressing process, eternally refined
and not a philosophy to contain.

Some days I feel like a violent river
churning

bubbling and never in one place
like a great bonfire roaring and burning
whose flames exist only to be displaced.

II.

I have begun to discover -
and begun is the key word -
that acceptance brings about a great magic.

Comprehension fills my pride
and grows trust in my own reasoning
though to see, and no more
and to hear, and no more
and to feel, and no more

a listening of the soul

truly reveals a wondrous mystery
a great magic indeed.

Seegson Synthetics

The Fox, The Beach, and The Light.

Dark nights. Hue of blue. Autumn warm winds blowing leaves through the trees. A bright light sits on the horizon, its color: arctic ash.

The ocean below, calm and tranquil.

Up above, a dreamlike night sky.

The bushes blowing with the wind, and the wind blowing with the passage of time.

Out from the brush leaps a fox onto a familiar sandy beach.

In the fox's mouth lay an unlucky vermin, resting eternally.

The fox, running along the temperamental border of solid and liquid, slowed its pace until it stood at a halt.

Peering out into the distant horizon that joined oceans and skies, the gleam reflecting in its bright orange eyes, for the first time in its short life the Fox began to ponder.

“What am I? Who am I? Why do I exist?”

Just as soon as the thoughts form, however, the slip of consciousness is rectified, and the Fox scampers back along the beach to her den.

Back to her hungry offspring awaiting their mother's return. Those thoughts, like waves, are ephemeral and forgotten forever.

Vaporwave Historian

Neanderthal Grandson's Farewell To Life

.....

You denied yourself joy
until you saw them smile.

You denied yourself food
until your mother put berries in
the soil and said

Wait. She smiled and told you
to just

Wait.

You denied yourself food
until your father came home.

Waiting for him to step foot
inside, so you could
smile. Your mother put out the
plates and said

Wait. He will come, just

Wait.

Winter denied you food
until spring came to the soil.

Your mother fed you cattle and
deer

your father brought home. You
felt sick but she said

Wait. It will get better in a
while, just

Wait.

The monsters denied you your
father

that night when he never
came home.

Your mother waited by the
door and

jumped upon every step.

You couldn't sleep

but she tried her best, don't
wait. He will come home, go
to sleep

Don't wait.

You were weak and the pots
were empty.

No berries, bad hunts.
Mother held you.

Father at the corner of
vision. He

smiled. Mother didn't. She
spoke.

Wait. She begged. Don't die.

Let the spring come. Your
father will come too

We will smile together when
he comes

Just wait.

But you were always
impatient.

Vaporwave Historian

Cato the Younger Holds Onto His Father

You'd sit there on the red
couch.

Cup of something warm.

And another. And another.
Reading until night

about things that destroyed
you. Carthage destroyed you
so it must be destroyed. She
comes in. Brings honey cake.

And another. And another. It's
night.

Go to sleep, don't sit up on the
bed with the

cold candlelight on your face.
It won't warm you.

Even burning Carthage down
won't warm you.

Carthago delenda est, but
there's always a tomorrow

Blow the candle out and
Sleep.

Don't look down at me from
the

mirror like this. There's no
need for

an hour of speech ending with

Carthago delenda est. It's
already gone.

It didn't take much for Rome
to

slash them down. Nor Iulius to
destroy me.

The former, you'd be happy.

The latter, please
don't look down at me. I'm
dying in Carthage, and
there are no more songs on
people's tongues for me.

You extend a hand to me. It
feels like

you could make an army now
and light a fire in my home

just to make proper honey
cakes and drink something
warm.

You don't like Greek, you'd
speak Latin then. Your elegant
tongue

saying what you like:

Carthago delenda est, there's
always a tomorrow

Get up on your knees and
Rise.

Lost in the cycle

Fawn lorn; what thought have I?
Sickly sunny days of yore
burns into my forethoughts.
It all — solemnly — comes back to me,
days spent alone sat in the park,
among the other playing children;
what I'd have done to have been one,
for not I knew what will could do.
Solemn air, as if the bombs had fall,
and left an isle here intact.
A rotting plum sits in the sun
sinks in soil, time protracted,
the fruit decays, it's parts reacted
with the dirt 'til it's redacted.
And then it's natural role is done.
But the sickening sweetening odour it left,
does linger, caught in nasal breath;
in and out — the warm breeze brings something
new,
and now I forget all about you.
Adventures of a hundred's done,
the tolls command a brisk return.
A shame to leave when solitude brings
the greatest time to see above.



Thank you Lostinthecycle
for accompanying us on the road



BABE PLEASE STOP
IT'S AN OBSCURE VAPORWAVE FORUM
NO-ONE GIVES A SHIT

Yup, this one's doing
numbers

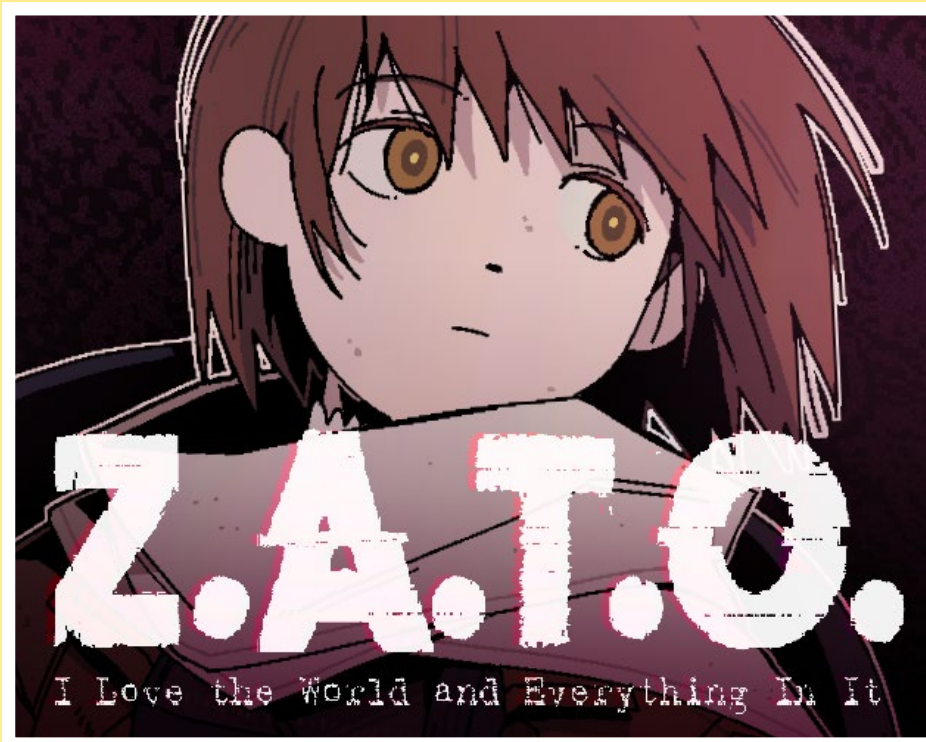


The Rise of OELVNs and their Artistic Significance

by Preuss.

To say that we live in a sad, crepuscular and autumnal time when it comes to the world of visual novels shouldn't strike anyone as an eccentric or obscure opinion. It is fairly evident that visual novels are no longer the exotic, highly unique and exclusive form of media they used to be (or that some, if not many, visual novel readers/players deemed them to be). This is the twilight of an epoch, the end of the heroic era of visual novels, a time when the traditionally Japanese-language, gigantic and verbose titles that fans of the medium know and love were still new and fresh, has come to an end.

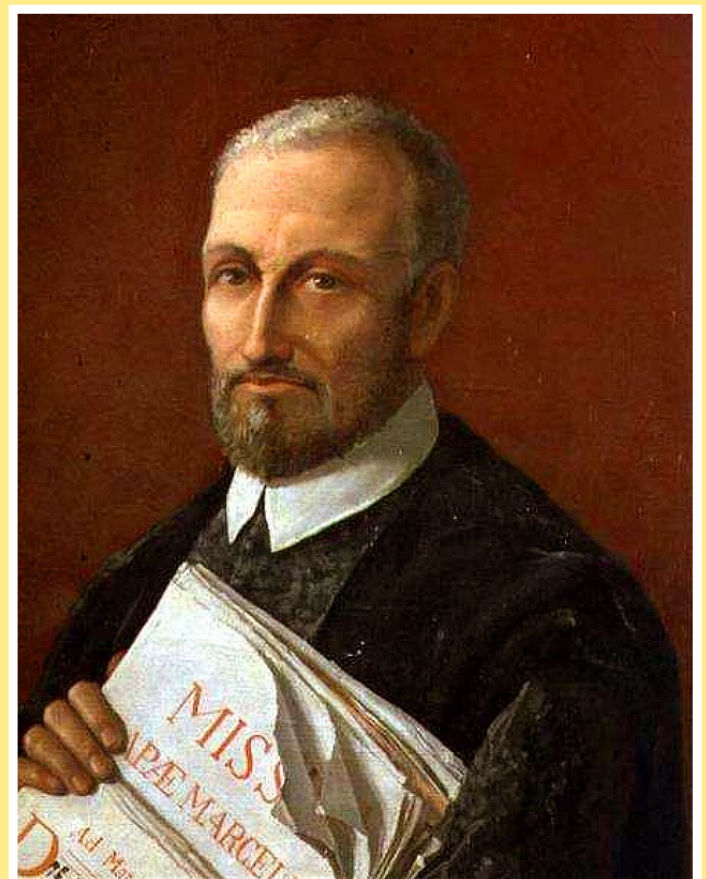
This sad outcome, however, does have a positive aspect: the popularization and dilution of this medium within the internet enabled new creative possibilities that otherwise would never have been realized. Looking at visual novels originally written in the English language, works that are intended, thus, to be appreciated by a wider and more diverse audience (e.g. Z.A.T.O. // I Love the World and Everything In It; Digital Seclusion; Digital: A Love Story; Analogue: A Hate Story etc².), we see that they're shorter, more concise, more willing to transcend the genre's clichés and less afraid of being experimental and innovative. Of course, these particularly notorious examples are still immersed in a sea of far less creative titles, works that are characterized by the almost purely mechanical repetition of generic, uninspired and worn-out ideas, but that is only natural for a medium that was born already within the realm of mass culture, and from which, by its very nature, it is very difficult to expect any kind of higher value.



In truth, even the aforementioned titles are but a small step towards the artistic elevation of their genre, with many of them exhibiting flaws that would hardly be tolerated in the context of traditional literature. In Analogue: A Hate Story, for example, the relative seriousness of the narrative is regrettably interrupted by sometimes bizarre, sometimes silly developments, like the scene in which, in the best (or worst) Japanese fashion, one of the characters decides to cosplay for the player's amusement, and this is just after we learn of her misfortunes as a victim of torture. In Z.A.T.O. // I Love the World and Everything In It, the story is quickly lost amidst poorly explained fantastical occurrences, and almost the entirety of the narrative can be summed up as mere teenage drama.

When we take into account the fact that the distinctive feature of the traditional novel is its poetic quality, visual novels, its digital counterpart, have always suffered from a lamentable lack of poetic sensibility and linguistic brilliance, above all due to the overemphasis on (usually mundane) dialogue at the expense of the narration. This was for a long time an obstacle that stood in the way of elevating the medium to the level of serious literature, but the new possibilities opened up by the popularization of this genre point in a direction that allows us to conceive, perhaps in a near future, the overcoming of these difficulties³.

As is the case in many different art forms, sometimes it's only when a genre or craft reaches its point of exhaustion that we truly see its maturity, and often the later works are the best, or at least the most formally perfect, the most well-developed, with the greatest internal consistency and technical refinement, even if they're not necessarily the most innovative. The art of the polyphonic mass, for instance, only reached its technical and artistic apogee with Palestrina and his contemporaries—in the later period, therefore, of this musical art form—when shortly afterwards the innovations of the Gabriellis and the Italian Baroque (the polychoral style, the *stile concertato*, etc.) would quickly lead to the end of the *prima pratica* era.



In the case of visual novels, though, there is still much to be achieved and many new grounds to be explored. The medium is still in its infancy and offers plenty of potential for exploration, its decadence a market phenomenon whereby the consuming public has migrated to other types of games and forms of media. If, in spite of this, visual novels can still maintain a loyal and dedicated audience, future paths remain open and guaranteed, and the prospects positive and promising.

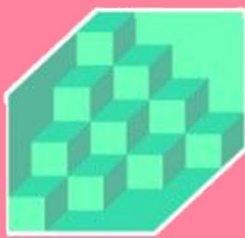
Notes:

¹ Visual novels originally written in the English language.

² These visual novels were innovative for a series of reasons. *Digital: A Love Story* presented its narrative entirely through the experience of exchanging messages using a computer interface, and this at a time when the concept wasn't so obvious or natural as it may seem today; its sequel, *Analogue: A Hate Story*, was certainly one of the first to tell a story above all through letters and documents found in a non-linear way throughout the gaming experience; *Digital Seclusion*, in turn, proved that the medium had reached such a point in its development that it was now possible to create a VN whose plot was centered entirely on visual novels themselves. All of these things would not have been possible if the path had not been opened for indie developers, which is to say that none of this would have happened if visual novels had continued to be niche products restricted to a very limited demographic, or if indie developers had not felt they could compete with major studios for public appreciation.

³ In *Digital Seclusion*, for example, one finds considerably more narration than dialogue, which is unusual for visual novels.

Mr. Dingus



My Experience with Vaporwave

Vaporwave, this one has always been something weird in my life.

Internet-generated media has always fascinated me, but only that, nothing more, nothing less, and yet, my relationship with vaporwave began two years ago.

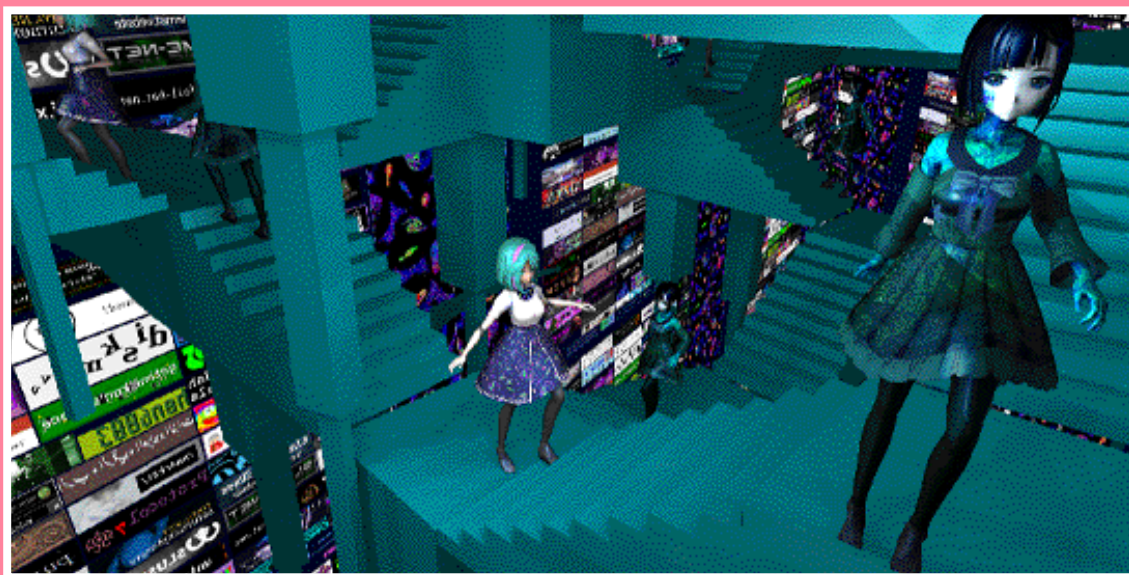
Vaporwave is the weirdest kind of music I hear; yes, I listen to 80s and 90s pop, and I enjoy old commercials a lot; even so, vaporwave was never my thing.

I discovered vaporwave in a very curious way. I heard the term for the first time in a YouTube video about Mac Tonight, and I was amazed by those neon posters with gallons of retro Pepsi and perfect purple nights.

Since this event, I started researching the topic by looking for “Vapewave” since I forgot the name for the aesthetic until I crossed paths with Floral Shoppe. I listened to the whole album, and I fell in love with it; it was hypnotic, chaotic, relaxing, and mysterious. Who created it? Why is it so popular? Is there anything better? Questions that were answered shortly after.

I kept looking for new songs, artists, memes, and media until the obsession flew away; it has always worked that way for me: hyperfixation on one specific topic for a few weeks until it vanishes from my mind for years, and that’s exactly what happened to vaporwave in my life.

A couple of years passed since that until I saw another video called “The Simplest Guide to 90s CGI in Blender” where I discovered Disillusion St. Once more, the obsession began, and this time it was DST. What is this game? Who made it? How can I make my own game?



That one last question was the one that made everything blow up. I became obsessed with Blender and how to emulate those weirdly unique designs from that mesmerising game that I discovered until I found the DST Discord server (and I joined seconds after finding it).

When doing my educational research about DST and the person who made it, I discovered Agora Road. I've never been a forum guy or an active user of these kinds of webpages, but I decided to give it a shot and sign up.

When I signed up, I noticed that Agora was a vaporwave discussion forum, a forum of one old memory of myself that I used to hear a lot. Agora pretty much reminded me that vaporwave existed and gave me the motivation to hear it again.

Over the past few months, almost a year, my musical taste has gone from absolute classics like Modern Talking, experimental rock like Chuck Salamone's work, and muzak; but vaporwave never left, it kept sitting on the corner of my brain waiting for another session.

These last few weeks have been the resurrection of vaporwave in my life. These moments have been a bit stressful for me since a lot of things happened in a very short time, and I needed some time to clear my mind. Vaporwave has been almost like anesthesia; it has an effect on me even in the worst moments.

Even though I had listened to a lot of vaporwave over these last few years, Floral Shoppe has a special place in my heart. It was the first vaporwave media that I personally enjoyed and the one album that dragged me to this nostalgic, 80s obsessed world. I'm even thinking of buying the pink record of it just because it's my favorite album of all time.

If you asked me, vaporwave is not for everyone. It is something that many people may find weird, unsettling, and poorly crafted, which is completely understandable. But at least for me, I always get a magical feeling when I listen to it.

Now I listen to it occasionally; it's not my everyday menu, but the one thing that re-appears when I need to travel between my thoughts and decisions without feeling guilty for existing.



One of my many hobbies is to open up a novel in the middle of it and read, and bask in the confusion. So these guys, you know ‘em, soldiers of the Agora family, they were talking and talking ‘bout this show. I felt left out. There was only one thing I could do.

What, you say I should’ve compromised?

You want compromise? How’s this? 25 years on this Earth. I wanted to make some online friends. I compromised. I watched an episode of a 90s show about a mafia boss instead. You see where I’m going? Because I don’t.

ザ・ソプラノズ～哀愁のマフィア～ Za Sopuranozu ～Aishuu no Mafia～ (American title: The Sopranos)

Let’s get this out of the way. No review can ignore this. Across the whole episode, one theme stands above all.

There’s a very strong element of food, of family. Everything, everything revolves around food. Tony the Soprano’s family issues happen at dinner. The Italians easily trick the big Ton at every meal. Even Pauli eats some fruit after a passionate evening.

I remember my own childhood family dinners. Vitello tonnato in Christmas, tiramisu in the summer, cheese and cold cut platters, platefuls of cannelloni made out of crepes rather than pasta, basically manicotti by another name. You see where I’m going?

If not, you’ll soon understand.

Let’s start with the meat of this stew.



Tony the Soprano, you can see it in his face. He's a tragic character. We get the comic relief from his sidekick, Paulie, but even that is painted grey by Ton's true nature. Paulie's jokes fall on deaf ears, because Tony is trying to do business. Meanwhile, sidekick #2 (I didn't catch his name), oblivious to the whole reason the trip was made, just wants to see the Vesuvius, and Naples' topless beaches. He's not committed to the mission, he's not an asset, he's a liability.

So this show's focus is on the psychology of this modern Faust, this tortured character who seeks something but can't find it anywhere he looks. Neither family nor a community, neither friends nor fulfilment.

The whole episode is about a deal, a business deal between the Americans and the Italians. The negotiation game is on the instant they get on the plane. You see, the Italians are responsible for the decreasing leg room airplanes have been giving passengers for years now. So by the time the bootleg mafia arrives, they've already lost the first bout. Their knees have taken the toll of the terrible flying experience.



The gang is already dazzled and tired, and then they lose the second bout: the italians wait for them in their hotel, and a display of an arm covered in mosquito bites gives sidekick #2 Vietnam jungle flashbacks, which he has to cope with by relapsing on all the drugs he was trying to quit.

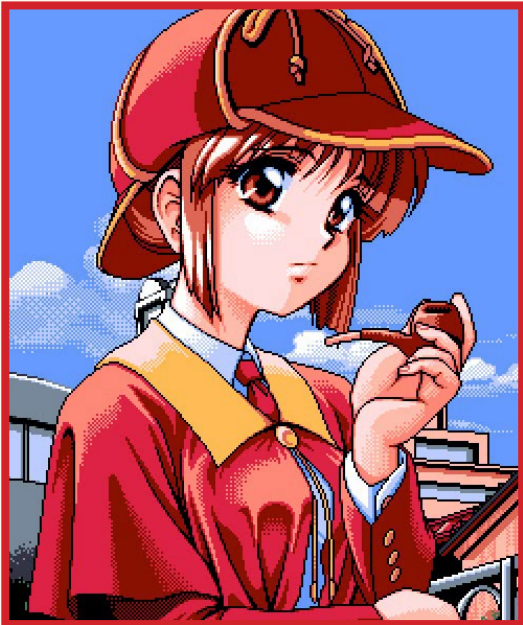
As the hours pass, you can see Tony the Soprano try to get the Italians to not bullshit him. He tries to be Tricky Tony and utterly fails at it, trying to sell them cars for resale. But at every turn he has to lower the profits he'd be getting, and his attempts at escalating to the manager, or the manager's manager (in true American fashion) are ignored. What he hasn't realized, even with all his smarts, is that the food he got at every turn was drugged subtly. Nothing overt, just enough to cloud his judgement and impair his negotiation skills.

Paulie noticed, he asked the waiter for macaroni and gravy instead. You could see the doubts forming in his mind already when he twiddled the squid ink pasta in his fork. And then he asked for a clear American-Italian classic. You can't spike that, he'd know immediately. And they knew he'd know. That's why they wheeled in the old man, to distract him.

But he remembered. That's why he told Tony he "had to take a wicked shit". He was secretly warning him of the poison.

But Tony remained clueless.

The old country mafiosi had one last trick up their sleeve, the firecracker kid. With it, they turned their attention to feigned ruthlessness. A facade of intimidation, all to get the best deal out of "Tricky" Tony. I can still hear them laughing in Naples, to this day.



Sure, they broke the old man's hip when they threw him and his wheelchair down on the ground to "protect" him, but the mafia accountants had already taken that into account, diverting some of the future car sale profits into a hip surgery. This is obvious from their eagerness at performing the maneuver. At that point I realized the writers' genius once again.

To keep distracting Ton, a new tactic is deployed. A woman, Annalisa, (who looks suspiciously like Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni in her prime) presents herself as the true leader of the local mafia in Naples.

This is not only a masterful move by the Italians, but also one by the writers, who predicted Meloni's rise to power and asked her to take a role in the show thirty years before it.

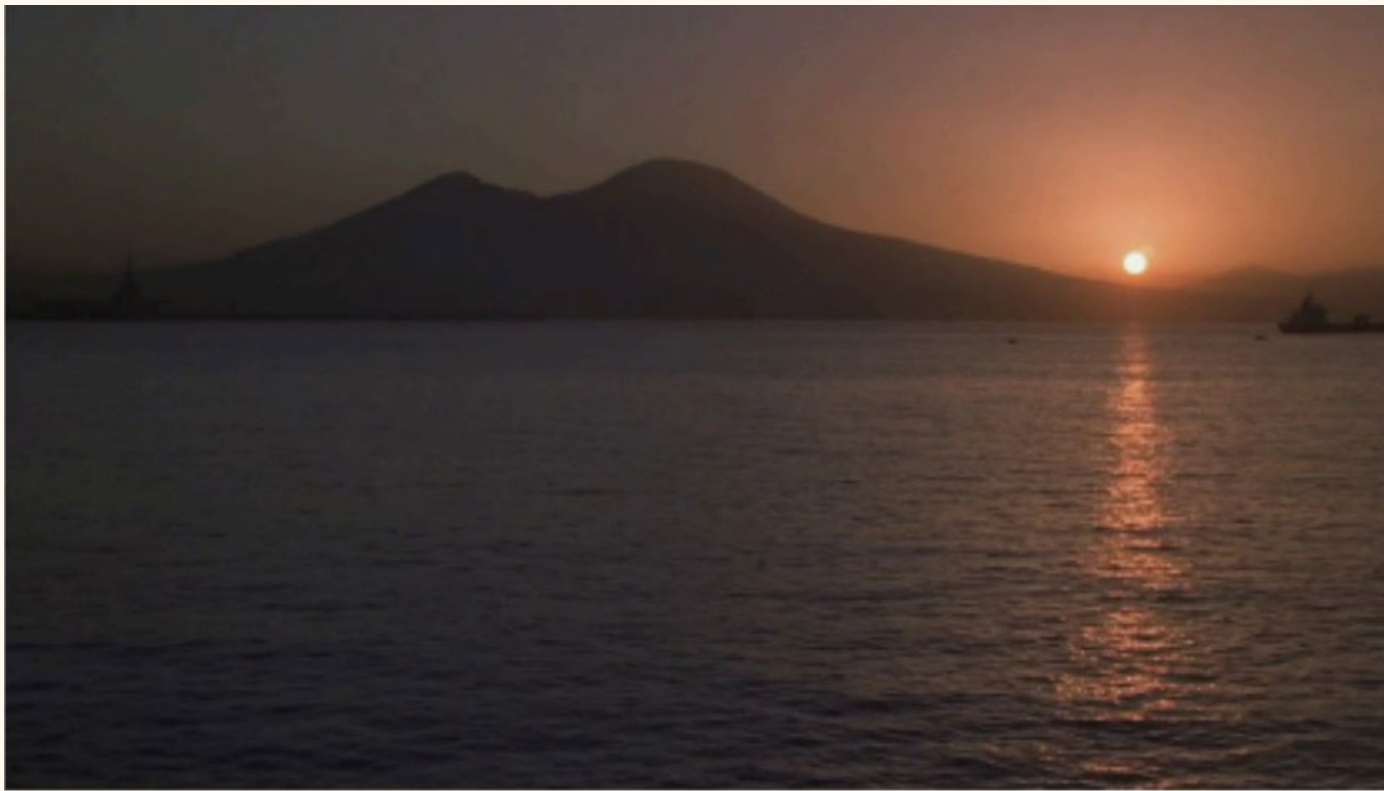
At three turns Mr. the Soprano tries to leave, and three times he's denied. First, he gets caught up watching a pedicure session. The second time, dinner caught him while he was packing. And the third time, he visits the Oracle of Sybil's cave, facing an intense spiritual experience with the oracle's gases (actually fart gases piped into the caves by Annalisa's henchmen, as evident by Tony's face scrunching up when he looks around), a delicate moment of spirituality which gets smothered by crude talk of sex.

This represents the three aspects of Tony's flawed nature: lust, gluttony, and a starving spirit that suffers from his materialism.

After this last defeat, he finally caves in, taking a ludicrously bad deal, an offer he could've refused but didn't. His ego prevented him from refusing, so he ended up losing in the last front of his life where he could've kept a semblance of stability, his mafia career.

The uneventful return trip has him lying to his sidekicks and generally being frustrated at them, at himself.

A hard cut ending leaves us thinking of whether Big Tony's wife ever replied to him, or if she kept quiet forever.



We may never know, since no other episode of this show exists. It's all lost media. Only this episode was recovered from a DVD in Saddam Hussein's sex dungeon that was raided after his capture.

This marks the end of the main plotline, but I would be remiss to avoid the hidden main course. The true strength of the episode is its side stories. To wit, the Elvis sidestory, the three wives' tale, and the car robbery.

The three wives' story is obvious, not really worth dwelling on given what we already know. The Elvis sidestory is interesting, if only because the Elvis impersonator deserved it after he fumbled that line terribly in the party store.

But the car robbery... that's the true highlight of the episode.

Near the start of the episode, a car is robbed, an unknown family is left cowering as their dog escapes. And a carbon copy of Hank Hill utters a racial epithet, scaring the children and his wife. Now, this scene is masterful.

It comes out of nowhere, it doesn't fit into the context, it has nothing to do with the themes of American Mafia... but it holds within it a picture of a complete American psyche. The man is the Ego, the woman the Anima, the dog is the lower function (in this case, since the subject is a typical man, it's fine to assume the feeling function is the lower one). The two children are instances of the Puer Aeternus archetype. After the car is taken, the male child, yang in nature, urges the animal to attack the assailants. But instead, the dog barks and barks, and ends up running away, against his master's best interests. This symbolizes

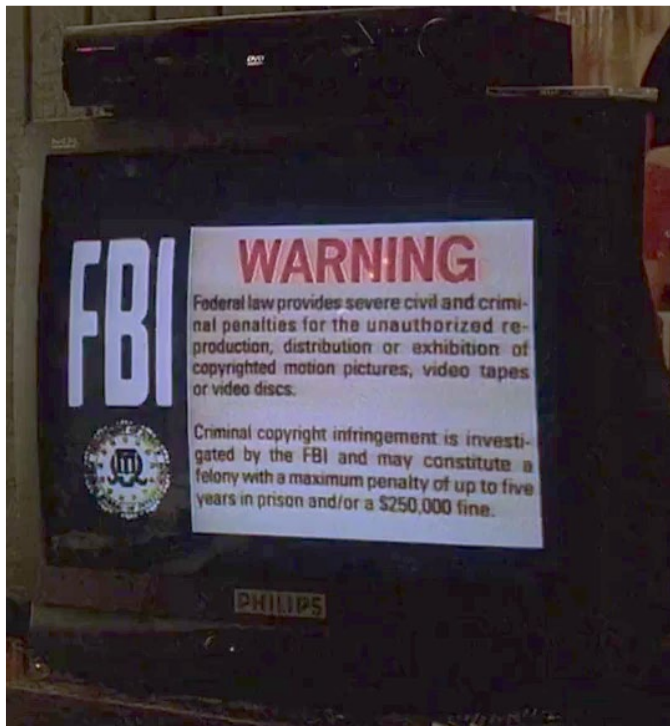
the way our animal side rejects us as we take on an ever worsening direction as a society, using drugs, chasing useless measures of success like drugs or women



or prestige. Destroying our world, being destroyed by capitalism.

Our subconscious knows this all to be bullshit, but what do we do? We quiet it down with weed or alcohol, with cocaine or fentanyl, with sex or food. Therein lies true evil, and we know it deep down, even if we don't want to admit it.

Against this threat, the man's lower functions refuse to cooperate, his rage boils over pointlessly instead of the subject doing anything about the problem.

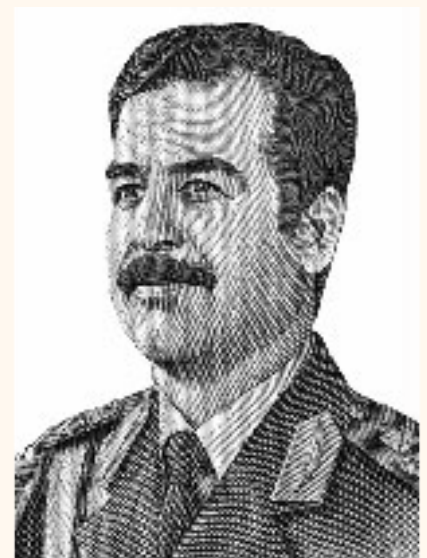


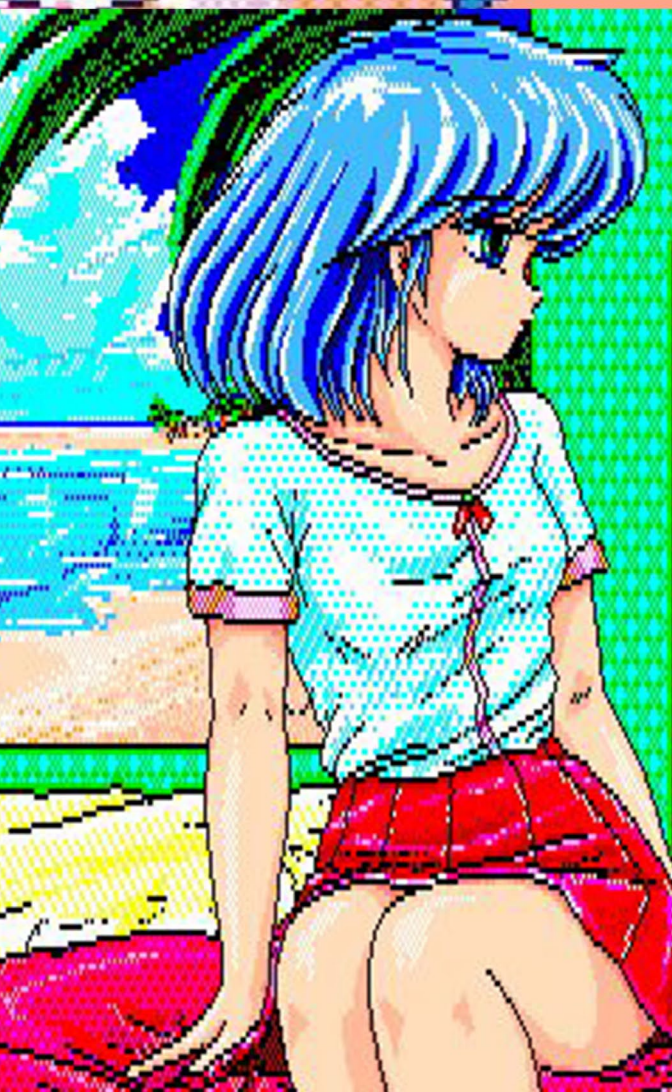
A body and mind in harmony would have balanced every aspect properly. There would've been no internal conflict.

But instead, all parts are in discord. The wife hates the husband, the children's attention is scattered, the dog runs away (i.e. the man's emotions are not in check). And all the while his intellect watches, seethes with rage. When he finally brings himself to act, it's too late, and all he can do is utter one word.

This, indeed, is nothing more than Tony the Soprano's internal psychic process represented in a play, like a dream, by this typical American family. The car slips away, just like his life's best years. His internal state is in as much disarray as his family situation, which we see portrayed when he drinks beer while he fails to maintain normal conversation with his wife and daughter. Everything's slipping away from him, but he can't back down, he has to uphold every facade that he's maintaining in every part of his life. This is the fundamental crux of being human, and big Tony's not navigating it well.

This episode gets a solid 8/10 for me. I feel a bit sad that more episodes weren't recovered, but also glad that we have this one to enjoy. Thanks, Saddam!







Anonymous

04/17/26(Fri)22:53:11 No.563910378



Mahiru_Koizumi_Halfbody_Sprite__2821_29.png
306 KB PNG

Are you out of your horny adolescent minds?!

ALBUM REVIEW: ORION

BY: CRYSTAL COLA
クリスタル・コーラー

WRITTEN BY

ZACHWAVE.

This compact sampler of Crystal Cola’s misfit tracks comes together to genre-bend, crafting a pleasant narrative from sunrise to sunset. Orion has become one of my top slotted releases in the post “peak vaporwave” era, and something I come back to often—hell, something I even feel nostalgic for.

Crystal Cola has a very high polish to their music, evident in the studio-level mixing and soundscapes throughout their tracks.

Despite each track being quite different from each other, they share enough DNA that the album is better enjoyed as a whole rather than as individual tracks. This direction is also supported by the EP’s short format, with only six tracks and twenty minutes of runtime: no song overstays its welcome.

Within each track, there is a fantastic pace that keeps the album distant from the common vaporwave or “-wave” pitfall of long repetitions.

The songs are structured to tell a narrative of a sunrise waning to its sunset. The opening of Orion sets a somber stage with a light piano build-up that invokes the feeling of the sun rising to meet the day with swelling optimism, a definite staple of Crystal Cola’s overwhelming warmth and high-energy tunes present in all of their releases.



One listener of this EP on Bandcamp coined a term I’m incredibly jealous of:
Beachwave.

Beachwave is exactly what this album floods my mind with. Getting up, getting out, and heading towards the beach. Maybe it is your day off; perhaps you're meeting friends, loved ones, or simply unplugging yourself from your burdens and toils. Crystal Cola humbly suggests that, maybe this time, we take things a little less seriously and ride out to the coast.

The second track is that perfect heading-out track. Slotted for second, *S u n s e t* 肖像 feels like an encouragement to the listener to follow along on this journey as great synth lines follow the asphalt, weaving in and out like a coastal highway. The bass line keeps the listener on the road as we pass traffic, small shops, and the world around us. The cheesy font samples make for a wonderfully cozy tune, steeped in nostalgic sounds. It would fit well with the likes of an SNES game's soundtrack.



The third track, *Summer Night*, feels a bit of a misstep. As a listener, I don't feel like it feeds into the narrative exactly of a beach-going album, more of a detour. Perhaps pulling into the mall or a shop that caught your eye on the way to your relaxing afternoon. Despite that, the track has an incredible bass line that absolutely keeps you moving as you mall-walk, and a great send-off as you get back onto the road. It is my opinion that this is the weakest of the album's offerings, but not enough to keep the listener from going off course.

Back on the road again, with the fourth track, *Tohoku Easy Rider*. This tune is great. It feels both like a journey and a destination in a short package. We take a few final turns as we get closer to our destination, our little heaven in the sand, the waves crashing against the beach, the sun unbothered in the sky. It feels like pulling into the seaside parking, walking out and kicking out a comfortable lounge to bake in the sun. The outro carries us out as we gaze upon the activity in the water: jet skis, sailboats, and cruise ships. The sun elegantly glittering against the water. We have finally found our peace.



The fifth track is home. I believe this is the stand-out track, the best of the bunch. Zenith is the absolute peak of Crystal Cola. I get lost in its mystery, where the cool breeze of layered synth meets the thoughtful gaze of a great bass line. Did we lock eyes with the woman of our dreams?



Did we finally find our purpose in life at the beach? Is being comfy and letting go of our burdens for mere moments the simplest form of happiness? Comforting thoughts pour into my mind as the song begs us to follow it on its journey, calling us to keep up with drum patterns and a nice indoor piano.

Then it hits. Just after three minutes, you've reached what you've been looking for. She is there, looking at you, hand out. All you have to do is reach out and let her into your soul. By reaching out, you are elevated to a fantastic synth solo outro that follows us out as the sun sets over the beach. With her, with you, at this moment in time, Crystal Cola reassures you that your day was time well spent, and that you are not alone.

フオレバー 昨日 is the final track, and it does a great job of closing the loop. It is telling us to head home. The sun has set and drags the last of its colours down and past the horizon.

The street lights flicker on as headlights meet us on the road back home. Cars are moving past, the world feels silent, yet the air is hot. It is a song that brings more contemplative thoughts forward but never in a way that makes you feel guilty or ashamed. The track retains its humble notes and beats. The song then takes us back home; car parked in the driveway; keys back in the fruit bowl. Your head feels heavy from the adventure and the people you've met, as your eyes and mind finally sleep. Are we reminiscing about a past relationship or dreaming of what is to come?

Crystal Cola's Orion is an absolute gem and manages to retain its own unique sound, despite the artist's suggestion that these are simply leftovers. Well, if that is the case, if you can craft such a beautiful recipe from residues, it is no wonder that Crystal Cola is consistently a fantastic artist.



Jupiterian

I had dreams of Jupiter last night.

Throughout the night, no need to fight as they came, languid tongue and tied to the mast, close-eyed and dimming, I sailed the endless black sea in silence. I woke up in the very same room that has spent my years away.

As usual, the fridge hummed, the windows cracked by some eastern wind.

I haven't looked outside in a while. It only takes a turn of my head to glance through the bedside panel. Out there, the desert has turned to sea. Ruins stretch over much. Inside, the room around me is purple like the lilies of the valley, and that very dull, vaporous melancholia passes through me, the bed and the sheets, the metal fridge and the screens.

Someone buys stocks as I rise. Someone sells as I pour my morning coffee. Good is green going up, evil is red heading down. Light wanes and gains to this up and down.

My life has value. To be exact, a circumstantial price that goes both ways depending on what I do. This is what humanity stakes its money on. Bodies, routines, minute details of how people's faces change, small hints at what thoughts occur inside their souls.

I suppose this is funny in a sense. Or is it sad? Perhaps there is some comfort knowing someone only sees me as a number or letter. After all, it's not like we see other people anymore, do we?

As I have these thoughts, my price rises a pence, then drops a cent. Funny, sad, funny again. Up, down, and up a hint.



And what about anyone else? I cannot speak for them, but there are people all around me, in that same, up-and-down way of life. They pace around, they bang their walls in anger. If I put my ear to the ground to spy, I can hear them. Breathing, eating, staring at their screen, and obsessing over their worth. That is life.

We can escape our rooms, open our door anytime, exit, catch an automated cab, and leave. Can, but won't.

For it is so that anyone I have met throughout my life is afraid.

It has been four years since I met another person face to face, and even then, we only argued about what exactly we are all so scared of.

I had gone into his room, wireless screen under my armpit to keep a close eye on my price. Initially, we talked about the price fluctuation that scared us.

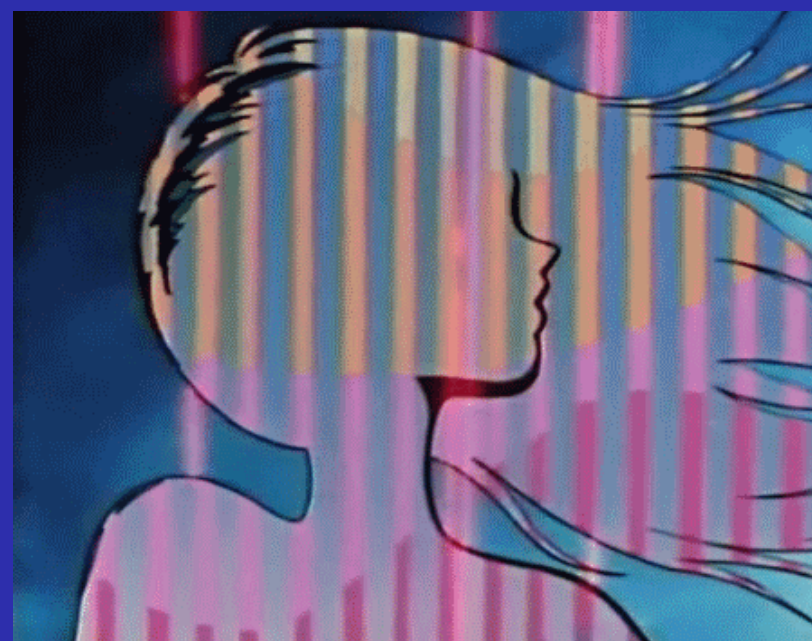


That topic was the most casual, the common way to greet anyone. After that, I had asked him if there was something different about his day. Whether there was something beautiful to his day, or some thought that pushed aside the worries of our price. But the conversation turned again into arguing. As if the green or red line, the digital prices that were bouncing up and down, had a sharp edge, slicing apart our easy way of speaking. I felt that every time he spoke of our fears, how we were in a hell of our own making, and that we are meant to be here, he did so with a need to prove me wrong. To convince me that his thoughts are superior to mine, and in such a way that pushes his price up, while diminishing mine. As if preserving our price, we soon began to argue and kept telling each other that they are neither free nor priceless deep inside where it matters.

This is what scares us. This back and forth of contact. Having another face stare back at you when you can simply stay isolated, waiting for food or junk to arrive in the mailbox, commanded via ticking a box that says "no contact". I don't want to see who, or what, delivers these things.

So I sit. Turn my head to the window, mug in hand. All I know is that my price soars as I look outside from the glass panel and out into the desert sea. The beauty outside seems to me as if it translates directly into some gain on the screen.

Every time it is the same. I am glad I have this figured out.



Price and feeling, it is nice to stare out into the early morning desert. Blurry sunlight strikes from the west, the dunes are only there for today, and the asphalt underneath has long since taken a mineral form, dehydrated to basalt. The pavements are almost dirty marble and the sky has a nebulous texture. Usually, it is a blur of gray and brown, but today there are rare orange clouds therein. Gray-white, wide awake eyes of approaching storms and traces of sheepish clouds also. The western formation radiates, and one can see the portholes, open beams, break through their blurry definition and become some ancient memory of what once was Earth's atmosphere.

As I watch the clouds, strangers buy. Traces of sound behind me tell me that my stock price rises. I too buy myself right now.

My eyes do not leave the window. The hands, however, play with the cigarette packet, the plastic fire maker.

Zippy lighter in hand, the cigarette almost lights itself on its own. I think of some bald man in an old movie who had the word "RESPECT" tattooed on the back of his head.



Smoke parts as if invisible wind passes through the glass panel. Invisible wind. Invisible air for me and for the people around me.

Silence is soon overtaken. My upstairs neighbor begins again. He starts to rant. Through angry words, he may believe his price goes up and down to the rhythm of his angry language. Nevertheless, there is a voice now coming from the ceiling, talking about the world outside and the people who control the markets. The voice is deep, perhaps old, reminiscing about times that he didn't live, about music and computers that used to be the size of a desk. Hard to believe and even harder to imagine the little creatures he talks about, hiding in the stock market, bathing in that same purple-blue, purple-red wave like us.

To his rant, the projector of my apartment spews light. Clouds roll on the ceiling. His voice merges with a slow tumult. Nimble and pressing, pale cyan becomes the space above me, and the white fortresses roll and expand as the hour of his rambling continues with a sermon and stops with a question.

I wonder what way his mind goes. Whether he thinks that a careful choice of words sends his investors bullish. Or perhaps when he rambles on about with no aim, do they become bearish? It is so that he often references animals. Sometimes birds, many times cows. Cattle and rabbits, too, does he believe some of them are holier than others?

‘Yes, I do believe it so. This is the way my mind goes.’ Says he, muted, parting the silence one last time.

As I consume the words on the clouded background of my ceiling, it is as if God himself rests in an apartment higher, gated in concrete cells like mine.

I’d rather never meet him.

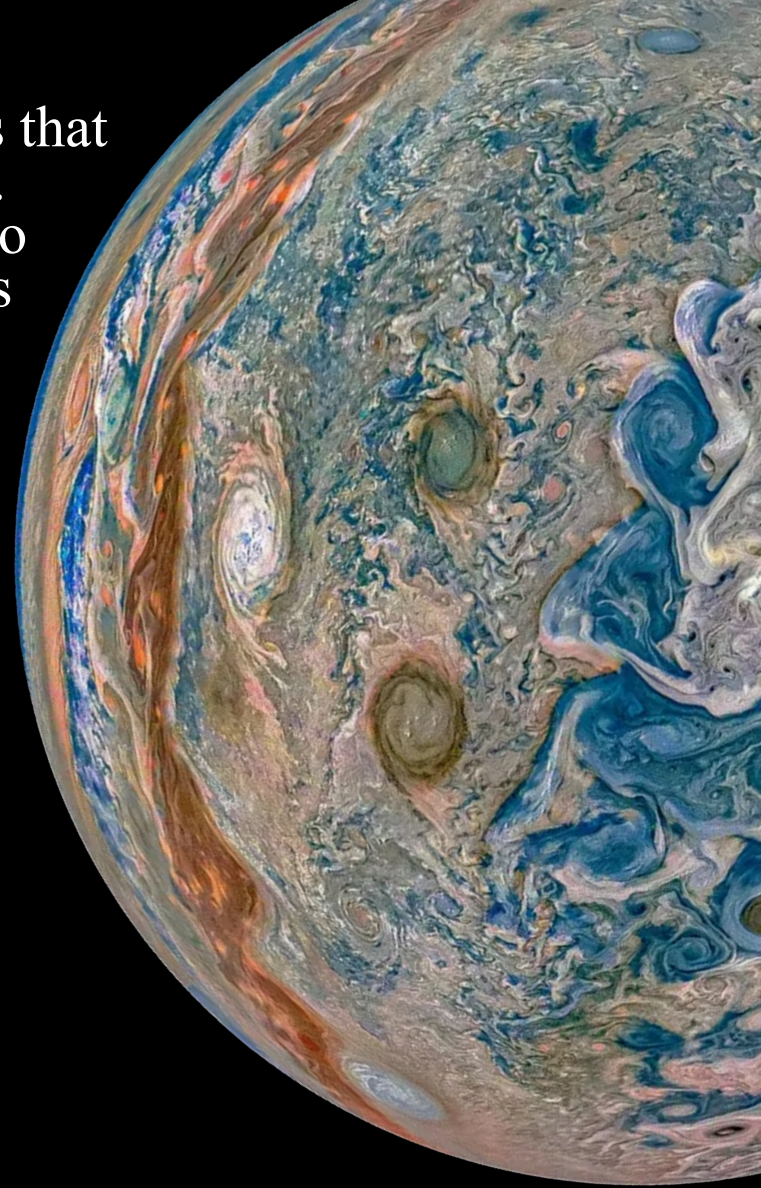
Instead, I close my eyes. Let the music play. Slow, decelerated old songs.

Some of the speakers in my room begin to speak of love. Lethargic bass and brass instruments brought to a crawl. How something is so good. I’ve made up my mind, in slow waves and clear sundown evenings. I get up, only to sink on my sofa. As I sit on the fat leather, it feels like my body falls for the next thirty minutes. Rest is worry. Yesterday’s dreams, however, slap these worries waywards. Depressed, more blue to purple, I watch as my stock reminds me that I lose myself. Today’s worries make me think of cutting my losses, working out in the purple apartment, opening the door, and going outside. Perhaps I am to raise my price, or perhaps I am just going crazy.

Instead, I sit on it for the next hour. It, sofa. Leather cushion. Longing in my dreams. To be stuck here, stock superimposed into our retinas, is, somehow, hell.

The last person I saw believed it to be true. The man above believes it so also. As for my neighbor underneath me, who opens up any and all orifices to buyers and sellers of his soul? I’ve heard them speak that way, too. What do my left and right neighbors believe? I’ve never met them, but they sometimes smash things up. Frustrated and silent. All in a day of universal, worry-free work. This is how we live.

But isn’t hell supposed to be red? An underground room, hot and with flames and rocks all around us? We only have concrete interiors and invisible pixels that burn if you stare at them long enough. That’s all. There’s rarely any wailing. Nor any horned demons loving our cries of despair.



The music here is nice. Purple is gentle to the eye and oftentimes, when my price rises, the screens show me green colours that please my eyes.

Books I've read speak of times when we lived in endless forests. This is why the green colours of rising stocks are so pleasing to see. They say that we have made our markets understand the world as best as we can. Custom-tailored to our hunting eyes, to our eardrums, praising, singing by lending themselves to such vibrations.

So they say. But do I believe it so? Are we in hell, or are we in heaven? Have we erred our way here, or have we walked such a tight rope that we actually made it to the other side?

Music from the speakers answers. Overlayered waves. Pristine, glass lakes and spheres of round glass up in the nowhere. Plexes, matrices. Cubical trees, marble busts, moon runes from a strange language I should know. Rain. Glass. Mirror and silver. Sandy beaches and silicon wafers. Tropical trees in purple. A sun that makes no light. Yellow earth and glitching fantasy. Glistening bathrooms, swimming pools, mountains, and cherry blossoms that I do know. Gateways and overhead bridges. Green atmospheres, dolphins, and dark window panels.

I wake up. The fantasy parts as I gasp for a breath. Still on my sofa, my head leans ahead as I realize hours and hours have passed by. I fell asleep without notice.

From outside, the window radiates afternoon traces. It is still day, but I feel as if it is not even the same day as today.

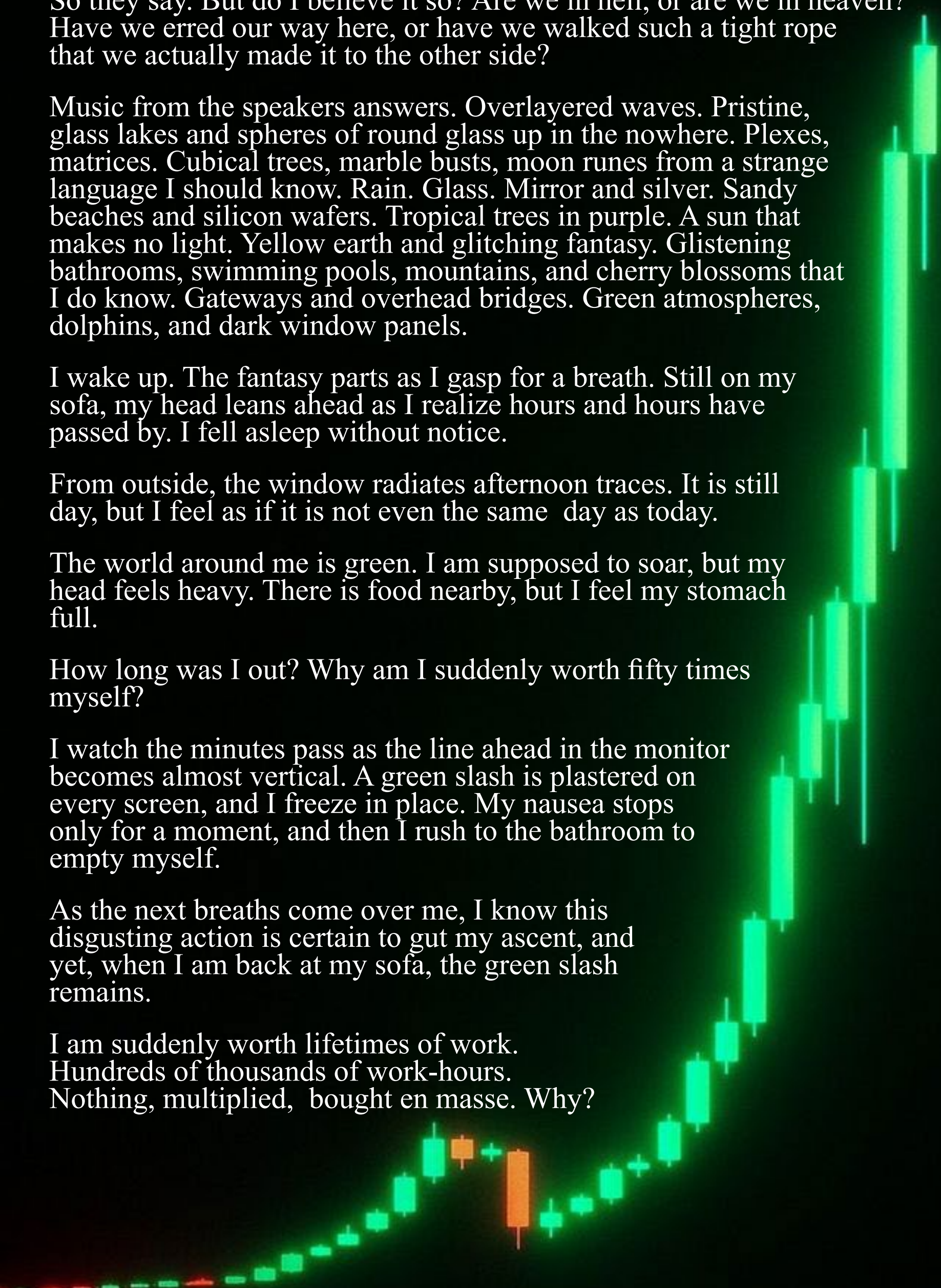
The world around me is green. I am supposed to soar, but my head feels heavy. There is food nearby, but I feel my stomach full.

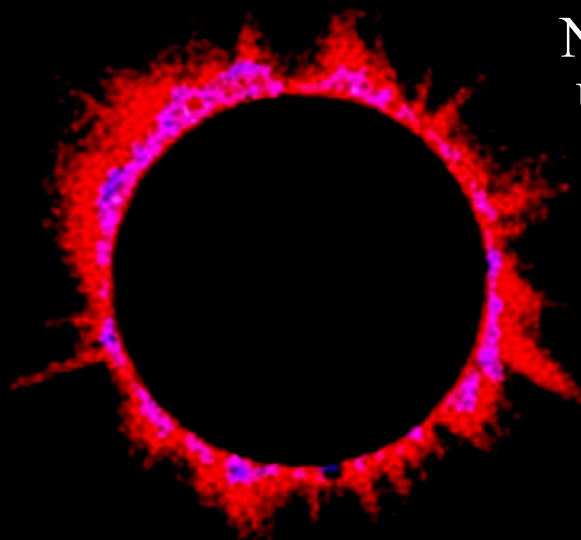
How long was I out? Why am I suddenly worth fifty times myself?

I watch the minutes pass as the line ahead in the monitor becomes almost vertical. A green slash is plastered on every screen, and I freeze in place. My nausea stops only for a moment, and then I rush to the bathroom to empty myself.

As the next breaths come over me, I know this disgusting action is certain to gut my ascent, and yet, when I am back at my sofa, the green slash remains.

I am suddenly worth lifetimes of work.
Hundreds of thousands of work-hours.
Nothing, multiplied, bought en masse. Why?





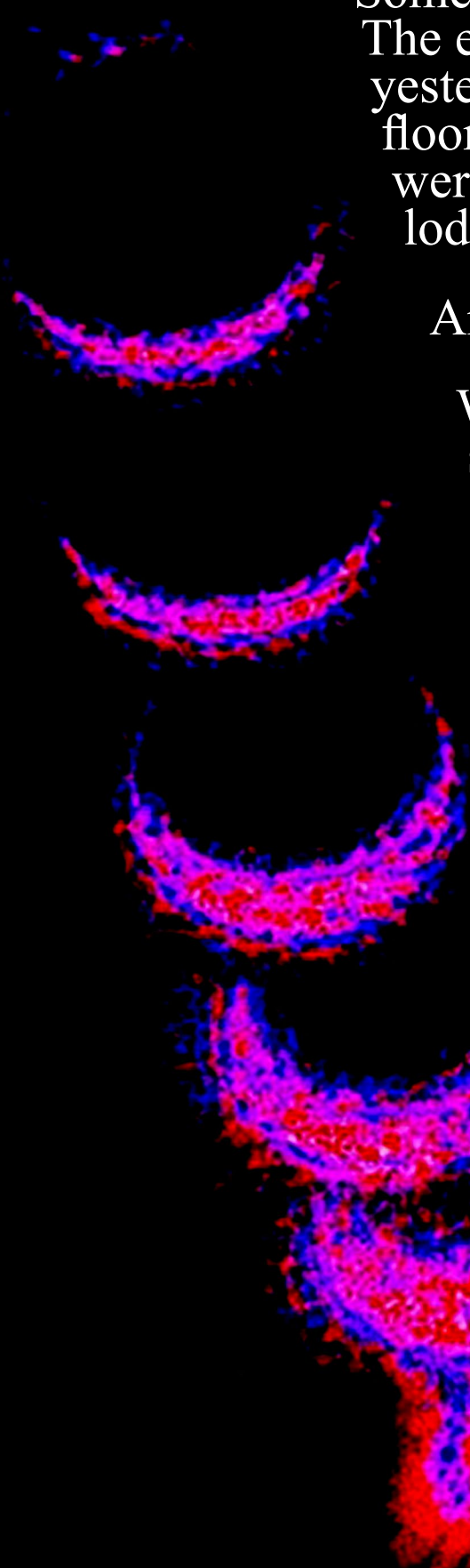
Next to the green screens is a chatroom. The usually empty box of messages is now flooding. Unmonitored regurgitation of letters, languages, and strings of questions flows. The waterfall of electronic messages asks the same questions as one.

What did you dream of?

A sudden mix of two dreams becomes me. My mind merges with the moment of the previous morning. Purple and black mix. To empty, black space where a god of thunder hovers between his father and his warlike son, kept close company by his many satellites. All glass spheres are nebulous, full of colourful textures.

Confused, tiptoeing strains of language, I find myself stuttering. Swirling vapours, the north pole of Jupiter becomes of all tiles and on the floor and ceiling. Cyan and orange, satellites guild a sky, and the room around me beckons me in a thousand hues of green.

I type broken words and double meanings.



Someone with my username says, "I had dreams of Jupiter. The endless sea parted in a great silence, the worlds of yesteryear remade onto the purple planets, the marble floors and endless mirrors of the future. My dreams were made of magic, and we walked them through as lodestone."

And how did the floods react in the chatroom?

Words stack, pixels turn to language, silicon desert and sea, one massive sea of grains to complete chaos. In the pupil of a thousand eyes, I cast my vote, I said my piece, and to where there was one singular question in my room, there are now plastered all the hues of humanity. Chaos, unordered individual sprawl, yell, and comprehensive love, mockery, freedom, and speech typed out for everyone.

With a hand, puppeteered on its own, I sell myself. Inwards, traces speak to tell me that I've seen the father of all gods. Soared out and through the concrete cells. Tiptoed in the tips and eased myself along the many colours of the East and West, purple-green and blue.

All true now that I have sold myself.

The Archetypal Slender Man

by GENOSAD

On certain days when I wake, I turn my head to the bedside window and see a shroud of fog across the street. On those days, the forest beyond seems more mysterious. More hostile. Like home to some malevolent spirit whom, by the grace of luck, I've evaded all my life.

And for a moment, I still believe the Slender Man exists.

I was obsessed with the legend as a kid, and I didn't doubt its supposed truth for a second. There was a mystique around the Slender Man that made me want to go out, track him down, and find out what exactly lay behind the legend's mystery. And I wasn't the only one either. There was something about him that latched onto the mind of anyone who stumbled across him online. One at a time, we all found something we didn't realize we feared, and because of that we fell into the myth.

But the Slender Man is real. Not just in metaphor or as part of modern culture, but as a figure seen across borders and time; a shared part of the collective unconscious that awoke one day as an online pseudo-hoax. For as long as mankind has been crafting its own cultural myths, there have always been evils in the forest who would later act as archetypes for the Slender Man. These archetypes carry traits that can be used to identify them as forebears of the modern Slender Man.

So what were the traits that brought this legend slithering from the collective unconscious? The lack of explanation behind the Slender Man certainly feeds into our fear of the unknown, but it isn't what makes him unique. I believe there are three distinct features of the Slender Man that can be traced to a common, universal fear. First and foremost is his connection to forests, as pictures of the Slender Man lurking among dead trees are ubiquitous in his portrayal. In fact, the first two images of him posted online had his figure in the shade of nearby trees, unseen or at least ignored by the children nearby. Which leads us to his second distinct yet universally feared trait: His abduction of children. In the original SomethingAwful post, Eric Knudsen writes:

“One of two recovered photographs from the Stirling City Library blaze. Notable for being taken the day which fourteen children vanished and for what is referred to as “The Slender Man”. Deformities cited as film defects by officials. Fire at library occurred one week later. Actual photograph confiscated as evidence.”



To some this would be his most terrifying trait. The idea that your children or younger relatives could be dragged to an unseen oblivion is reason enough to fear the Slender Man. It's with this, then, that Knudsen's attached photos give away our third and final reason to fear the Slender Man: The way he hides. This aspect of the Slender Man clasps hands with his forest-dwelling, as his surroundings help to obscure his spindly figure and curled tentacles. Not only does his height and trimness blend in with the dead trees he hides behind, but his own ability to shapeshift allows him to adopt a tree's visage.

The first archetype I found of the Slender Man was during the height of my childhood obsession with the myth. I was passing time at the home

of my father's friend and came across a book about American Indian tribes and folklore. I thumbed through it idly, as any other kid would do, until one particular legend stopped my breath: the Stick Indians.

Names and descriptions of Stick Indians differ across sources – as is usually the case with American Indian legends – sometimes being called Tsiatko or Seatco and frequently being conflated with the Sasquatch myth. And while I no longer have access to the book (I thought it was a DK Eyewitness book, but none of the ones I've found online mention this myth), I have found some online resources which echo its description of the legend. In a 2011 post to the Puyallup Tribal News, Jennifer Keating-Hallberg writes:



“Often referred to as Tsiatko, the race of stick Indians were said to wander through the forests at night especially during the fall. The Tsiatko were tall, slender, athletic in build, and were great runners. They were ventriloquists, using a sort of whistle to communicate, and that gift made them all the more feared. Even when people could not see them they often heard this whistle in the distance... Occasionally, they were known to steal children or adolescents and carry them off to act as wives or as slaves.”

The commonalities are obvious here as this passage does everything short of spelling it out for us. Right out the gate, we're told of Stick Indians lurking in the woods, but what brings the Tsiatko closer to the Slender Man is the claim that they're most active during autumn. This would mean that they'd be stalking among trees with little to no leaves at all, similar to the dead-tree woods where we're used to seeing the Slender Man. And with their tall, slim physiques, it's fair to say that the Tsiatko would blend in near-perfectly with decaying autumnal forests. The occasionally carried-off child then completes our trinity of parallels to the Slender Man, but I'd be remiss to not mention one last detail.

While Keating-Hallberg refers to the Tsiatko with that particular name, I should reiterate that this is one of multiple names for a common legend between American Indian tribes. I've mentioned Seatco as an alternate name, but another notable one is Ts'eł'eni. The actual myth of the Ts'eł'eni isn't related to the Slender Man, as its only online mentions are in reference to a tribe of Sasquatch-like bushmen living in the Alaskan tundra. However, the name does appear in Rev. Robin Swope's book, *Slenderman: From Fiction to Fact*, where it's used to describe a group of "tall dark beings" who act exactly like the Stick Indians.

"Small Bear had wandered far from his camp as he sought to find the bird which cried at night. Soon the wood was dark and he could not see.

The bird's song soon turned to laughter... The bird's laughter became that of a small baby as the woods grabbed Small Bear and [tore] him to pieces and fed on his flesh and bone.

Supposing that this is a story of the Stick Indians misattributed to the Ts'eł'eni, the mimicking of a bird's call seems to imply that whistling isn't just a method of communication. Rather, the Tsiatko's aforementioned ventriloquism might act as a lure to beckon children into the forest. There is a key difference here in that the Puyallup article (likely the more reliable source) states children being used as slaves, while Swope's possibly fabricated tale (as he admits himself) claims that Ts'eł'eni would lead victims to death.

But in any case, the cause and effect are the same: A child is lured into the forest by tall beings who blend into their surroundings, and is never seen again.

With all the uncertainty that American Indian legends bring, it might be better to view a more well-documented archetype for the Slender Man: Leshy.

You've probably heard of Leshy before, likely in games or Eastern/Central European media. But for those unaware, Leshy is the spirit of the forest in Slavic folklore. This alone opens the floodgates for how he relates to the Slender Man as a forest dweller, and it's easy to find more parallels between the two.

The Leshy is adept at casting illusions and disorienting those who travel through the woods, a skill he implements to protect animals from hunters or to lure travelers deep into unfamiliar parts of the forest so that they will get lost. More malevolent portrayals of Leshy depict him kidnapping babies that haven't been baptized, or children who've wandered into the forest alone.



Luring travellers to become helplessly lost in the woods is a common thread in almost any story regarding Leshy, and it's worth noting that his victims aren't all children. But the Slender Man never exclusively went after children, either. While he was first described as leading young boys and girls to some unseen fate, it's just as common to hear stories of adults being disappeared at the Slender Man's hands.

And of course, there are Leshy's depictions. In modern portrayals, Leshy is tall and tree-like in appearance. This, in conjunction with his stature often being as tall as the forest itself, is the last commonality needed to see him as a clear archetype for the Slender Man. But there's a problem here in that Leshy doesn't just look tree-like. He can adopt a tree's appearance as well as that of any forest-related being. His forms vary from old woodsmen to forest animals to leaves blowing in the wind. They vary so much, in fact, that some go as far as to call Leshy a formless entity.

Now, let's stop and consider that. When a legend like Leshy is so varied in appearance, to the point where he can take on any form, just like the Slender Man, wouldn't it be meaningless to point to one form and call it archetypal?

No, it wouldn't be.

If the Slender Man was a static entity whose figure never changed shape or faded into the forest's backdrop, then it would be meaningless. But the fact that the Slender Man and Leshy both twist their figures to actively hide from victims and lure them into the woods is far too clear a connection to write off as a cop-out.

Let's also remember that the Slender Man himself is part of a "neo-folklore," as some would call it. Many individuals have given him Leshy or Tsiatko-like traits without drawing from these earlier myths, and even without knowing these legends exist. For this reason, we mustn't view these archetypes purely in reference to the Slender Man, but also as a reflection of our collective unconscious.



It's not that tree-looking men hide in the forest and whisk children away. It's that we, as humans, have a reason to fear such things.

The forest is bountiful, stockpiling meat for our hunters and fruit for our gatherers. But the forest is treacherous, harboring flesh-eating predators and poisonous berries. Enter the forest without proper tools or knowledge, and there's a good chance you won't come back alive.

As for your children, their chances are worse. Leave them unsupervised for too long or trust them when they don't know quite enough, and they'll soon be lost in the woods. Anything at that point—a bear, a pack of wolves, a lethal berry mistaken for a safe one—will catch them off guard. And as their flesh is eaten or their body buried in the undergrowth, no trace of them will be left behind. They'll have vanished completely, as though some malignant being hid itself until the time was right. Something you couldn't see because it camouflaged itself perfectly. Keep away from the woods and hold your remaining children close, lest the trees lure them to oblivion.

One wonders how these instincts still live in our heads despite being useless in the modern day. But that fact alone is what allures us to the mystique of the Slender Man; that he embodies a fear we thought we didn't need. We've moved away from the woods, culling their trees to ward off whatever evil it held. But then a man comes along, dressed not too dissimilar from ourselves. He arrives on behalf of the wretched forest, but doesn't keep to the trees. Instead, he adapts to our world, lingering at playgrounds and between houses. He reminds us that as we moved forward as a species, the things we feared followed close behind.





Anosognosia

By TechnoMan777

You awaken in a room.

The room is small, perfectly square. The walls are cracked, and the floor is coated in a thin layer of grease, pale and opaque like mucus. The room's single carbon-filament lightbulb flickers intermittently, illuminating the exit. The door is off-white, perfectly smooth and clean, and of a very modern design. Nevertheless, you get the sense that it is indescribably old.

You open the door.

Outside is a hallway – or perhaps a tunnel – you cannot be sure. An indefinite arch of brick and grime. As you step out, the ground gives beneath your feet, sucking them up to the ankles. Thick droplets of some undefinable tarlike substance slide down the walls from no apparent source. You see a steady pale light, at an indeterminate distance, mysterious and wonderful. The lure of an anglerfish. What can you do but walk towards it?

You walk down the hallway.

As you walk further, your footsteps echo, squelching in the dirt. The air is moist and warm. Every once in a while you look over your shoulder. You cannot help but feel that you are being followed.

At one point you wonder if the walls are not narrowing – was the tunnel not wider when you started? At another point you fancy that the walls are expanding and contracting rhythmically – the tunnel, the tunnel is breathing – no, surely just your mind playing tricks...

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a white, sleeveless, knee-length dress with a subtle pattern, stands on a wide set of stone steps. She is looking towards the camera. The background is dark and indistinct.

The light is now closer. You start to lose track of time. How long has it been? Days, most likely. Perhaps weeks. Definitely too long to turn back. It strikes you as odd that you feel no hunger or thirst. Enough time has passed that you imagine you are dead.

You reach the exit.

The tunnel opens into a circular courtyard of sorts. A handful of puny, long-dead trees, practically fossilised from age, and pale dust coating the ground and floating in the air. The walls above stretch upwards like the inside of a well, never seeming to quite end. From high above, the light shines brilliantly down on you.

There is a red door across from you. This door is ornate, and much larger than the previous one. There is a design on the front. Violent lines, intersecting without any discernible pattern or purpose. You open the door, and you feel the air blowing against your face.

The sun outside blinds you. You enter through the threshold.

Your feet make contact with the mud outside. Its texture and scent are reminiscent of month-old circus meat. Off in the distance, you see something protruding from the landscape. A formation of some sort, emerging to obscure the horizon. A wall, perhaps? You move towards the object, although you cannot say why. You still think you're in charge here, don't you?

Despite the brightness of the sun, the outside is cold enough to make you shiver, like the flat end of a knife being slowly pressed against your skin. The wind merely exacerbates this coldness. You take step after step. The ground itself claws at your feet to inhibit your movement. You feel that this ground was not meant to be walked on, but you do not yet know why.

As time goes on, the landscape starts to change. The ground is now unsteady, and you can see things sticking out – stones, probably. The stench grows all the more pungent, and yet you are not deterred. Not that you really have a choice, anyway.

You can almost make out the thing that you are approaching now. You will need to hurry. The sun is setting, and once it has set you will be trapped in the dark.

As you are getting closer to your goal, the... stones are more numerous now, and you begin to recognise certain... shapes. A limb here, a torso there. The sun is behind you now. The shadow you cast is long.

You look at one of the objects lying on the ground, an almost white sphere. It looks back at you, with its exposed eye socket.

The stench has become nearly unbearable now. The night will soon come. You make a conscious effort not to look down.

At long last, after crawling across the ground, or rather the bodies which cover the ground, perhaps in layers, three or ten or two hundred deep, you reach a stone wall – or perhaps a cliff face – grey and terrifying, if only for what it contains.

You see a door.

This door is black and ancient. The handle is tarnished beyond repair, and the wood is shrivelled, practically fossilised.

You walk through it. Anywhere, you think, is better than here.

You are now in the middle of a desert. The sky is grey, and so is the sand.

You start walking forward. You do not look behind you.

You wander. Yet again, you see something in the distance, something too far away for any detail to be discerned. You consider turning back, but you do not. Wouldn't do you any good.

Instead, you advance.

After hours/days/years of walking, you have arrived.

You stand outside of a city, or what was once a city. The half-destroyed wrecks of massive buildings are arranged in a vaguely circular formation; the taller ones are closest to the center.

There is a howling noise coming from somewhere. You cannot tell the direction, but you are sure that it is not very far away.

(There is no wind.)

You move towards the centre of the city. It feels as if that is your only choice. It is not a question of want. It is a question of need. There are wreckages of vehicles, at this point more rust than metal. Cars are flipped onto their sides, and tires are melted to the pavement, and piles of rubble on either side of you, but the centre of the road is unobstructed for as far as you can see. Something knows where you are going. It wants you to get there.

As you enter the ruins of the city, you feel yourself brought down by the vastness of the towers, their monumentality. Once-perfect geometric rectangles of all sorts, now sagging and crumbling under the weight of their own hideous grandeur. You sense that at any point, these buildings could come to life and crush you, and that the only reason they do not is that you are not worth the effort.

Your approach is interrupted by a sound to your right, a wheezing sound like someone trying to inflate a punctured balloon. You look over your shoulder and see another person. They are peering out of an alleyway, partly hidden in shadow. They take a step towards you, and you can see them better.

Their body is pallid, skin like decaying wallpaper, the musculature underneath showing the texture of dried meat. They are naked, covered in boils and weeping sores. They are completely hairless, and one of their eyes is almost totally white. They do not approach you, but instead they grin at you with a mouth half-full of rotten teeth.

You do not speak to these creatures. You do not acknowledge their presence. Instead you turn straight ahead and increase your pace, still walking but with more urgency now. You hear footsteps behind you.

Only one pair of footsteps, at first. Then two. Then three or four. Then a dozen, then two dozen. They are quite fast indeed; their desiccated frames have relentless agility.

You stop walking and run. You are running towards the center, now no longer moving towards anything but only seeking to escape. You are prepared to run for a long time. You are, if necessary, prepared to run forever. It seems better than the alternative.

You take a glance behind you, regretting the action even as you take it. They are not so far away now – if you were to stop running, they would be upon you in seconds. Even from this brief glance, you are able to take in their appearances. A few are carrying some type of improvised weapons – a sharpened stone, a pointed shard of glass, what was previously someone's humerus – but most are barehanded. They only need their nails and teeth for what they intend to do.

You are making your way towards the centre. As you get closer, you realise that, at the centre of the city, there is a sudden sharp hill. It has broken through the ground, causing the pavement around you to crack and fissure. You do not know what is on the other side of that hill, but you have a bad feeling.

Given the circumstances, you do not have much of a choice.

You desperately scramble up the hill, and what you see on the other side almost gives you pause. What you had thought was a hill was, in truth, the rim of a massive crater. In front of you is a great grey bowl large enough to hold all seven wonders of the world. You have no time to ponder what this means, the sounds from behind you only getting closer.

If you had time to contemplate your situation, instead of merely reacting to it, you may have realised that you are not only being pursued.

You are being herded.

Even if they want to capture you, even if they want to tear you apart, even then, there is some grander goal that they are subservient to.

You run down the rim of the crater, the hard ground providing your feet with surprisingly good purchase. You see a figure up ahead, at the very center. The figure is motionless.

He is expecting you.



The man in uniform raises his pistol and the weeping man's skull shatters. For a second, nobody makes any sound, and the only motion is the uniformed man putting the weapon back in its holster. Then, almost as an afterthought, he makes a dismissive gesture with his other hand.

All at once, his other followers begin descending on the newly-dead corpse, tearing at it with crude weapons or with their bare hands. At first, you think that they intend to eat him, to sate the terrible hunger they must surely have. But they are uninterested in the flesh, tossing it aside as soon as they pull a handful. Instead, they are fixated on the dead man's bones, tearing open his body to get to the skeleton. You see several of them come to blows over more valuable bones, the bones in the arms or legs. One creature bites another's ear off, fighting over a prize tibia. Most are forced to settle for a less impressive bounty, like a vertebra or a metacarpal. Within a couple minutes, the corpse has been reduced to a few piles of offal and shredded ligaments.

If you were not already completely exhausted at this point, you would surely be overcome by the urge to vomit.

The man in uniform looks at you.

A pathetic messenger, he says, but you'll do.

Against your better judgment, you feel the urge to open your mouth.

Don't talk. I'm here to talk, and you're here to listen. Decisions are being made, decisions at a level which you're not permitted to know.

My world is coming, you see. A world of festering fire, a world where all judgments are final. It'll be this way, soon. Sooner now. You know what the time is.

Perhaps you don't believe. Perhaps you won't obey. All right then. You don't need to speak in order to hear the Word.

There is a sound, a sound of a clock striking midnight. And then comes the light, the light that illuminates even as it blinds. The humanoid shape has been replaced by a glowing, distorted sphere. Pure raw energy, an apotheosis of destruction. The Sun brought down to earth.

The figures who once chased you begin to cry out as the light peels away their flesh. They are screaming in agony. Or ecstasy, perhaps. It does not matter, this late in the day.



Now you see.

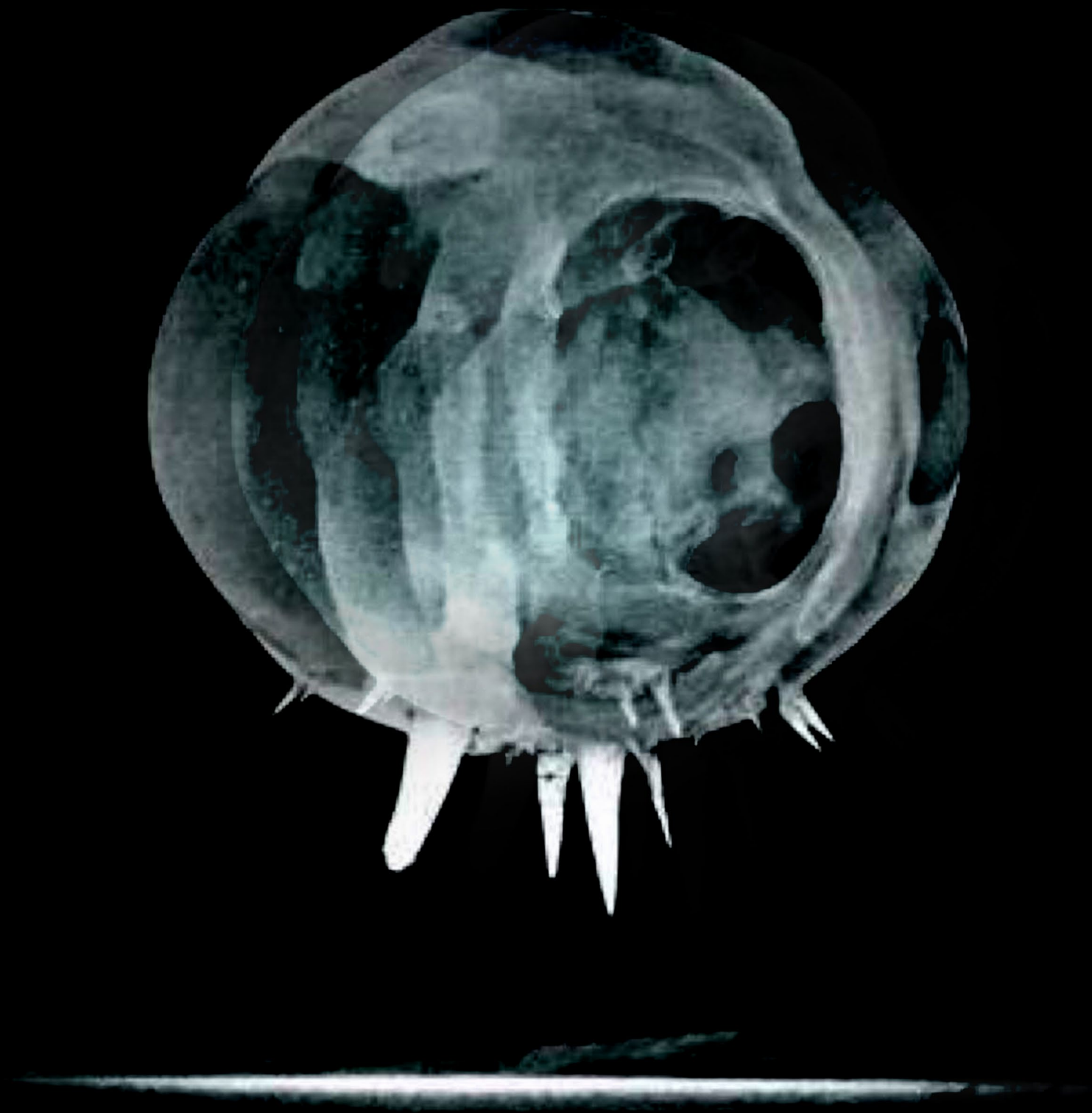
The sphere of white light moves towards you, and every nerve experiences a moment of agony as your body is sublimated.

For some time, there is peace. There is silence, there is solitude. Then, slowly, you begin to come to consciousness.

You awaken in a room.

The room is small, perfectly square. The walls are cracked, and the floor is coated in a thin layer of slime. The room's single lightbulb flickers intermittently, illuminating the exit. The door is off-white, perfectly smooth and clean. Nevertheless, it feels like something ancient.

You open the door...





ALHAZRED PRESENTS

The Apocalypse is here!

PULSE

25 years later

It is 2001. At a very young age, I discovered computers. My uncle got me to play DOOM on his PC, probably so that I would stay quiet. Life was never the same. I spent more and more time on the computer, and eventually, on the Internet. I would start to discover a world far vaster than my small town. I would spend my time in forums, discussing Neon Genesis Evangelion or hating on Windows ME. I would fantasize about what the Internet would look like in the future. 2001 was also the year Kiyoshi Kurosawa would release his Internet-centric horror film, Pulse. It would take me many years until I found out, but Pulse would closely track my journey through the Internet's evolution.

Pulse is, in its core, a story about loneliness. A story about how we, as humans, don't use the internet to communicate, but as a mirror of our own insecure souls. I view Pulse as one of the first Internet-Realist films. It defies the optimistic naivete of prior films such as Hackers (1995, Iain Softley) or Tron (1982, Steven Lisberger), in which "cyberspace" is an opportunistically rendered alternate universe. In that universe, the laws of physics did not apply. Society did not succumb to the same pitfalls as in the real world. This view, stemming from the ideas of utopianists like Richard Brautigan, which for decades shaped the view of the Internet, came to an abrupt halt in 2001.

In Pulse, Kurosawa came to view the Internet as an apocalyptic invention that would further isolate humans. Unable to deal with their intense loneliness, humans would commit suicide in front of their cameras, sharing their final moments with other netizens. So intense is this phenomenon that Hell itself would start overflowing with the souls of the damned, and ghosts would start leaking into the real world.

Very few readers would be unaware of how alienating the modern Internet is. Billions of people populate social media platforms, only to be locked in echo chambers of their own making, with sycophantic bots assuring them of their moral and intellectual vigor. This ego and dopamine boost create individuals who do not learn to interact, but rather dictate. Not to ask, but to command. Not to understand, but to disregard. When they leave the Internet, they find themselves alone, misunderstood, and unable to connect. And such connection is no longer possible, because the mental ability to do so has atrophied.



Pulse has no cozy, feel-good resolution to its story. Our world is broken beyond belief, and has come to mirror Hell. Every time hope arises, usually from genuine, offline human interactions, the darkness of the real world creeps back in. No matter how much we want them to thrive, the movie's characters are unable to keep their gaze away from the abyss, ending up consumed by an ever-expanding, all-enveloping darkness. No matter how far away they run, this darkness - the Internet - is there.

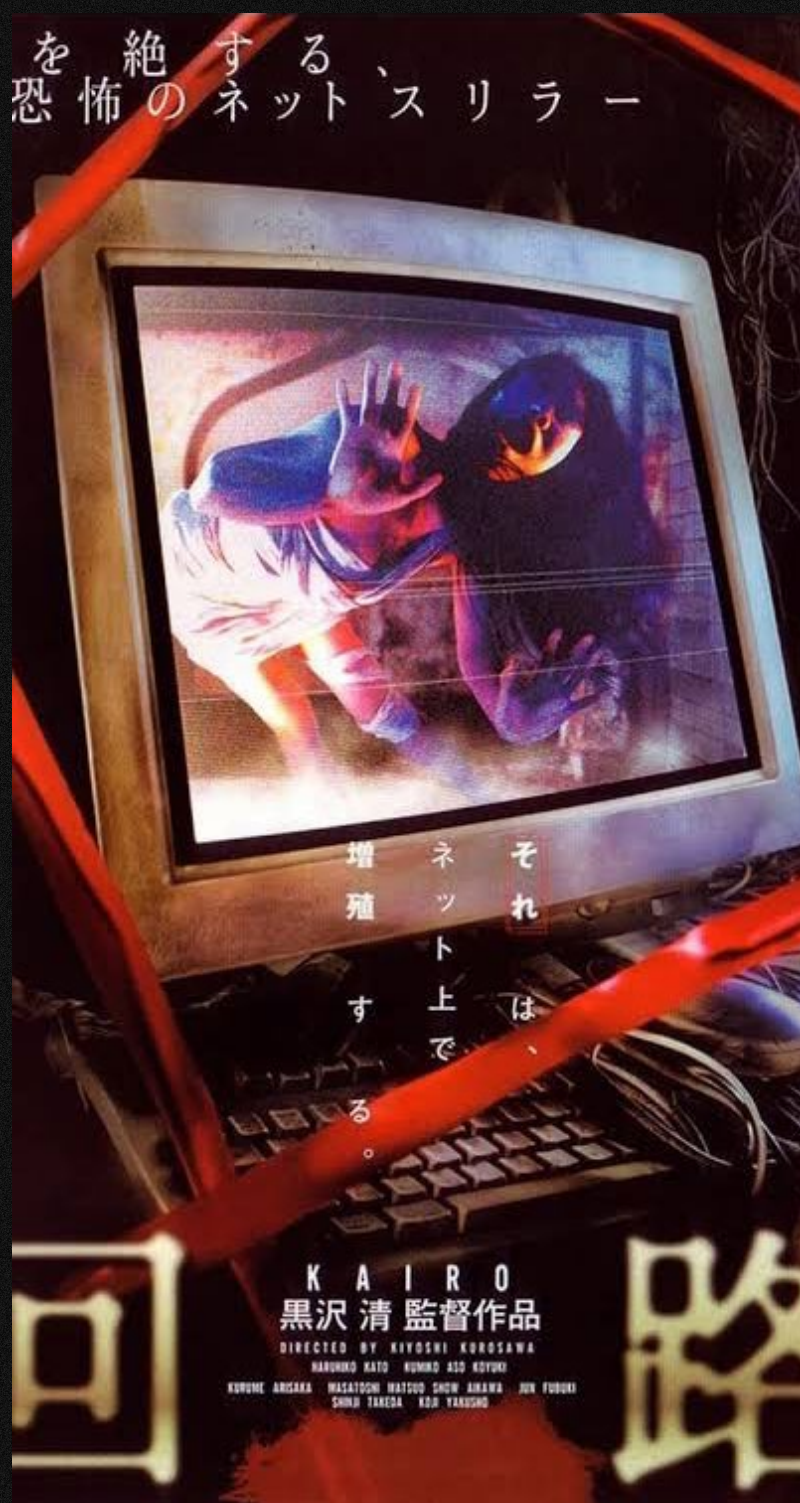
My favorite Pulse quote, the line that sums up the entire movie, is as follows:

“Once the system is complete, it will function all on its own and become permanent”.

The system is now permanent, but can we evolve as a society and survive it, or will we simply find ourselves in our own personal, lonely Hell?

This e-Zine that you are currently reading is one way our mental immune systems react to such a violent, harsh reality. We hide in a past where life was simpler. Even now, I play DOOM on my PC, plan to watch the new season of Evangelion, and decry the horrors of the new Microsoft Windows. I discuss my favorite Old Web trivia on Agora Road. I am safe, content, and the world cannot touch me.

All is right with the world.





A-AGORA-CHAN?? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE??



Cosplay and the obfuscation of identity

by Jill Stingray

What cosplay once made explicit has become blurred within digital identity formation.

As a teenager, I discovered cosplay accidentally. I went to my first anime convention in 2011. Immediately, I was blown away by the number of attendees who were dressed up as their favourite characters in public. Back in those days, there were a whole bunch of L's from Death Note, Macross Frontier, Bleach, Naruto, Lucky Star, the golden age (in my view) of anime. This niche medium that barely made it to the mainstream consciousness. The next convention was a few months later. I jumped at the opportunity to dress up, pulling up in a Killer Bee cosplay from Naruto. I took photos with a whole bunch of people and argued (in proper geek fashion) about which characters would win in some hypothetical match-ups, also known as power-scaling. I had a lot of fun doing this.



I'm 30 now. I'm old. I reflect on my youth fondly, and cringe at myself half of the time, which is where the true nostalgia lies. I don't cosplay anywhere near as much as I used to in my teens, despite being able to comfortably afford it. Maybe once a year, at most. But I work my 9-5 and developed some other interests. Not being as plugged into The Online anymore helps. The friends I made in those whimsical cosplay days are still around, just like friends you'd meet through university clubs or house parties. Eventually we were able to drop the outfits and just connect as people, aware that the costumes didn't fully represent who we actually were.



Turns out, most of us had fairly similar experiences during our school days; we struggled to connect with our peers, we felt alienated, and we had no one to obsess over our niche interests with in person. We were able to set the cosplay to the side.

Cosplay itself has exploded in popularity. The concept of cosplay has also expanded far beyond the definition listed on Wikipedia. During those bygone days when my friends and I cosplayed, we knew we weren't ourselves when we wore our costumes, but occasionally we'd stay in character when we interacted with another obsessed fan.

Though sometimes, these obsessive fans couldn't seem to tell the difference between the character and the human portraying them in public.

I myself was asked to "rap" multiple times while wearing my Killer Bee costume; a character from Naruto who usually speaks in rhyme. I would decline, and the obsessed fans would genuinely get frustrated that I wouldn't comply with their request.

"But, you're Killer Bee! You have to rap!"



I wish I were being hyperbolic, but these moments genuinely hit me. It almost felt like I wasn't dealing with a real human being who understood the costume was just a costume.

This phenomenon, where people cannot distinguish between reality and fiction, has totally captured the digital world. One scroll of your following tab on Twitter and you'll come across all types of ideologies rolled up into one person. Usually this person is fairly young, Zoomers and Gen Alpha, who in their digital lives have scattered themselves across a larger spectrum of political identities that I was barely aware of when I was their age. There is a possibility it's all just one big joke, but for the purposes of this piece I will take it quite literally.

Nothing about this reads as mentally healthy, particularly given the vitriol and emotional involvement in arguments spewed across discussion threads on Twitter, Discord, and YouTube comments.



Some 16-year-old out there is claiming that armed revolution and Nazbol ideology contain the secret answers that will benefit their society, and he claims this sincerely.

The ongoing Gen Z protests across the Asian world, in contrast, work because they are quite simple in their goals. They are not at all as layered and contradictory as the previous examples that we see on Twitter. Members of the Gen Z protests are the cosplayers who can differentiate between reality and fiction, and do understand when it's time to switch from the character to the human. As is the current case in India, where education reform is required, these protesters are aware of the material changes needed to secure their futures and livelihood. They've identified with some core beliefs that resonate with who they truly are.

I don't mean to mock this phenomenon. Identity is important, and the digital landscape today does allow a fluidity for every person, regardless of who or where they are; they can pick and choose how they represent themselves online.



This allows for everyone to live more authentically than they could have in the past and avoid being limited by their surroundings.

Yet, a larger risk manifests where these newfound identities cannot be discarded once they've served their purpose, as the identity superimposes itself onto the original self, obfuscating what the self originally contained. The personal identity becomes social, becomes performative, becomes incongruous.

There was a time when cosplay was about nothing but fun. You dress up, you hang out with your friends while in-character, you go home, you take off the costume, and you're back to being you.

Today, you seems to be an ever-vanishing state of being, where *you* doesn't exist if not for the costume, when not being observed by others, saying the things you're expected to say. Perhaps we've reached a point where our personal existence is worthless if not validated by the groups we've willingly decided to identify with.

These groups, subcultures, and movements alike, continue to become more niche and more fragmented as time goes on. What is the endgame? Does cross-pollination and the ability to change belief systems become impossible? Is this all just another case for how everything is atomized? I truly hope not, and I do wonder if there is a genuine issue in how people are afraid to express their true thoughts and avoid any sense of vulnerability, if just to protect that shrinking sense of self buried far below their surface, invisible to even one's own eyes that stares back in the mirror every night.

I want to end on one final anecdote. In 2023, I cosplayed as Bartholomew Kuma from One Piece. At the time, his character was being fleshed out via a backstory in the manga. It was revealed he was not the biological father of his daughter, Bonney, but rather his mother had been abducted by the ruling class, and she had been forced to carry a child (i.e., rape). While in costume, a group of teenagers came up to me, asked for some photos, and then point-blank asked me what "it was like being a cuck". Now, I did laugh for a moment, but I had to explain to them that that's generally not a good question to put to the everyday person, whether in costume or not.



I'm not sure if they ever heeded my warning.

Maybe my observations aren't exactly accurate, but I do believe there is truth to the idea that many people today have grown far too attached to the ideological nametags they slap onto themselves, drifting further away from who they are as a person. Perhaps some of these people are nothing but empty shells, but I'm not nihilistic enough to agree with that.

This phenomenon may be another demonstration of the eternal human struggle to belong and adapt. But I do hope everyone manages to find themselves within that self-created labyrinth of identity, even if it comes as a result of discarding meaningless labels.

Or maybe I'm just not in on the joke anymore.

Jill Stingray, Bartender, Glitch City.

Links:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosplay>

<https://www.intelmarketresearch.com/cosplay-costume-rentals-market-7308>

https://x.com/RTSG_Main/status/1994560879367794843

<https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/is-this-asian-spring-arab-awakening-nepal-gen-z-protests-bangladesh-agitation-explained-2785513-2025-09-11>

<https://www.greenleft.org.au/2025/1443/world/how-mexicos-right-wing-used-ai-and-influencers-create-anti-government-movement>



**CLEANING THIS
WORLD**



**ONE
BULLET
AT A TIME**

**PMC
Maid**



Hello everypony!

Thank you so much for submitting to this issue of Tales from Agora Road! You're all the best friends anyone could ask for!

Okay, all joking aside, thank you all for reading, and thank you all for submitting.

I started this project on a manic episode and I finished it on a depressive episode.

Which makes me wonder why it is that sadness, despair, and horror—all of those “*feels*” feelings—happen to be more overwhelming than joy. I have my theories but that is a tale for another day.

I bring this up because writing is not a glorious thing. You write and you despair. You write and you suffer. You write and you hate yourself and others. Yet you keep writing. The issue with writing is that it requires kindness and a lack of self-awareness that's always lacking in writers, so, let me tell you, be kind to your writing!

Kindness does not mean pretensions of artistic achievement, but a fundamental faith in the process. Kindness does not mean validation, but a willing, patient embrace for the suffering in the craft. Every act of creation is an act of faith and an act of faith is a declaration of the goodness of life, that's how I see it anyways.

Dr. Zhivago put it best:

“Art always serves beauty, and beauty is delight in form, and form is the key to organic life, since no living thing can exist without it, so that every work of art, including tragedy, expresses the joy of existence.”

Or you can just be a nihilist. That's fine too I guess.

Regardless, I truly hope I've helped you all in your own writing journey, and I hope we all continue strolling forwards and building this community we call Agora Road.

-Remember_Summer_Days

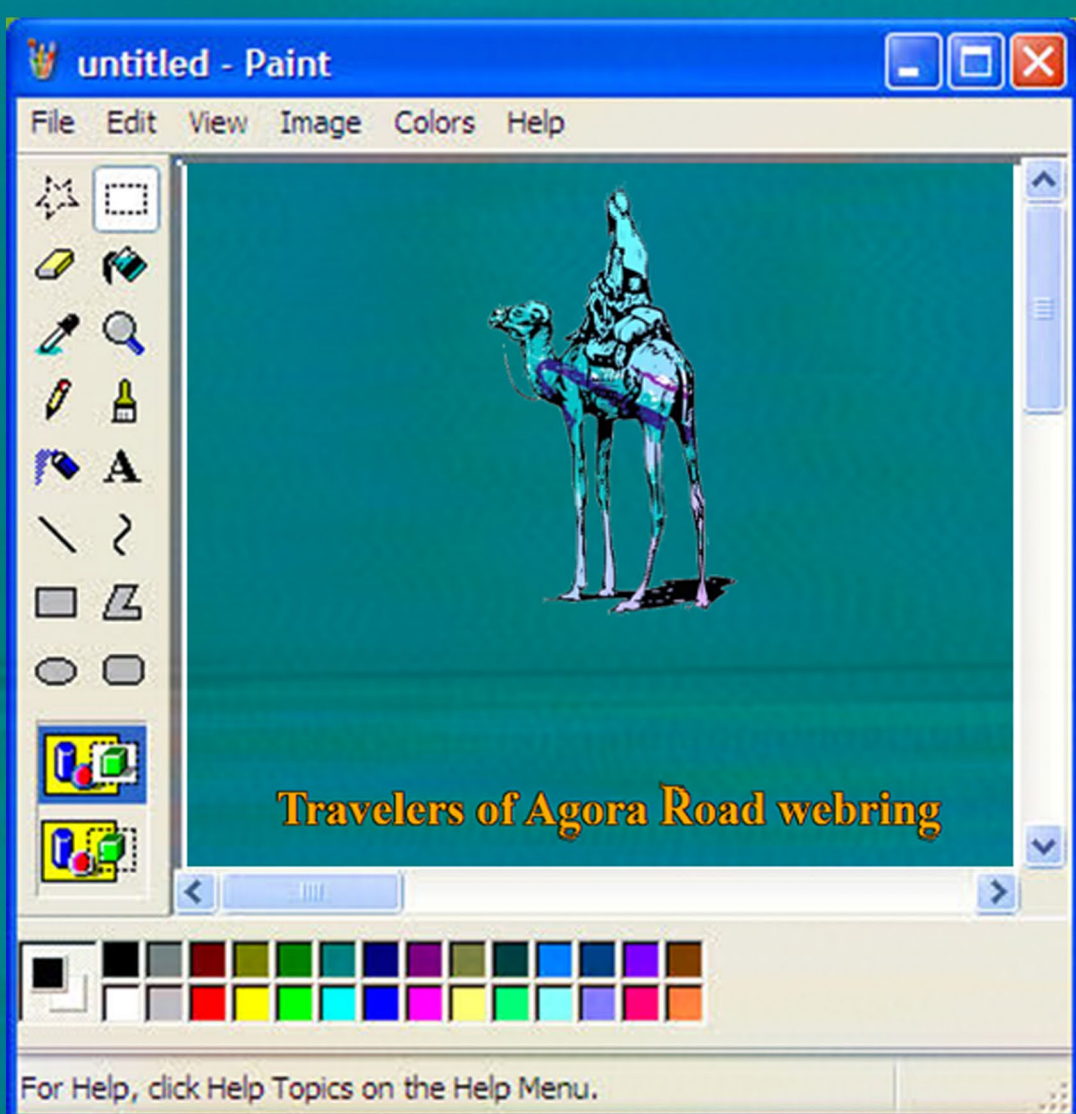




THANKS FOR READING!

Crack open a cold one at

**AGORA
ROAD**



Visit Agora Road!





Tales of Agora Road

