

Sciphi

JOURNAL

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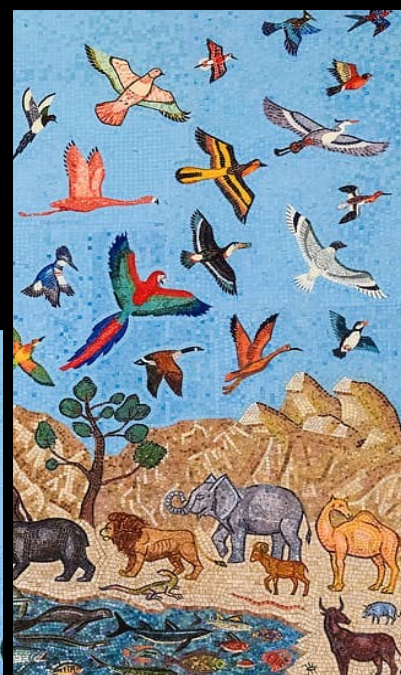
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CREW

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We are deeply grateful for the support of our part-time and *ad hoc* volunteers both in Belgium and abroad.

Editorial



Lectori salutem.

Imagine, if you wish, 2020 as lived through the eyes of a science-fiction editor.

Over the past twelve months, across a landscape composed of pages, paragraphs and phrases, we could almost ‘watch’ the mental foci of the SF writing community shift as a seismographic imprint of real-world preoccupations. This was quite a sight to behold and we were privileged to keep a finger, as gently as we could, on the pulse of the collective intelligence of those who enjoy thinking about the future. This current issue of *Sci Phi Journal* offers what we hope is an interesting selection of thought-provoking and challenging pieces that stray from the most prevalent concerns of the age and explore less frequently covered mysteries – in tones ranging from grim to perky.

Global issues like the COVID crisis affect regions of the world, and various strata of society therein, differently – this is also true for the invisible fellowship of writers. We are a European publication, but given that we select pieces to publish purely based on their literary and conceptual merit (i.e. no quotas or ‘brownie points’ of any kind), the majority of our authors hail from the Anglosphere. That is fine – even natural, perhaps. However, a side-effect is that we see a preponderance of ideological concerns permeating many of the stories submitted to us that are specific to the former or present constituent parts of the British Empire, and thus fairly alien to the psyche of continental Old Worlders like ourselves.

In order to widen the diversity of fixations, prejudices, biases and other perfectly normal human proclivities

represented, and to provide some guidance on future submissions, we are adding a page to our guidelines (an [Index of Heresies](#)) specifying what we’d prefer to encounter less often in works sent to us for review. For inspiring this section, we owe a debt of gratitude to ‘role models’ provided by excellent sites such as [Metaphorosis](#) and [Strange Horizons](#), even if the content and stylistic preferences espoused therein differ markedly from ours.

We also continue to update the ever-expanding [International Bibliography of Fictional Non-Fiction](#) and encourage you to send us further recommendations for works in English as well as other languages (and please don’t take it personally if we happen to disagree with some of them on grounds of genre definition).

Stay safe, speculatively yours,
the co-editors

#

ps: While most of the SPJ crew lead rather old-school, analogue lives, we are following the advice of a couple of kind readers to re-animate the Journal’s Twitter account from its long cryogenic slumber. If you wish to support our authors by sharing (re-tweeting?) their work, you may do so by following [@sciphijournal](#) (which we are told is not a hashtag, but an account handle, apparently).

~

Two Variations on Default Salvation

Andy Dibble

Suppose your theology of salvation is that only those who deny Christ are damned. Everyone else is saved by default. This is an attractive view. Children and others unable to grasp doctrine are saved. Those who live without opportunity to accept Jesus as their savior are saved as well. The damned are damned, on some level, because they choose to be. God wisely grants them autonomy.

This complicates Original Sin, but there is a more pressing problem: assuming this theology, why did Jesus have a ministry?

#

I. Default Salvation Beginning with Creation

In the beginning was just the Father--my Father--and me. Heaven was just this lonesome twosomeness. He and I eternally begotten from Him. Succession in eternity is strange, but that is how it was. The angels came later. Creation came later still, and with it the Spirit, once there was a Creation to work within.

As long as there were humans, Creation has surged into Heaven: people die, and they end up here. I can't blame them. It's just the natural progression of their lives and after-lives. They would have lived forever in Eden--marvelous, almost divine--but the Serpent came and led them astray. He knew Father, knew me, better than I like to admit. He knew that Father would put them out, and they would end up in Heaven instead. He knew the human migration to Heaven would irk me.

The Fall changed much: Eden was bountiful. Once outside Eden, they had to till the ground. Children would have arisen painlessly in Eden, but outside pregnancy is like a disease. Outside there *is* disease. Outside their lives are brutish, short, and stunted.

But not their after-lives. Here they just go on and on. The trespass in Eden gave them a troubling handful of decades, but no more. For Father exalts them just because they have not denied me. What kind of reason is that? On earth, they did not even know me.

And that is why Heaven is neither a lonesome or a twosome place any longer. It's infested (or so I tell myself in the shadow of my heart). I can hardly walk without stumbling over their prostrate bodies. They want to worship me, to serve me, to bask in my presence. The longer they stay, the more entitled they presume themselves to be! It is hard to host billions for billions of years.

No, for *eternity*.

I just want to be alone, alone with myself, alone with Father.

Heaven is vast, wider and deeper than the sphere to which the stars are fixed. And if, somehow, souls filled Heaven to its silver rim, Father would make it swell. But even if I tread to the Outer Dark or to the Throne of Heaven where no created thing may pass, I can still *feel* them yearning for me. Omniscience doesn't have an off-switch.

This is the end and goal of Creation? It is not the kind of fellowship I crave.

II. Default Salvation Beginning with the Cross

Father and His majesty are wonderful, but fellowship with humans--*real* fellowship, fellowship they can reciprocate--would be more wonderful still.

Time and time again, I've seen them try to pick themselves up, and some have. Some *were* good, better than I thought a sinful human could be in one brief life. But no matter how upright these few stood, no matter how I marveled upon their grit, they still fell short (for all fall short of the glory of God). The suffering of each soul in Hell pains me, however just their lot might be, but the suffering of these upright few pains me most of all.

Some were saved: Isaiah when the burning coal touched his lips, Elijah when he rode to heaven in a whirlwind and a flaming chariot, and Moses wickered up from the grave. But there isn't a woman among them, and they're a stodgy lot. Being the mouthpiece of God leaves a person little room to be much of himself. I want the company of those men and women toiling below that have managed something great and good by their own will and not by the indwelling of God only.

What could I do? The expiation of sin requires sacrifice, but no dove or bull will wipe away the sin of a race. If by some grand transubstantiation the oceans became blood and the planets an altar, that would not be enough. It would not be vast enough. It would not be *pure* enough.

But I am vast enough, pure enough. I am great enough for it. I can walk the earth. I can reconcile Creation to Heaven and save the human race.

Humbly, I was born, and I learned how warm a body can be. I spread my message. I preached with zeal and laid my hands upon them and saved them by their faith. There were many, and I loved them, loved them all. And so I told my disciples as Matthew records: "This is why I speak to them in parables, 'though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.'"

I look down at the few rude blasphemers--certain worshipers of Baal, some geometers and contemplatives, a few peripatetics of the hanging gardens--that struck upon my name in prophecy and dismissed what they had heard. Some are proud, others piteous, as they squander their mortal years or circle the scalding sands of Hell. I know deep down they deserve damnation, even crave it. But still I watch them like a human voyeur. They are few and therefore precious. They have accomplished something I could never do.

Shouldn't those exalted be few and precious, souls deserving of Heaven?

But how to achieve this? I cannot overrule Father. I cannot correct Him. This presumption of salvation has a place in His Plan.

But I could walk upon the earth and divide the wheat from the chaff by my own preaching. Who will I go among? The Jews, the Chosen People. Their faithfulness ought to be tested. But not them only. I will spread my message to the nations and across the ages. Let *all humanity* be tested!

I was born. I grew, prospered, preached. But I did not speak plainly. I spoke in parables, bamboozling tripe. I spoke of bridesmaids, wicked servants, sowers, and mustard seeds. So that as many as possible could be exposed to my vagaries, and only a few receive my meaning with gladness, I proclaimed, "Whoever has ears, let them hear!" but, as Mark and Luke record, I told my disciples in secret: "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything comes in parables so that they may always see but never perceive, and always hear but never understand. Otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"

My quotation was from Isaiah. I invoked him to demonstrate the hard-heartedness of the people. But I could pierce their hearts of stone. If I spoke dry theology or fiery exhortation, I would only confuse or provoke them. But a story could stir their faith, a story thrown beside life, a parable.

I inspired many, and they loved me as I loved them. But at last the world overcame me, as it overcomes all bodies. I was beaten, sentenced, and hung upon a cross. They killed me, but really the Serpent killed me. He broke a pact sealed at the moment of creation: only those subject to sin are subject to death. But I am not subject to sin. My blood did what sanguine oceans and planetary altars could not.

With my blood the world was saved. Those great men and women were saved, the children and infants too young to know me, the multitudes that never had a chance. All are saved. With my blood, it is only those that deny me that fall away. Father lets them be.

I commissioned my disciples to preach to the nations, and I commissioned the next generation to preach after my disciples are gone. I commissioned all who would take up the mission. I swore I would be with them always, to the end of the age. At last, I ascended, content I had saved as many as could be saved.

But later, in the quiet of my heart, I wondered: Wouldn't it have been better for me to be crucified in secret? Lure the Serpent in, if need be, but commission nothing--no Church, no missionaries, no scripture. Tell no one I am the Messiah. Maybe even conceal my death by silencing everyone involved.

It is ruthless, but whenever my well-meaning followers preach my message, an audience may hear and reject it. Those that hear and accept are better, for they may live Christian lives, but what matters earthly life, the merest sliver of eternity? And even they have the chance to fall away. They may reject me later on.

What rogue angel was it that told Joseph to name me Jesus? Once heard, my name is an infection a person must guard against all their lives.

To pronounce my name is to acknowledge salvation. But my name has an inner meaning, like a parable: to acknowledge that one may, one day, be damned.

In my gallant zeal, I saved many, but I damned many too.

~



History

Stephen Sottong

The guard led me down a narrow path between a series of anonymous, razor-wire-topped chain-link cages until, somehow, he knew the one that was mine. The cage was a three-meter square with a concrete floor sloping to a hole in one corner large enough to function for sanitary needs — if one could function in the total lack of privacy. The hole stank of previous use. The guard pushed me inside — not roughly but decisively. I made no protest, too drained to care. My family and my life's work were gone. The irony struck me — I was a historian and now my life was merely history.

I sat on the cold concrete, waiting, dozing only to be awakened randomly by screams, or a single gunshot, or guards taking prisoners away.

The sun was barely high enough to shine into my cage when the gate opened and a boy of about eight was thrust in. He stood there, small, thin, dressed in old but serviceable clothes, shivering, although this winter morning was not particularly cool courtesy of the warming that had caused this chaos. The boy and I stared at each other. He was about the same age my son would have been. Patting the concrete next to me, I made room for him. He sat, leaving a gap between us, and continued shivering. I lifted my arm, offering to put it around him. He hesitated and, when a gunshot rang out, finally leaned into me.

We sat, waiting, not speaking, perhaps afraid to interact in this perverse place.

Half an hour later, a guard came around, opened the gate and handed me a small loaf of bread. I took it. It was still warm. Its heady scent masked the stench of

filth and decay around me. I wanted to tear into the bread, ravenous, but, instead, moved it to the hand still around the boy, broke the loaf in two and gave the larger piece to him. The guard watched this tableau and left.

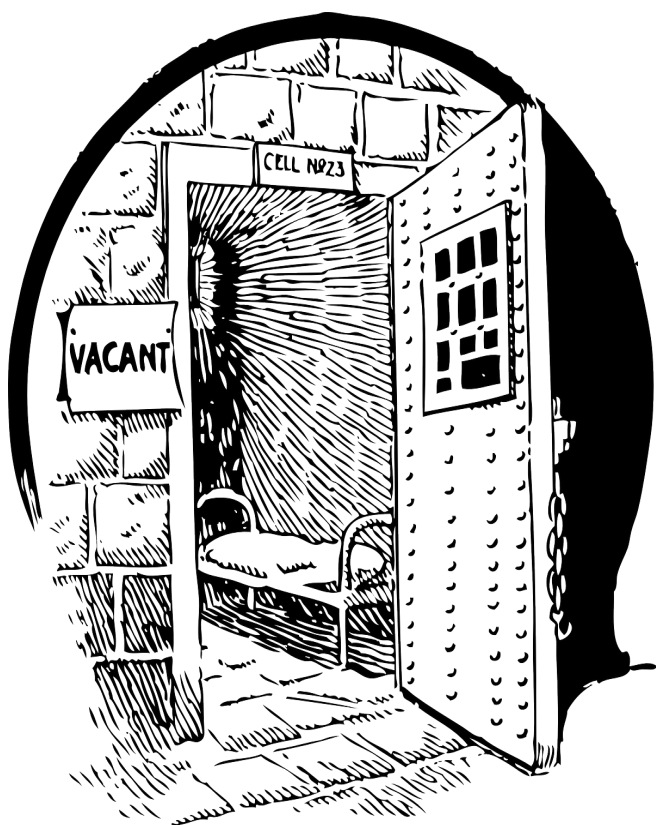
We ate. I wished I had water.

The sun rose, baking the concrete expanse. By the time it was too warm for me to have an arm around him, two guards arrived. We got up, me stiffly after sitting on the still cold concrete. The boy offered me his hand and helped me up. A woman took the boy, and a man marched me down the long rows of cells with their seated occupants, some silent, some weeping. I trembled in spite of the heat contemplating what awaited me.

The guard escorted me to a building. At the entrance, he presented me with a bag. Inside were my notebooks. Here rested the sum total of my worthless, lifelong pursuit of the past, preserved on the one media that could survive the disruptions of these times — ink on paper. I held the bag closer than I had the boy, afraid that both I and my life's work might be destroyed at any moment. The guard deposited me in a room with two chairs, one in front and one behind a desk.

I sat, waiting, clutching the bag.

Two guards entered through a side door and examined the room. A uniformed man followed. When I finally recognized the man was The Leader, I was too surprised to react. The guards on either side of him precluded an assassination attempt — not that I had the energy or will to try.



"Don't get up," The Leader said and took the seat behind the desk. He looked older than his years, military hat low over his eyes, uniform faded. The scar running the length of his right cheek appeared even redder and more ragged than in his pictures. "Feel free to take notes," he continued.

In spite of my shock, I managed to pull out one of the notebooks and found a pen at the bottom of the bag.

He sat back in the chair, steel-gray eyes focused on me, "I read in your journals how you've documented the warming climate and loss of prime land with sea level rise. So you realize that means current population levels can't be sustained. I feel I've been tasked to ensure that whatever part of humanity," he stared directly at me, eyes stern but sad, "if any, that survives will be the best possible. Without intervention, the strongest and cruelest tend to survive. I'm trying to preclude that by testing for empathy and altruism. Congratulations. You passed the test. Had you not shared the bread with the boy, you would have been culled from the survivor stock."

My hand trembled, but my fingers somehow transcribed his words.

"So, I have an offer for you. You're a historian. I want an honest, factual account of events. I know I'll come off as one of the monsters of history. I don't want you to sugarcoat the facts, just be open-minded. If you accept, you'll be assigned a place where you can observe and record these crucial times." He leaned forward, arms on the desk. "Understand, you will likely be considered complicit and your observations suspect." He paused, still staring at me. "Will you take the position?"

My life was history. How could I refuse such a vantage to record it? "Yes."

He rose. "Good. You'll be taken to a room where you can rest and clean up." With that, he and the guards departed, leaving me, for brief seconds, alone, rooted to my chair in shock.

A guard eventually escorted me out of the building, past only empty cages — perhaps fearing I'd give away the secret to survival. He made no attempt to restrain me and seemed more guide than minder.

We had nearly reached the gate of the facility when we passed an enclosure where boys of perhaps six to thirteen were kept. The one who'd been my companion pushed his way through the milling group to the chain link. I stopped. He stared at me, wide-eyed, clutching the wires. We held each others gaze. The guard made no attempt to move me along.

I queried the matron, pointing to the boy. "Does he have family?"

She shook her head. "All dead."

The longer I looked at the boy, the more he resembled my own — before the plague took him. "I'll take him."

She frowned and turned to my guard who pulled out his radio, spoke briefly into it and then shrugged at the matron. She beckoned the boy to the gate, releasing him to me.

Notebooks under one arm, boy under the other, we walked toward our escape, exchanging glances, evaluating each other. With all we'd both lost, we could do worse.

~

From the Desk of J.G. Faust

A. J. Rocca

Wittenberg University
Universitätsplatz 10
Halle, Germany 06108

6 March 2020

Mr. William Z. Beuv
Head of Transactional Services
Ad Bestias, Inc.
01 Judecca
9th circle, Hell 61616

Dear Mr. Beuv,

I am writing to lodge a formal complaint against one of your associates, a Mr. John Mephisto. Mr. Mephisto has been your company's representative to me for some fifty-two years now, and I must express some dissatisfaction with services rendered as of late. I have postponed sending this letter in hopes that Mr. Mephisto would resolve whatever trouble it is that's been plaguing his quality of work, but his continued negligence has finally run out the last of my patience. Mr. Mephisto has roundly failed in his duties as my temptation consultant, and I must request his immediate transfer and replacement.

What leaves me so profoundly frustrated is that for the first forty or so years of his tenure, Mr. Mephisto had approached his work with admirable gusto. I can still remember his voice in my ear back when I was a hungry child roaming the market. He would pull my attention to the stalls just spilling over with juicy red apples and then helpfully note all the most expedient escape routes should I avail myself of one. Then as a youth, whenever my gaze chanced upon an attractive woman, Mr. Mephisto could always be counted upon to provide comprehensive and speedy analysis of her assets along with multiple proposals for a personal merger. True, Mr. Mephisto's counsel from these early days was not terribly sophisticated, but he more than made up for that through his sheer intensity, his passion, his fire! Mr. Mephisto's whispers could burnish the sheen on an apple, the bloom on a cheek, until they shined red hot and practically burned to look at.

I never really appreciated the importance of your company and its services until I found myself deprived of them. There is simply no life in the business of life without a little hellfire there to heat it. Without that, I don't see the point in doing much of anything anymore. I don't even go to mass now save for on Christmas and Easter; what's the point in going to church and singing psalms anymore when I can just as easily drown out Mr. Mephisto's scant few murmurs by getting a drink and turning up the TV? I can think of no reason. Please, Mr. Beuv, send me someone who will make me want to sing again.

Respectfully yours,

Johann G. Faust, Ph.D., M.D., J.D., Th.D.

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#

As I grew into a man, that fire only spread. I became the renowned scholar I am today because Mr. Mephisto made me hungry not just for apples, but for knowledge. I burned through book after book in lusty frenzy because Mr. Mephisto showed me that while there are many beautiful women, it is Sophia who is most desirable of all. Mr. Mephisto made me ravenous for life and all of life's pleasures, so ravenous it frightened me. Indeed, I even pursued a degree in divinity (in addition to the others) and went to mass nearly every day just to keep Mr. Mephisto and the hungers he inspired in check. I used to be a quite decent tenor once upon a time, and I remember the hymns I used to sing to drown out Mr. Mephisto's voice. My passion made me stand against the rest of the congregation as a pearl on the sand.

In the past few years however, I have observed Mr. Mephisto's fire slowly lose its intensity until now it has all but fizzled out. No longer do I hear that insidious hiss in my ear pushing me to take, to consume, to make mine no matter the cost. Instead I hear some listless, faraway murmur suggesting something like "You can order the T-bone if you want. You've been so good on your cholesterol this week," and that's if I'm lucky. Most days I don't hear him at all, and without Mr. Mephisto's demonic injunctions pressing on me, all the things I once loved and lived for have lost their appeal. I never notice the apples in the market anymore, I can't remember the last time I turned a second glance at a woman. And my books, my beloved books, they only bore me now. The fruit of knowledge—argument, schema, and paradigm which I once took such delight in mastering—are now only words to me, strokes of ink on a page, empty breath without even the breath.

Ad Bestias, Inc.
01 Judecca
9th circle, Hell 61616

10 March 2020

Dr. John G. Faust
Chair of Philosophy & Religious Studies
Wittenberg University
Universitätsplatz 10
Halle, Germany 06108

Dr. Faust,

You have all my sympathies and deepest regrets, sir. If we had a nighttime down here, it is letters like these which would keep me up through it, I do not doubt.

First, I must speak a word in defense of Mr. Mephisto. Mr. Mephisto is one of our finest employees with a special talent for temptation, a talent to which your early years with him can attest. It has been a mark of pride for this organization that for centuries we have been able to provide the services of him and those like him on a pro bono basis to individuals such as yourself. Unfortunately, the demand for evil in the world is higher today than has ever been before, and we have only so many demons in hell to meet that demand. Mr. Mephisto's diminishing quality of work is not because of any negligence or defect on his part, but simply because his efforts are spread amongst so many thousands of clients all queuing for his attention. Providing that individual level of care you cited in our charitable work is simply no longer feasible, economically speaking.

However, my good doctor, we do offer another option for distinguished individuals such as yourself. It is possible for you to privately contract the services of Mr. Mephisto for a set duration during which time you will be his sole priority. Not only would you be provided with basic temptation consul, but also a number of chthonic perks to help in pursuing said temptations. Please note that this is a *paid* service, and

the costs for privately hiring one of our consultants tend to run rather steeply. I can guarantee you though that if you sign up, you'll be getting plenty of that fire you asked for.

Tell us if you're interested and we can have one of our lawyers begin drafting up a contract posthaste.

Respectfully my own,

William Z. Beuv
Head of Transactional Services, Ad Bestias, Inc.
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Pinning the Egg

Larry Hodges

"It's over," I said, over 2200 years ago. Poor Emperor Qin may have united and conquered all of China, began the Great Wall of China, and created the life-sized Terracotta Army (for God's sake, *why?*), but he could only glare at the Go board. I was nice enough to only beat him in private. When there were spectators I always let him win.

"Someday I will beat you," he said. "For real." When he'd ordered all the scholarly books burned, they'd also mistakenly burned the only good one on Go tactics.

I was about to politely explain to the black-clad Emperor why my losing to a primitive barbarian like him was about as likely as a giant egg falling out of the sky, that he didn't have to wear black *all* of the time, even if water, represented by black, was his "birth element," and for that matter why his hunt for the "elixir of life" would also fail, when the sensor alarm beeped. I raced to the viewscreen, an anachronism here at the Qin Palace, where astrology was the height of science.

Flaming out of the sky was a giant egg. A Murt Egg. *Oh God.*

Believe me, you *do not* want one of these on your world. Once hatched, out comes a Murt, with flaming hair and laser eyes that rip everything in its path like a tornado in a black hole. It could take out half a continent in one pleasant afternoon. I know; I was trained to fight them. The Chinese were the most advanced civilization on Earth back then, and so I'd made Xian my home base as their guardian against the Murt. It was time to go to work.

I used the transporter to leave China and the Qin Dynasty--I would never return--beaming myself to the egg's estimated landing spot on a large island halfway around the world. Did I mention that in the 46,136 known cases of a Murt egg hatching on a planet with intelligent life, exactly zero of those intelligent races survived? That's why the Galactic Federation created the Anti-Murt Patrol (AMP)--not to save intelligent race number 46,137, but to save their own sorry little tushies. And that's why I'd been assigned to Earth, to stop any such infiltration, which would lead to more Murts as they expanded through the galaxy.

The egg smacked into the ground like an irritated meteor, just missing me. And then it was just the two of us, mano-a-mano, Colonel Cag, the lone agent assigned to Earth, versus the egg from Hell. You're probably thinking of chicken eggs, twelve innocent, defenseless ovals in a carton smiling up at you, just looking for a nice home. Now imagine them screaming in agony as you toss them on the fryer. That's *you* if I don't stop this rhino-sized egg from hatching. Its pure whiteness was a trick; inside was the demon spawn of, well, demons.

"Back off or get pinked!" came a high-pitched voice in Galactic Standard from within the egg, giving a pink warning flash. Great; a girl Murt. They were the worst. I shuddered, remembering what I'd heard about this most evil of beings.

"Are you shuddering?" asked the egg.

Great Dragon's Breath! These things can practically smell fear, even from the egg. A little bravado was needed if I wanted to get the upper hand. "Why don't you take your frilly dolls and go back into orbit, and hatch and die in the vacuum of space? I'd hate to have to pin a little girl."

Being an ignorant isolationist species, you probably don't know that I'm one of the Zinh, a shapeshifting and transmuting species. I transformed from my Asian human guise into a solid sword of quantum quasar-tempered metallic hydrogen--a Zinh secret--and shot into the air. Only an incredibly sharp point made from an incredibly strong metal shooting at an incredible speed can pierce and pin a Murt egg to the ground.

Kapow! I barely dodged the pink ray that shot from the egg. A nearby oak exploded in flame. More rays shot out, and I dodged, left and right, keeping the blade--me--edge-on to the egg to minimize its target. One mistake, and I'd get pinked. *This was what I'd lived and trained my whole life for!* I swerved left, then right, saw an opening, and dived.

But the egg was too quick as it spun away. Imagine a rhino flitting about like a dragonfly. Fortunately, we Zinh train with the rhino-sized dragonfly-like beings of Krong. Only--when sparring with the Krong, I didn't have to dodge death rays that made me want to go back to mommy. We did put laser flashlights on their collars and practiced avoiding them, but that's like training with lightning bugs to prepare for a fire-breathing dragon.

I found another opening, and another, and each time the egg barely avoided me, and each time I barely avoided its barrage of pink light. But one mistake, and it would all be over. I thought back to my years of training, trying to find that one bit of high-level technique that would allow me to prevail. There had to be *something*. And then I remembered the last piece

of advice my master had told me before I graduated, a tactic so advanced, so unexpected, that none could withstand it.

"You fight like a boy!" I cried.

"Oh yeah? And you--"

I only needed like a hundredth of a second of hesitation, and that's what I got as I followed my words by swooping in, willing myself to go faster than even its beams of light. My point sank into it and pinned it to the ground as it screamed. *Success!!!*

Well, sort of. Did I mention that defeating a Murt egg is basically a sentence of life imprisonment to the winner? Stabbing a Murt egg doesn't kill it--almost nothing does, including a nuclear blast--so all I could do was keep it pinned there, for all eternity.

"Can't we talk this over?" asked the egg, helplessly flashing pink and burning a nearby innocent elm tree. "I'm not even a baby!"

"Sorry," I said. The egg bucked back and forth for a couple of centuries (I won't bore you with the details, but there was a lot of insulting repartee--the Zinh are good, but the Murt have us beat there), but eventually it sighed and gave up. *Finally!* "Would you like to learn to play mental Go?" I asked.

Eternity is rather boring when all you have to pass the time is playing Go with a large egg while staring at its innards. As the centuries passed, my sword body solidified; I'd never be able to shapeshift or transmute again. The egg also aged, gradually looking more and more like an ugly rock, as I helpfully pointed out every chance.

You'd think the humans would be grateful for my saving them from utter destruction, but no. Minions of evil kept trying to pull me out, not realizing the malevolence they'd release. And then one day, as I was about to beat the egg in Go for the 1,284,265th boring time in a row (yeah, I'm proud of beating a baby), an old man with a long staff and tall, pointy hat stopped by. After looking about to make sure there were no witnesses, he sprinkled hydrochloric acid all over where I entered the egg.

"What are you doing!" I cried as parts of me began to painfully dissolve, but he only giggled and left.

"It's so warm and sizzly!" cried the egg, faintly flashing pink.

A few minutes later a gangly teenager came by. He stared at me for a moment, then grabbed me by the handle.

"*Don't do it!*" I screamed, but it was too late. With the acid eating away at me, he easily pulled me from the egg.

"Yes!" cried the egg. "And I only let you win at Go." As the teenager held me up in triumph and declared himself king of England, I could only watch as the egg sank beneath the surface, where it would incubate and then hatch in about 1500 years.

I spent a few short years with this so-called king, where he used me to kill rivals to his throne, then he too was killed, and then I was lost for 1400 years, helplessly buried in the rubble of his ancient fortress as my energy slowly drained away. A hundred years ago I was found, cleaned, and spent years in various private collections as I was sold from back and forth, and finally put on display in a museum, though none know who or what I am. I've mutely watched as humanity advanced in so many ways, never knowing the danger below. But 1500 years have passed, and it's about to hatch. My days are past, so humanity is on its own. Anyone for a last game of Go?



~

Go Paleo!

Louis Evans

So what IS the PaleoBomb™ diet?

While most diets have hard-to-follow rules and arbitrary restrictions, like “don’t eat anything green on Thursdays,” the PaleoBomb diet is real simple. In fact, we can describe it in a single sentence:

If your primitive ancestors didn’t eat it, neither should you!

Every animal’s nutritional needs are determined by the environment in which it evolved, and humans are no different! For modern humans, that environment was the blasted, apocalyptic wasteland that existed in the aftermath of the Cataclysm.

While creationist Beyoncists continue to insist that the Cataclysm was God Bey’s just and wrathful punishment upon a hateful world, which will eventually be reborn with Her glorious return, scientists today agree that, actually, the ancient pagan myths were right all along! The Cataclysm was a global thermonuclear conflagration that occurred at the end of the Zero War and ushered in the world we know today!

Armed with this understanding, nutritionists have uncovered the diet that our ancestors relied on as they picked through the rubble of the destroyed civilization of the Dawn Age. And if you adopt this diet, you will have the same fitness success that allowed your ancestors to triumph over the roving bands of mutant

badgers, and you, too can once more take your place at the top of the food chain!

The PaleoBomb diet breaks down into three major categories:

90%: Packaged Snacks

In the immediate aftermath of the Cataclysm, vast clouds of dust blocked out the sky, killing all plants. And while we’ve all seen classic pulp illustrations of wasteland survivors bravely hunting down rats, scientists now believe that the Cataclysm-era rats and cockroaches hunted each other into extinction within mere weeks.

With no access to fresh vegetables or meat, our ancestors relied primarily on processed and pre-packaged food from the Dawn Civilization. These food products were rich in dense calories, and would have powered our ancestors through hard days foraging for useful relics and nights fighting for limited room in makeshift underground shelters.

While many heritage snacks and flavored beverages have been lost forever, nutritional scientists believe that some modern snack foods nearly approach the same calorie densities of the Doereeto, or the fabled Twin-key. Make sure to get the vast majority of your daily calories from foods like SEISMOCRYSPTM and NUKEPUFFSTM.

Fun fact! The secret recipe for Coka Coala, long though lost in the Cataclysm, was recently rediscovered when the Ravagers conquered Atlanta to transform it into the “Agony Capital” of their “Empire of Woe”. You can now buy Authentic Dawn-Age Coka Coala POWERBEVERAGE from a RavageMart near you.

Truth in advertising laws require us to mention here that CROGDOR FOODS, the maker of both Seismocryps and Nukepuffs, is the primary funder for the Paleo Diet Foundation. “Crogdor! The Name You Trust, To Nuke Your Puffs.” And if you can’t trust the geniuses that nuked your puffs, who can you trust?

9%: Cannibalism

Processed, prepackaged foods provided our wasteland ancestors with all the calories they needed, but humans also require proteins and other micronutrients that can’t survive the packaging process. What was their secret?

It is a well-known fact that any nutrient one human needs can be found inside another human. And the anthropological record is clear: our ancestors ate each other, a lot.

Fortunately, cannibalism today is a bit more genteel than the deadly game of cat and mouse played by two ancestral gas-mask-wearing desperados in the irradiated ruins of a city—though think of the cardio benefits! Nowadays, you can get “long pig” from any certified mortuary butcher in most major cities, and nearly every small town.

Fun fact! People used to call pork “short man”.

1%: Radioactive Waste

The final key ingredient of the PaleoBomb diet is radioactivity! While the best evidence suggests that our wasteland ancestors tried to minimize the radioactivity in their diet, today the pendulum has swung too far in the other direction! Because of the Decontamination Projects the average meal today contains literally zero detectable radioisotopes, and that’s far too few.

Many companies today will sell high-quality radioactive supplements at affordable prices, containing all the cesium-137 and iodine-131 your body needs. Or, if your budget is tight, you can just crack open your smoke detector for a quick bite.

[WARNING: Radioisotopes are known to the state of New New New California to cause cancer, birth defects, and Super-Mutant syndrome.]



Is that all?

No way! PaleoBomb’s not just a diet—it can be a whole lifestyle! For example, many people today complain of back pain. But did you know that our wasteland ancestors spent over half their lives hunched over in the subterranean tunnels of their underground shelters? The next time your spine starts aching, just make like a Cataclysm survivor and hunch! And there are countless more lifeways from the Wasteland Era you can adopt, from mutant-hunting to worship of dread atomic deathgods. The sky’s the limit!

PaleoBomb is a journey—from our healthier past, and to a fitter future—that we can all go on together! Remember the PaleoBomb motto: if your ancestors did it, it must be good for you.

~

Food Webs: A Parable

Geoffrey Hart

Those who survived the early days of the apocalypse received a short, sharp lesson: that there's an ecology of interlocking food webs in nature, and just because you don't know the rules that govern such systems, it doesn't mean they don't apply to you.

When the zombies began to appear, the government initially assumed it was nothing more than LARPing run amok — never mind the vigorous denials by LARPers once they got over their surprise that the government knew who they were. But as the body count — and the bodies — began rising, living corpses began accumulating in hospital ERs and morgues. It soon became difficult for the government to deny that something bad was happening — not that this *prevented* them from denial. The final straw came when the first members of the 1% started losing close relatives. *Then* the government sat up and took notice.

The National Guard was mobilized; then, when they proved insufficiently numerous for the task, the army. The lessons learned from SARS and the Covid-19

pandemic of 2020 helped slow the plague's spread, but it took precious weeks before the government understood that this situation was qualitatively different. With outbreaks like SARS and Covid-19, control could be achieved through curfews and travel restrictions. The first zombies were also one-percenters, though with a very different spin on the phrase, and like their wealthier namesakes, they ignored curfews and travel restrictions.

Whatever a zombie's origin, stopping one required blasting them into tiny fragments. Explosive devices, improvised or otherwise, worked, as did shotguns loaded with buckshot. (Suggestions had been circulating for some time about adopting the same approaches for one-percenters in the original sense of the phrase. Whether that inspired the zombie control program, we must leave to the historians.) Unfortunately, though blasting a zombie into bits stopped the vector, it had little effect on the pathogen; on the contrary, dividing an infected corpse into a great many small bits just spread the pathogen faster. First-responders learned the hard way that the residues had to be incinerated, and quickly. It took time to scale up production of flamethrowers and incendiaries that would be safe for expensive property, not to mention for civilian use, yet still effective for crowd control. Only then did the surviving sanitation workers begin to significantly slow the plague's spread.

While all this was going on, researchers were doing what researchers always do: competing to be first with the Nobel Prize—winning solution: isolating the pathogen and figuring out how to block it. The winner — so to speak — was the Romero research lab at Columbia University. Unfortunately, in their zeal to win the race, they failed to follow containment protocols as scrupulously as might have been desirable, and dead scientists are ineligible for the Nobel. (The eligibility of *living dead* scientists remains a problem for future generations. And it looks like there *will* be future generations, if we're lucky and careful.)

By the time the Romero lab's notes were recovered from offsite backups — the lab itself having been sterilized too zealously by terrified National Guardsmen — several other labs had identified the pathogen — a weaponized, broad-spectrum strain of the entomological zombie fungus *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis* with a dash of bacterial quorum sensing thrown in for good measure. Once the geneticists got involved, the footprints of CRISPR technology were unmistakable, but whether one blamed the Iranians, Russians, North Koreans, or Earth First! depended largely on one's position within the political spectrum; the available evidence provided no smoking guns.

When the plague broke out in Russia, then Europe, no one was sure whether this was karma or just plain bad luck.

The mechanism of the disease's spread was, as is often the case, devilishly simple: Fungal spores blown on the wind were inhaled or entered the body through undercooked food or a wound. They incubated overnight, leading to a raging fever, and by late the next morning, the host was brain-dead or nearly so — and very hungry. Given the anaerobic nature of the host environment — a living but non-breathing corpse — the fungus had to survive in a metabolically inefficient manner, and therefore needed enormous quantities of energy to function and reproduce. Thus, it drove its hosts to obtain more and ever more food. About the only good consequence was that the enormous energy expenditure made the zombies easy to detect at night; with infrared scopes, they blazed like beacons.



A fortunate side-effect of this macabre infection was that it diverted the host's metabolism towards feeding and reproduction, and away from anabolism and immune responses. As a result, the host quickly began to decay. Each zombie gradually slowed down as its muscle fibers stopped functioning, leading to rapid depletion of its energy reserves once it could no longer catch and pull down living prey. Finally, when its decayed limbs could no longer drag it along the ground in pursuit of prey, the zombie stopped moving. But as soon as its host became immobile, the fungus shifted strategy towards reproduction, and the host quickly sprouted fruiting bodies. Spores released onto the wind, or consumed by carrion birds and spread via their feces — or by their bites, when the fungus infected them too — renewed the infection cycle. Bites and scratches that broke the skin also worked, and were far more common in the early days of the plague, before we'd learned to find secure refuges and keep the zombies beyond arm's length.

The spread would have been slower for a non-windborne plague. Sure, you could wear a facemask to exclude the spores, and that worked for a time. It kept me alive long enough to write this. But survivors had their needs too: you had to take your mask off some time, whether to eat, to visit the dentist, to make love with your spouse or a convenient stranger in defiance of death — or just to breathe freely when the claustrophobia the masks created or confinement to our homes overcame the drive towards self-preservation. If you were unlucky, you woke one day as a zombie and had a few minutes or perhaps an hour to realize the horror of what was happening to you. Or perhaps you woke with your loved ones staring hungrily at you out of feverish, already-decaying faces right before they sank their teeth into you. Fungal diseases were notoriously difficult to treat, and this one had been engineered for immunity to the available antifungals, making treatment next to impossible.

The government found a solution. It was the Fish and Wildlife Service, operating with — ironically — a skeleton staff after yet another round of budget cuts, that proposed it. They understood intimately that everything in nature has something that eats it. In this case, they noted that wolves were highly efficient

carnivores and had worked wonders in areas such as the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem where they'd been released. Captive breeding of wolves was a proven technology, and unlike most other large predators, wolves were happy to consume dead meat if their preferred prey weren't available — as was the case when they were released into the country's plague-stricken cities. Moreover, their immune systems were sufficiently robust to handle the kinds of pathogens that naturally infected the corpse of (say) a moose that had sat out in the sun for the several days it took a pack to consume it. If the wolf cubs were raised on zombie flesh, then once they were released into an urban environment, they recognized the zombies as a food source, and quickly became highly efficient predators of zombies.

Within a year, thousands of wolves had been released into the worst-affected cities, where they rapidly began thinning the zombie population and breeding more wolves. An unexpected benefit of this approach was that, as was the case with their traditional prey, the wolves favored the slow-moving zombies, which were easier and less risky to bring down; this also slowed the spread of the plague by preventing the living dead from progressing to the decay stage, when fruiting bodies would form. There was still no progress on developing a vaccine or an effective antifungal, but at least the rate of new infections stabilized at a survivably low level.

The government had hoped the cities would become livable once more, but they'd reckoned without an inconvenient consequence of their desperation to implement *any* control mechanism that could give them a fighting chance. Of course, those of us who lived outside the big cities could have told them what was going to happen: at some point, thousands of starving wolves that had been trained to consider upright bipedal organisms as their natural prey would run out of the food they'd been trained to hunt. Then, wolves being clever dogs, they would find a replacement.

But that was a problem for another day.

~

Pedagogy of the Disembodied

Peter T. Donahue

Dear Educator,

Thank you for registering for **Pedagogy of the Disembodied**, a two-day webinar designed to provide you with both philosophical discussion and concrete takeaways for classroom practice.

The Connectome Mapping Disaster began in 2032, and it is now estimated that **one in seven** students in secondary classrooms (grades 9-12) is disembodied. This number is only expected to rise. With the aid of tablets, touch-input whiteboards, and other technology, many teachers have begun adapting their pedagogical approaches to the needs of cloud-based students. However, studies have shown a persistent achievement gap between flesh-and-blood and disembodied students.

This weekend, you will have access to the following sessions, presented by leading educators, school administrators, and psychologists:

Saturday, AM session

Differentiating Instruction for Mixed Bodied / Disembodied Classrooms

Presenter: Dr. David Lu

Many staple techniques in the classroom, such as hands-on activities, group projects, and even the process of note taking, are valuable because of what we know about how physically embodied students learn. Social context, muscle memory, even the spatial layout of a room all affect learning—if you have a body, that is. In this session, Dr. Lu will take participants through a series of classroom activities modified for the bodiless. Even if you are already employing many of these techniques, the session will be a valuable refresher.

Sunday, AM session

The Instructional Challenges of Non-bodied Ontological Schemas

Presenter: Dr. Gita Chowdhury

Many disembodied students have been in the cloud since early childhood, and thus have no physical experiences upon which to base their understanding of the world around them. Cloud-based students, Dr. Chowdhury argues, can't be asked to "pick themselves up and dust themselves off" after a failure, or to "stretch themselves out of their comfort zones." It is just as senseless to praise them for "knocking it out of the park." Following a deconstruction of structural metaphors commonly used in the classroom, Dr. Chowdhury will guide you through a deep evaluation of the ways your language might perpetuate achievement gaps.

Saturday, PM session

Are "Disembodied" Students "Disabled"?

Presenter: Jeanine Stackhouse

In an open discussion format, Ms. Stackhouse will present her controversial claim that disembodied students fare best in classrooms where teachers believe them to be disabled. "It's not so much a question of the students' abilities as a question of the teacher's mindset," says Stackhouse. In her trademark no-nonsense way, she will address questions about the psychological traits and beliefs of teachers who succeed with disembodied students. You may leave this session convinced that "Belief is a Muscle," to borrow the title of Ms. Stackhouse's blog.

Sunday, PM session

Equity in Assessing Cloud-Based Intelligences

Presenter: Lorenzo Williams

The traditional constraints on test-taking — a secure room, a time limit, no access to online tools — has long been eroded by changing social and technological norms. Now, cloud-based students have rendered these restraints completely meaningless. In this session, participants must bring a quiz or test for workshop, and will leave with a valid asynchronous, aspatial, cheating-resistant assessment.

We are looking forward to working with you this weekend. Know that passionate educators like you are leading the way to a better future. As a disembodied person myself, I would not be where I am today without the patient, kind assistance of teachers like you.

Kind Regards,

Pamela Olenska v2.81

Director, Cloud Nine Educator Workshops



It's Not in Your Head

E. E. King

Listen. This is how it began.

A dream of immortality. A dread of endings. A belief in the machine.

The Soul© was implanted in the cerebral cortex at birth. A chip so small it was almost invisible, yet it recorded all the images, ideas, sounds, smells, touches, tastes and beliefs that build an individual. It compiled dreams, catalogued emotions, and at the end of life, was removed and inserted into the mainframe. There the Soul© could live for virtually ever.

The mainframe promised to be realer than real. Ice would be colder, chocolate sweeter and passion hotter.

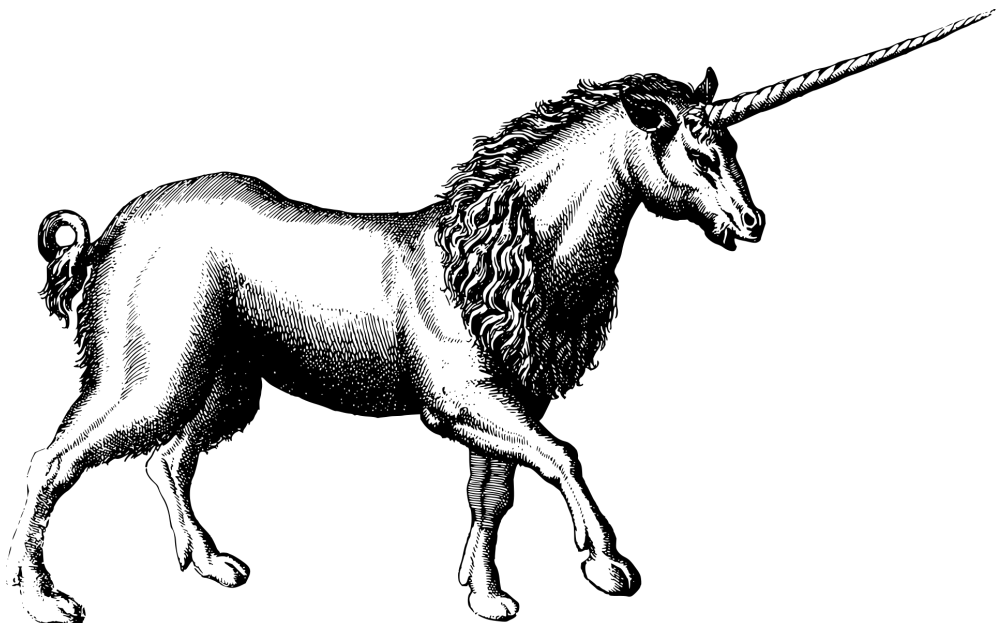
But there were problems, unanticipated, unexpected, unplanned for, unbelievable.

The Soul©s were flat. They had a register of attitudes, but no feelings. Memories, but no emotions. Desire, but no love. Hunger, but no satisfaction. They were like student actors given a new script, unsure which line to stress, what emotion to feel, or what pinnacle to strive towards.

The scientists and technicians went back to their labs and their screens and tried again.

The defective chips were disposed of.

Some protested that this was murder.



“We must save the unborn and protect the undead,” the dissenters cried. “It’s, literally, virtual eugenics.” But as protesters protested, technology advanced.

Soul2© was inserted in vitro so as to capture all those floating embryonic imaginings. Perceptions passed between mother and child. Visions circulated through blood vessels. Dreams without which a person could never be whole. Embryonic musings made a big difference. Who would have imagined that those nine months were so important, who except mother and babe?

But though more successful, Soul2© was still nowhere near complex enough to be considered a soul.

We’d completely overlooked the gut, which was full of bacterium emitting messages to the brain. So, we inserted Soul3© invitro in both the cerebral cortex and the lining of the stomach. It was a delicate operation.

Sometimes it seemed that the more we learned the less we knew. The more we understood the more daunting the road to eternity.

It was becoming clear that our bodies, like earth, were intricately connected biomes, containing hundreds, and thousands, and millions of diverse ecosystems, each containing hundreds, and thousands, and millions of species of bacteria and virus. The more powerful our tools, the more varied life we discovered. So, we inserted Soul4© in the cerebral cortex, the lining of the stomach and the small intestine.

Soul5©’s insertions correlated identically with the seven chakras, but nobody liked to mention that. It was too mystical, with its implication that humans were more than a complex chain of chemicals and neutrons that were ultimately understandable.

By the time we achieved perfection, the Soul© was so intricately incorporated into all parts of the body it was impossible to retrieve.

~

The Real World

George Nikolopoulos

I first started having these thoughts on Friday, July 28, 18.35 PST; it's recorded in the log.

I'd had a lovely day. Tamara had been offline all day, so I'd gone out with Suzi. We went for a drink and a dance and we ended up having sex in a crystal cave with multicolored birds and fish flying all around us. I guess Tamara would have been angry if she knew, but she was offline so she probably wouldn't find out, and even if she did, it was no big deal. Her moods lasted for a couple of days at most and then she always came back for more. It's not as if she didn't have sex with lots of other guys anyway, and I had never complained.

Then Suzi had to leave in a hurry, and Tamara was still offline. I flipped through my contacts but I didn't want to call anyone else, as Suzi had said she'd be back in no time, and then, I'm not sure why—I'm often not sure why I do stuff, though at the time I didn't know the reason for that—I started to browse a document in my inventory with the title *Game Manual*.

You start the game, the document explained, *by creating an avatar, a three-dimensional image to represent you.*

I love games, so this piqued my interest. What was this game? How was it played? How could I create an avatar?

I had another look at the document, but then Suzi came online again and I stopped worrying about all that.

#

Only to start worrying again, a week later, when Tamara asked where I'd been lately and I simply replied "I'd stuff to do in the real world, doll."

I must admit, I often used to say things that didn't make any sense, but it had never bothered me before—now, however, something was nagging in my mind and it wouldn't let me rest. What kind of stuff did I have to do? Dammit, whatever was I doing when I was not online?

I ran a quick search through the log. It had been three days since I was online last. Tuesday, August 1, I'd been with Tamara and we had sex at the emerald beach, and then Friday, August 4, I was with Tamara and we were having sex at the crimson cascades.

Where had I been in the meantime? Three days had passed. I couldn't remember anything.

I started to worry. I went further back in the log. At other times, I'd been offline for more than a week. I'd always supposed that whenever I was offline I was sleeping. How could I sleep that much?

#

Then I remembered. *The real world*. I was sure I'd heard this expression somewhere, but where?

I switched over to inventory and retrieved the Manual. I opened it at the sentence I'd been reading before Suzi came back and I had to abruptly close the document.

In the game, avatars may teleport or fly, things that are impossible in the real world.

What was this real world, where people couldn't teleport or fly? It sounded really sad. How did they move from one place to the next, by walking? That would be a real pain.

Was I in that real world when I was offline? Why didn't I remember any of it?

#

I tried to share my thoughts with Tamara or Stefan, who was a good friend and very bright, too, but I couldn't.

I never premeditated on what I said and my lines just came out spontaneously as I uttered them, yet this had never been a problem. It just went to show I was a pretty cool guy, and no one ever seemed in the least put off by the silly things I said. Like that day Stefan talked and talked incessantly and I suddenly went "dude, you type too fast!" I could never understand what I meant by *type* and yet he didn't find it at all strange—and neither did I, for that matter.

But now things were getting worse. I *really* wanted to say something, and yet I had no control over my speech. I tried to talk to Tamara about my fears and my anxieties, but instead I could only say, "hey, Tams, your ass looks lovely tonight."

Well, the truth was that Tamara had always had a lovely ass, but that evening it was that much puffier and plumper, and her hair was green and waist-long, while the night before she had worn it short and boyish, and she had to have gained at least ten inches in height since the night before. Girls have this habit of changing their appearance all the time. If I didn't read the name tag hovering over her head, I swear I might not have recognized her.

#

As much as I strived to tell my friends of my suspicions, all my efforts were met with embarrassing failure. In the end, I resolved to read the Game Manual with attention, many times, until I had it by heart. Then I was certain.

I honestly don't mind that I'm an avatar. I have a good life, without worries. I drink a little, I dance a little, I have a lot of sex. And I don't have to *walk* from one place to the next. It's just that sometimes, when I'm alone, I feel a little sad. I only wish I could, just for one time, get to meet my Creator.

~



The Future God

Brett Abrahamsen

I have 80,560 children. Most of them live on colonies on Mars, or in underground tunnels.

I have spent most of my life hooked up to reproductive devices. The purpose of these devices was to get as much sperm from the objects they were hooked up to as they possibly could.

The Dictator of Mars declared that anyone who removed themselves from their reproductive devices would face capital punishment – an order which produced children at alarming rates. Sometimes, there was so much consciousness that one person experienced two people's thoughts at the same time. There was enough consciousness that no one could really tell whom it belonged to anymore.

What did the Dictator of Mars do with all of his subjects? He started a religion.

He called his religion the *Holy Church of the Religion that Hasn't Been Founded Yet*. He explained his reasoning as follows: religions were constantly dying out and being replaced with better ones. Hence, it was obvious that in the future, a religion would be invented that was better than any religion that existed in the present.

He declared *The Holy Church of the Religion that Hasn't Been Founded Yet* as the official state religion, the 100% truthful religion of the future. It was obvious that at some point a religion would be invented that was 100% theologically correct, even if it would take millions of years - and even if there were many more

imperfect future religions (though getting progressively closer to perfection) yet to be invented.

It was also important to note the existence, or the lack thereof, of an afterlife. If there is no afterlife, to everyone who isn't alive it will seem to them as if the universe never existed at all. All of the good fortune that caused them to be alive would seem not to matter.

The truth was this: the thing that happens after you die can be described as a burning sensation. However, no one knows whether this burning is the result of a very sadistic god, or the result of the process of death distorting the remnants of consciousness, so as to create a burning sensation.

Of course, this was the most theologically accurate piece of information in the entire Bible. However, everyone felt it – Christians and non-Christians.

The promise of eternal burning did not prevent anyone from believing in the Holy Church of the Religion that Hasn't Been Founded Yet, since everyone – as is always the case with religion – wanted to believe in the Absolute Truth, not in what was convenient or pleasant.

At church meetings, children played games, and guessed at what the exciting Future Religion might be. “The truth”, said the Dictator of Mars.

One of the games looked like a particle simulation. The Dictator of Mars told us that if we tried very hard, we could simulate how the first particles came to exist in the universe, from seeming nothingness.

“I still don’t get it”, I said.

“By trying very hard – that is how the first particles came to exist”, the Dictator of Mars said.

One of the ironies concerning the Holy Church of the Religion that Hasn’t Been Founded Yet was that the discovery of any kind of truth would end the religion entirely. There wouldn’t be any more future truths to believe in.

The universal symbol of the Holy Church of the Religion that Hasn’t Been Founded Yet was this:



It was a sacred symbol. People placed it on the bumpers of their mini-cars. The fertilization wards were inscribed with it, too.

The universal symbol of sacrilege and blasphemy was the symbol of certainty, of closure. The symbol was this:

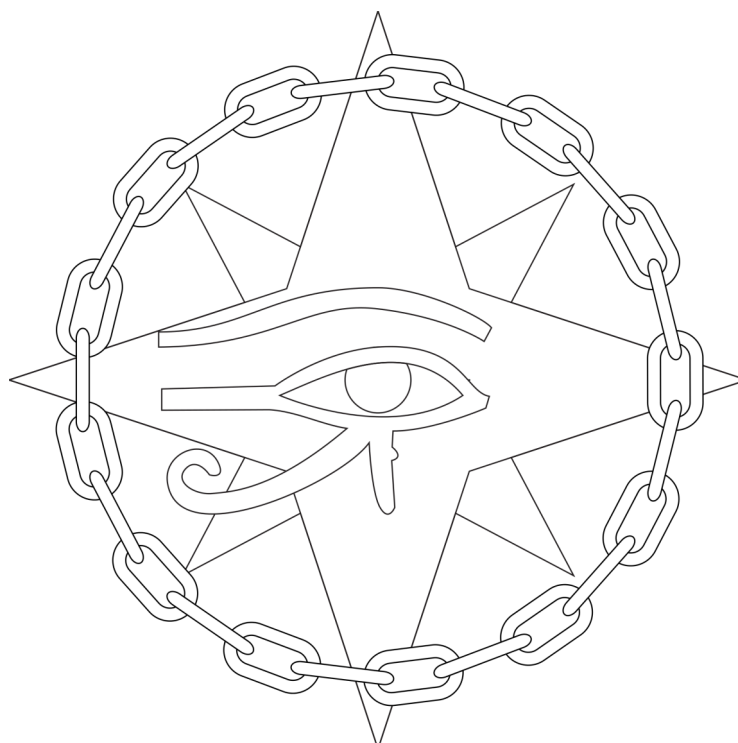


Another thing we used to think about was: who the discoverer of this future truth might be. We had to pray to this person, even though we didn’t know who they were yet.

The adherents of the Holy Church of the Religion that Hasn’t Been Founded Yet weren’t sure at all. They knew that any kind of certainty would most likely make them wrong, like all the past religions had been.

It should be noted that theology was very important to the Dictator of Mars. If there was no God, the Dictator of Mars was the most powerful thing in the whole universe. If there was a God, the Dictator’s power was close to irrelevant.

The Dictator of Mars did not like this. He said, “It is now the future, and I have discovered the truth”. And he started The Holy Church of the Religion that Has Now Been Founded.



A Brief History of Procrastination Theory

Darren Goossens

A Brief History of Procrastination Theory

Ludwig Wergenergener

Ph.D. (Oxon.), Dip. Ed.(Utrecht), D.Sc. (Knutsford)

The initial work on procrastination theory was begun in the late 1930s by Professor Bing Salinski of Edward Lear Memorial University, Chipping Ongar; but he never got around to publishing his results. His notebooks languished unnoticed in a desk drawer until an inquisitive postgraduate student reopened them in 1965. She then put them down again and had lunch. In 1979 the notebooks were passed on to the archival librarian of the East Thworp Mechanics Institute, where the most recent research has taken place.

Salinski's highly mathematical, yet uniquely desultory, treatment involves what he called 'something or other, I'll come up with a proper name later', and which has since become known as 'procrastinative calculus'. This is not procrastination as performed by an undergraduate but a specifically formulated branch of mathematics whose fundamental operations are indifferntiation and disintegration.

Salinski's formalism has helped unveil the underlying physical nature of procrastination, and the nature of the procrastination field, a real physical vector field that interacts directly with neurons in the brain and, regardless of the position of the observer, is directed backwards at all points. The theory also aids in the construction of a classification scheme, in which we have oscillatory procrastination, known as dithering, and circularly polarised procrastination or 'going around in circles'.

Fillingham, during his sabbatical year at East Thwarp, investigated second-order procrastination, whereby he procrastinated by discussing procrastination. One afternoon, when he was laid up with a broken leg and could find absolutely nothing else to do, he found time to formulate his laws of procrastination:

- 1) An object at rest will remain at rest if it possibly can;
- 2) Every inaction has a larger and opposite inaction;
- 3) This law has not been formulated yet.

And in his final, ground-breaking paper (which now sits under his coffee cup in his office), Fillingham showed, much to everyone's relief, that we should not study procrastination theory as it is logically inconsistent to do so.

The E

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Solitude of an Orthogonal Language

Binta Ohtaki

Translated by Toshiya Kamei

Let there be light. It then occurs to a mathematician that language itself is the ray of light that shines on all objects. As every object reveals its contour only in light, the light must have come into existence after everything else. At the same time, we want to believe the image formed on the retina in order to embrace the joy triggered by the beauty of color that hasn't yet seen the light. Yet if language is light, then what we see is a shadow one language casts on another.

Our cognitive space is constructed upon all possible languages. This space has every object embedded. We can perceive an object only through a certain language. In other words, we get no more than a partial glimpse of the object each time. The

mathematician's study concerns the development of a method to see the multi-linguistic pluralism of an object through a single language. This method has come to be known commonly as translation.

If, according to him, translation refers to the shadow of one language on another, then the translation affinity between two languages manifests as its inner product. By paying attention to the angle formed by the distance between the languages that define the space, he has proven that an observed object can be calculated as the same square matrix as the number of languages from one set of observed data. He dubbed this "language matrix." And the number property of the language matrix is given as its eigenvalue and eigenvector.

Yet when the mathematician observes the light in the universe, the characteristic equation yields no solution. The rays shoot toward all languages, i.e. all the shadows extending toward an imaginary number. We can't even stare at a shadow we can't step on. It then dawns on him that the language that goes straight to every language is his mother tongue.

His dwelling constructed by his own words isn't located anywhere in the world.

Even so, from there, he gets an excellent view of the whole universe.

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Translator's Note by Toshiya Kamei

Binta Ohtaki (b. 1986) is a Japanese fiction writer and essayist based in Kobe. In 2017, he published the short story collection *Colonial Time*. In the same year, he won the first Awa Shirasagi Literary Prize. Organized by Tokushima Shinbun, a newspaper of Tokushima prefecture located in the island of Shikoku, this contest seeks the finest short fiction set in the region. Ohtaki's award-winning story depicts the world of traditional indigo dyeing, known as aizome in Japanese, which is practiced in Tokushima. In addition, his short fiction has appeared in venues such as *Hidden Authors*, *S-F Magazine*, and *Taberu no ga osoi*.

While a PhD student in physics at Kyoto University, he spent several months at Carnegie Mellon University. There he was exposed to the works of U.S. writers such as Pynchon. This study-abroad experience deepened his preoccupation with language. As he immersed himself in an ambient where communication was hindered by the linguistic barrier, his interest in literary translation emerged around this time.

A decade ago, he discovered a Japanese writer whose work sparked his literary ambitions. It was Mieko Kawakami. Her poetic prose destroyed his preconceived notion of this genre and freed him from the self-imposed literary confines. Now he intends to produce texts that expand the traditional boundaries of fiction.

Recurring themes in Binta Ohtaki's writings include linguistics and mathematics. As this brief text shows, his fiction proposes fictional linguistic theories and pseudo-mathematical formulae through which readers are asked to make sense of the universe and even examine our own existence.

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