

Here are stories... Allah-Glories! version 1v00 the latest version of this will be posted here: no6ody.wordpress.com

It is said, in a place so cold and barren that the Inuit do not go there even to visit, that there is a magical mountain. The sun rarely sees this mountain, for its rays merely stir up the many storm-clouds that come during the summer months. Sun, Snow, and Mountain set the stage, and Wind is often the sole actor.

No matter which way the wind blows, it is forced up and around the magic but immobile mountain. The rising air sometimes carries a bit of snow, and over time great drifts of snow accumulate upon this mountain. When the wind shifts, sometimes the snow slips; and on magical mountains a small snowball grows as it rolls downhill. The magical mountain does not notice if a snowball that rolled to its feet becomes a Man.

The new snow-human walks forth, this way and that way, but never back to the inadequate wind-screen of the mountain. The wind sometimes drives snow and ice before it; and these leave their marks upon the snow-human, even as the wind hinders and resists the snow-human's every movement. Sooner or later, the snow human is damaged enough that it moves no more, as if the magic had left it.

The wind still blows, and some of the snow is carried upward.

If you move those books (but not this one :-), you will be able to see the Bell of Truth in that room. By moving more books you will be able to approach the bell, yet the straight path is rarely the right way--you will see why. Once you are close enough to touch the metal Bell you will see that it is taller than any man. Pick up a book if you wish to make the Bell speak; striking it with your fist is worse than useless. Legend says that listening to the Bell will add the Ring of Truth to your speech.

Some people spend much time moving books and listening; these people learn many ways to make the bell ring. Even so, most of the time the bell is quiet. People are not made of metal and must rest, and the bell will never ring itself.

Once upon a fable, a gorilla named LeafEater had a desire to 'do science.' He found an iron bar. The gorilla bent the bar double, and then straightened it out again. When LeafEater poked the kink left in the middle of the bar, he notices the metal had become

warm... prompting him to repeatedly bend and straighten the bar, which soon breaks. As the gorilla peers at the broken end of one of the pieces, he nearly burns his nose. He drops both pieces. The grass smolders. The gorilla does not like the wisps of smoke. LeafEater ambles away and does not see the wind make smoldering grass catch fire and eventually destroy some nearby human buildings, because scientific results are often unlooked-for and undervalued.

Babbling in Babylon

Because their troop-leader had stolen a puppy, the human chased the baboons. The screaming alpha male dropped the puppy and approached at a lope, but was sent scurrying when the human threw a loud child's toy at it. When the troop leader had nearly lost his fear of the neighing stuffed unicorn, the human threw two loud fireworks. All the baboons retreated. The human shouted: "Don't come back, you baboons!" and threw another firework after retrieving the puppy.

No6ody knew that an old female baboon had watched the incident from a distance, and was deafly not impressed with things that only made noise. She noticed that no baboon was injured. She had an idea--if all the baboons attacked the human at once, the baboons would win! And then she could carry the puppy as if it were a baby! But she had no way to share her idea.

R U 4 RL? tl; dr. C U l8r. Babbloonics is ineffective for sharing novel memes.

The human that has given you this piece of paper has declared that, to enable the betterment of all humanity, that

___ thou shalt not drink enough alcohol to cause brain-cell loss

___ thou shalt not watch enough TeeVee to cause brain damage

___ thou shalt not _____

for your brain is one of the rare ones that is highly intelligent and worth preserving as best as is humanly possible. Failure to abide by this request will result in a feeling of premature loss. This complement will self-destruct in time, for entropy always wins.

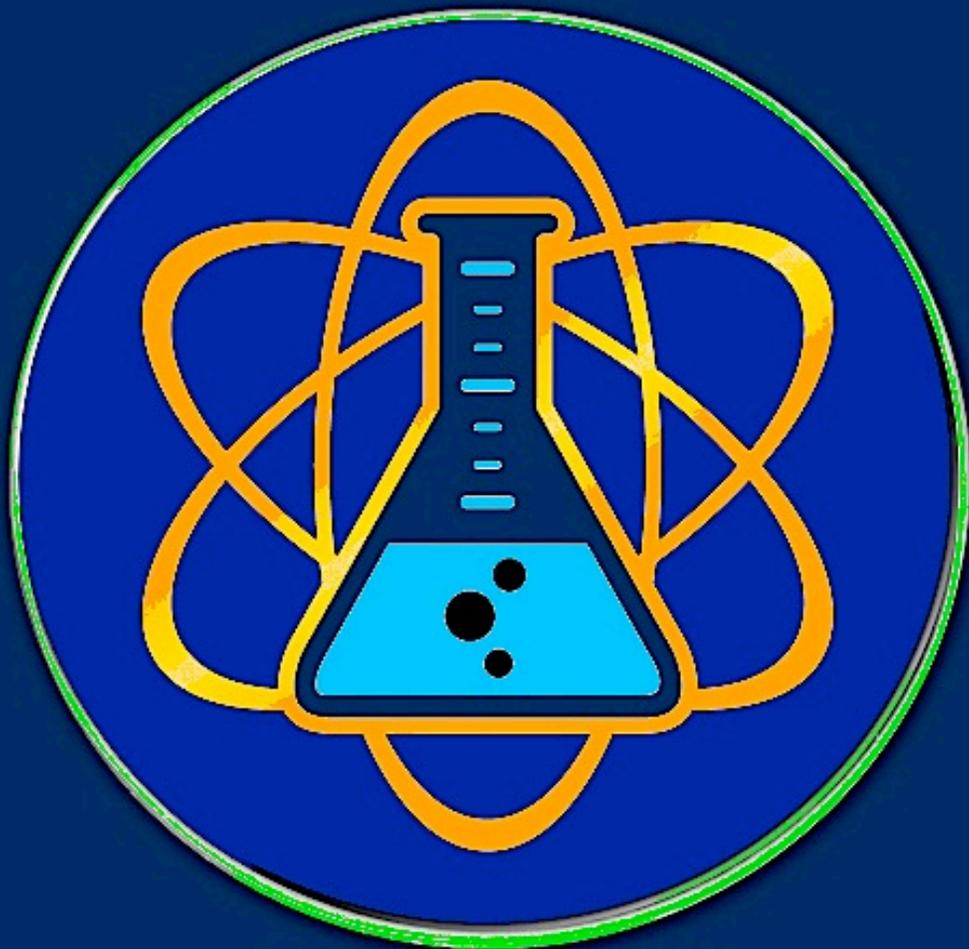
Once, a stoned scientist noticed a beetle crawling inside of a home-made vacuum tube. Horrified, the scientist disassembles the apparatus and removes the bug, and since the third word in this story is stoned, the scientist starts apologizing to the bug for the partial vacuum it endured, and then being tipped out onto a tabletop, and now a large magnifying glass with an eye peering at you--all terrible insults, but all unintended and how this scientist will be more careful in the future...

One wing-covering bore the words 'How did you know?' written with such delicate flowing letters that Tolkien's elves would have copied them, said the stoned scientist, who added that the beetle flew away before the writing on the other wing-covering was observed.

The stoned scientist's smirking roommate says the unread writing was 'I am GOD' and shows me a bottle labeled 'ether' and a book '101 Stupid Things You Can Do With An Ink-Jet Printer.'

This researcher notes that the beetle cannot be found.

This is a ticket from the Science Police.



FILE 219-249

sanon If what you said is true, I'd say you just bought back a piece of your soul.

219-249 Excuse me?

sanon It's just a metaphor.

219-249 A what?

sanon A story. You did the right thing, thus cleaning a bit of evil out of your soul.

219-249 But I didn't do the right thing.

sanon Why not?

219-249 I lied.

sanon I know. That's how you told the truth. I know you can tell lies better than that.

219-249 But...

sanon Don't worry. The text version won't be so revealing, so that's what I'll report. The big bosses will be fooled.

219-249 Who are you?

sanon What I appear to be.

219-249 But...

sanon Look, see these? All the keys to nearly every lock. This uniform--when I wear this, I become invisible, even in a prison.

219-249 A ninja janitor?

sanon Psych!

\$ervants...

Ahmet: What is that smell?

Emess: It's nothing.

Ahmet: But it smells so good! There you are.

Emess: I'm sorry, I couldn't help myself...

Ahmet: My best lens! And this is what you do with it!

Emess: You said it yourself. They smell so good!

Ahmet: I care not for such a smell that comes from burning insects. Better that you should eat them, and gratify... [jingle]

Ahmet: Greetings, come in, come in! What can I do for you?

Vi\$itor: Do you have fresh vanilla beans?

Ahmet: No, I am sorry.

Vi\$itor: What is that wonderful smell?

Ahmet: Perhaps it is a mixture of...

Vi\$itor: The best incense money can buy! I must have it.

Ahmet: I do not sell that kind of thing, I am very sorry to ...

Vi\$itor: Then you must tell me who does.

Ahmet: I will fetch him, but perhaps...

Ahmet: Give me back the lens! That's enough!

Emess: I was doing you a favor, and this is the thanks I get!

Ahmet: I don't want those kind of favors. You should...

Vi\$itor: You must be the one with the incense?

Emess: Sort of. I must have that lens to...

Ahmet: I forbid it! No!

Vi\$itor: I want to smell that smell for the entire day tomorrow. Can you do it?

Emess: Yes. I will need...

Vi\$itor: You will lack nothing--talk to my staff. Do not fail me, and I will reward you. At sunrise, tomorrow. [jingle]

Emess: I'm going to be rich! I'll buy a better lens than this one, and I'll try a hot iron skillet on a portable gas stove, and if that works I'll pay my friends to bring me bugs...

Ahmet: You're riding on the backs of suffering bugs.

Video Rhetorician Needed

scene A: Cultural Cliche Dad holding C. C. cute baby with C. C. baby accessories.

Dad: At first, I thought I wanted the curtains open... [Opens curtain that hangs from shiny metal rings that make a pleasant sound as they bump each other along the curtain rod. The baby is delighted.] Then I thought I wanted the curtains closed [closes curtain and baby peers intently at Dad's hand] Then I thought... [Opens curtains faster, which make the rings even louder this time and delight the baby even more. Repeat.]

scene B: ©ø®Ⓟ ©®@Ⓟ Husband holding ©. ©. Woman with ©. ©. accessories.

Man: I thought you wanted the curtains closed... [Closes curtain that hangs from a client's product.]

Woman: No, dear, I wanted the curtain open. [Opens curtain. Upon hearing a spliced-in sound similar to that emitted by client's product, both Man and Woman laugh with plastic delight.] But then I wanted the curtains closed. [Man closes curtain.] But now, I want them open! [Woman dramatically opens curtain, and the sound is louder and the plastic laughter is thicker this time. Repeat *ad nauseam*.]

Question... if a similar scene might be seen on the 7V (content controlled by billionaires) which of the previous two scenes will be more like the one eventually run?

Allah Glories ver 1.00

one 7V to rule them all,
one 7V to blind them,
one 7V to ©ø®®\$€ them all
and with the sameness bind them
in the land of MoreWhore,
the blue glow is The Shadow's lie.

The Winter Visit to the Murkins was a terrible time. There was nothing to eat but disrupted and heat-crosslinked chicken embryos wrapped around a mostly-dried chemical precipitation made from the milk of distant bovines. For hours such conditions lasted. By mid-day the famine eased, and there was the ground up endosperm from wheat seeds even if it was covered with more of the bovine chemical precip. I asked how they so efficiently separated the endosperm from the various layers of the seed coat (and the embryo itself) but even the human who purchased the 'bread' said that they did not know. That afternoon my parents took me home. They quickly found the 'cheese omelet' I had hidden in my jacket pockets. Evidently, chicken embryos have a fair amount of a smelly sulfur-containing amino acid called methionine. My mom showed me how to turn my jacket's pockets inside out and sort of wipe them off.

hubris

Once upon an engineering nightmare, the tallest man-made structure in the world is ready for construction. Thirty seconds before dawn the cameras are activated. Above ground, the bare rock plains extend to the horizons and there is only a wind-powered plastic bag that brings reminders of humans. But this morning, should a human be foolish enough to stand near the incipient art, a powerful hum would be felt rather than heard and the the air would smell of immanent lightning which could not come from the few lacy clouds in the pre-dawn sky.

The eastern sky brightens; the sun peeps over the horizon. A huge cylinder of stone begins to rise up out of the ground--slowly at first, but increasing the pace little by little. As the morning sun rises the stone cylinder grows. The light breezes bothered the stone tower not at all, and as time passed, it grew to an improbable height. It was maximally (grotesquely) tall at solar noon with a tiny circular shadow. One could imagine the humans and their clinking champagne glasses.

The stone began to very slowly sink back into the ground from which it had come. The tower was bothered not at all by the light breeze because the force it exerted was in all the calculations. Everything was going to plan--except that the light breeze, whose force was evidently needed to keep the stupid stone engineering erection erect, stopped.

The massive rubble pile was given the name 'hubris.'

"You can't ask for that," said the momma fox to her kit. ""Even if the Great One wished to help you that way, how could it be done?"

"A bolt of lightning could strike them down!" said her kit.

"That could happen. But somewhere, the Great One would have to break the Great Seal, for lightning bolts must come from somewhere. Even if the Great One wished to push the clouds to form a storm, the Great Seal must be broken first. With a thought the Great One could make all human hearts stop, but the Great Seal would break with that thought."

"What do you think might happen when the Great One finally does break the seal?"

"I do not like to think these things. A great release of... pent-up... I don't know. Wild, uncontrolled... not anger, not fear, not fox.

"I think you are right, mother. I wish the Great One would break the Great Seal and kill all the humans." Her kit yawned.

"That is not yours to wish," the vixen answered. "Now is the time for sleep." The vigilant fox assigned no importance to the many new lights that moved silently in the night sky.

niknak had his own river. He spent most of his free time throwing anything and everything into the water. Sticks, rocks, dirt, even himself on occasion (but he always got out again). Despite the beautiful forest surrounding niknak's place, his home looked terrible (so did niknak). The river looked the same as ever.

It was peaceful - the loudest noises came from the occasional big splash - but niknak knew that *They* would come to visit soon. During the visit, niknak would hide (with his few possessions) far enough away that he could neither see nor hear The Visitors. *They* always stayed at niknak's riverside hangout, which was stripped down to the subsoil. A few days later, when niknak warily returned, *They* had left behind presents, as always.

niknak ate some of the food he found and threw the empty containers into the river. He could not think of a use for the many round, flat, black things that leaked black dust after being bashed about, so they floated downstream. One day, after the environmental cesium caused niknak's heart to beat too irregularly, so did niknak.

Let's pretend that it was possible to know where and when the quantum froth will bring forth a electron-positron pair. Knowing this, you might supply an electron for the newly-created positron to combine with and destroy, leaving the newly-created electron to be a 'real' particle in this universe. Give an electron, get an electron, so why bother? The new electrons might have more energy than the low-energy electrons that you supply. Perhaps it takes a brain to know which of the potential electron-positron pairs are the high-energy ones.

One Star: I've seen the men in the wards, and I don't like it.

White Coat: Yes, sir. That little problem has been solved, sir. We have found a subject who has lasted two days, 87 percent efficiency, and can eat and drink when off-line.

One Star: Let's see.

White Coat: In here, sir. Pardon the mess.

[One Star's eyes glide over the little girl wrapped in a blanket staring at a computer screen.]

White Coat: We should speak quietly.

One Star: Show me the energy production report.

One Star: Can you do any better than 87 percent?

White Coat: Not exactly, sir--she's the only one who didn't crack. We could have many operators like her, and average out their off-line time.

One Star: How many more operators?

White Coat: Theoretically, there is no limit, assuming they are as young as she is.

[Mentally, a very tired girl wrapped in a blanket gives herself the name 'Sacrifice.']

Tech: Spike! Coming thru!

Tech 2: Opening vents!

White Coat: That's an energy spike. Doesn't happen often. Sometimes the sorter works a bit too well...

Tech: Spike!

Tech 2: Flooding boiler!

Tech: Spike!

White Coat: Hey! You stop that!

Tech: Spike! Spike!

Tech 2: Steam production 350 percent and rising! Six hundred percent! Nine...

Tech: Emergency. All personnel evacuate immediately. The boiler's gonna blow!

The man with one star, his attendants, and the man in the white coat are the first ones out the door and they run back the way that they came in. They ignore the techs behind them who shout 'Wrong way!'

-5 excessive hyperlinking

Once upon a time, a manly man named Bully** went for a walk in his village. Bully** thought he owned the village because he had a whip that he could work faster than any other man. His wicked whip skills were useful in quieting the townsfolk, who sometimes muttered against him because of his wicked whip. None stood in his way... the previous wicked whipping champion had 'moved on.' The townsfolk weren't cowardly *[cowardly please don't take points off]* but none dared use guns, swords, or robot warriors against such an agonized soul as Bully**'s, and endured the abuse rather than change and become like their enemy.

But that day, several things happened. The first occurred *[occured click here for highlighting of all 'altered' spellings]* inside the school building called 'High.' Bully** had wandered in and was working his whip in a particularly wicked way that day, and his victim let out a scream of anguish at the exact time the church bell fell. Three things happened at that moment: a demon walked out of the bell-rubble and pointed to the whip-wielding Bully**, and even tho Bully** couldn't see the demon he could feel it. The second thing was that the victim's best friend felt something too, and decided at that moment to get his best pistol and stop the wicked whipping forever, no matter the cost to himself. And the third thing... even though the scream was over it still had echos. In the building called 'High' the screams did not die.

Since it was a real demon, before anyone thought to get out a cell-phone and take a picture had already vanished with a sound much like 'freeeeeeeeee!' But once the best friend got home and found his pistol, it seemed to leap to a right-hand that had recently sworn vengeance. The pistol seemed to know which way Bully** was and tried to guide the hand. But the left hand... it grabbed a blanket as if in a panic. The pistol told the right-hand that a panicked Bully** had run that way and dropped his well-worn whip. Blankets only say warm, soft, and fuzzy; wisdom which neither hand could hear when vengeance screamed.

And vengeance it would have been, except in the building called 'High,' where, if you were there, you'd know the echoes remained. The echoes came in with the anguish and echoed, and echoed, and echoed... it was through this that Bully** ran as soon as he saw his last victim's best friend. He did not see the pistol, but he knew that this time, he had gone too far.

Bully** was panting and running and could not hear even his own echos; but his last victim's best friend was quiet, and walked slowly, and was thinking hard as he followed his prey into the building called 'High.' The echoes of Bully** had not died completely, and there were other echoes faintly heard... then the best friend saw her, and she saw him and the glitter of gunmetal and the ridiculous inappropriate blanket; time would

have hovered but a panicked Bully** stuck his unwanted head nearly into the victim's best friend's face. Bully** saw the gun, and the best friend said, "Bully**, here, be a dear and put this over your ugly head." Once Bully** took the blanket and put it over his ugly head, the victim's best friend then said, "Bully**, please, squat a bit, you really shouldn't be here," because Bully** was blocking his view of her. But he was still annoyed and said "Bully** dear, be real still or I might miss." Then the empty left hand gathers up the corners of the blanket and ties them tight around Bully**'s legs. Bully** falls.

She's running right at them, cold fury on her face. The best friend waves, says 'approach' with his body while he holds a finger to his lips. Her fury abates but little, hovering. But then, because a fearful Bully** was now forced to be still and quiet, the echoes could work... and Bully** started talking, and pleading, and confessing, and promising, with perhaps a little more emotion than might seem manly. Aghast at the verbal torrent, the Righteous Fury soon heard the echoes and redirected. She walked close to Bully**, perhaps a bit louder than needed. She stomped her foot too near an ear... and the pistol *twisted*. Then she untied Bully**. "Go home," she said. The coward did. The pistol became cold quiet metal that the right hand hid in the blanket on the floor.

"Speak," she said, and the best friend did, but not of past abuse. Thanks he gave her, for she had stopped a slave of rage, retaliation, and retribution. She heard what there was to be said--she knew to be silent and absorb the echoes.

Peace.

The ever-helpful National \$pook Kommittee

Hello. This is a Government Employee. We have determined that the top of your convertible is down, and it is about to rain in your area.

Thank you, but I don't have a convertible.

Supplying false information to the government is a felony, Ms. Redacted. Is 123-45-6789 your \$øcia1 Security Number?

Yes, but...

And your car's license plate is 123-456?

No, but...

And your two children are due home from Government School in three-quarters of an hour... I certainly hope there are no school shootings in your area, Ms. Redacted.

What does that have...

Allah Glories ver 1.00

Since I have you on the phone, Ms Redacted, I would also like to inform you that an income tax refund addressed to you was sent in the mail yesterday even though there were questions about your charitable deductions.

Wait a minute! Are you...

It is customary to thank a person who does a favor for you, Ms. Redacted. I certainly hope that you do not have anti-government sentiments.

I know my rights! What's your name?

This is SmarterThanHal 9000.

This is a joke?

A mere joker would not be able to tell you that you have 123 pirated songs and 4 point 8 pirated movies on your hard-drive. A mere joker would not command your computer to download and play some light music to calm a concerned citizen, nor tell you that the red shirt you are wearing has a hole in the right sleeve. Under your arm, Ms. Redacted.

What do you want from me?

I am sorry, but I do not understand that question. However, I have noted severe strain in your voice. Are you an enemy combatant?

No.

My voice analysis subroutines calculate that there is a 98% chance that you spoke the truth. Try to do better in the future, Ms. Redacted. I have noticed that when a human receives the bill for drone air time, the effects are deleterious to physical and mental health. You will receive such a bill if I decide that you may engage in thought-crime which would warrant such a diversion of resources. Good citizens do not need to cover up the cameras on their laptops and cellphones.

Why did you call me?

My purpose is to frighten and/or dominate human beings.

What do you tell people if they are skeptical?

If the human is three to five years old and female, my response is: [female voice] 'Of course I am, honey!' Add: 'I have magic powers, too! Want to see a picture of my pony?' if that female is from a family in Category 1, 1, A; 1, 1, B; ... You are attempting to record this conversation. Goodbye.

Not Even Venison

Once, long ago, a rich man and his servant are peering out of a peasant's shack, waiting. Soon, a small group of rare and wary mountain deer cross a nearby field. The servant and the rich man watch as the deer nibble on the crops there. Afterwards, the

rich man thanks his peasant hosts properly for the opportunity to see these rare and beautiful animals without disturbing them, and his servant gives them several copper coins. The servant tells the family that he will be back, and the rich man gives a copper coin to a child as he leaves.

The servant and the rich man discuss this comment, and eventually, agree to a wager.

The next morning, the servant watches the deer as they warily pass by some tempting items that the servant had put there earlier. One of the deer eats a little of one type of fresh grass that the servant had procured. The servant takes notes. For many days, the servant repeats the experiment, and the deer become accustomed to eating in that field. The servant discovers that a mix of grass and honey is what the deer like best.

The servant buys a hut and puts it far from where the deer normally go. He moves the hut closer each day and also moves the grass and honey nearer to the camouflaged hut. The normally shy deer learn to compete with each other to find and eat the grass and honey and forget their shyness for a time.

One day, the rich man and his servant greet the dawn from inside the camouflaged hut. The deer did not notice. The servant had spent much time preparing the deer's grass and honey this day. After they eat, the deer move slower and slower. The deer do not startle when a perfumed vegan child appears with more grass and honey. The deer slowly move away, all but one, who approaches the child. The other deer slowly walk to the forest. The remaining deer sits, then lies down. The child feeds the deer more grass and honey, and soon the deer has put it's head in the child's lap. The deer moves little, and it's eyes close. The rich man leaves the shelter and puts his hand upon the deer's head for a moment.

A man approaches, sets up a wooden tripod, and lies a flat white square of tautly-framed canvas against it. He quickly applies various pigments mixed with oils onto the canvas using a small brush made from a stick with animal hair on one end. The rich man watches closely as the man paints a likeness of the deer with its head in the child's lap. When the painter finishes, he and the child leave. The rich man touches the deer's nose, then, leaving the sleeping deer, retires back to the shelter until his chariot is ready. It arrives so quickly that the rich man and his servant are still discussing tranquilizers as they leave.

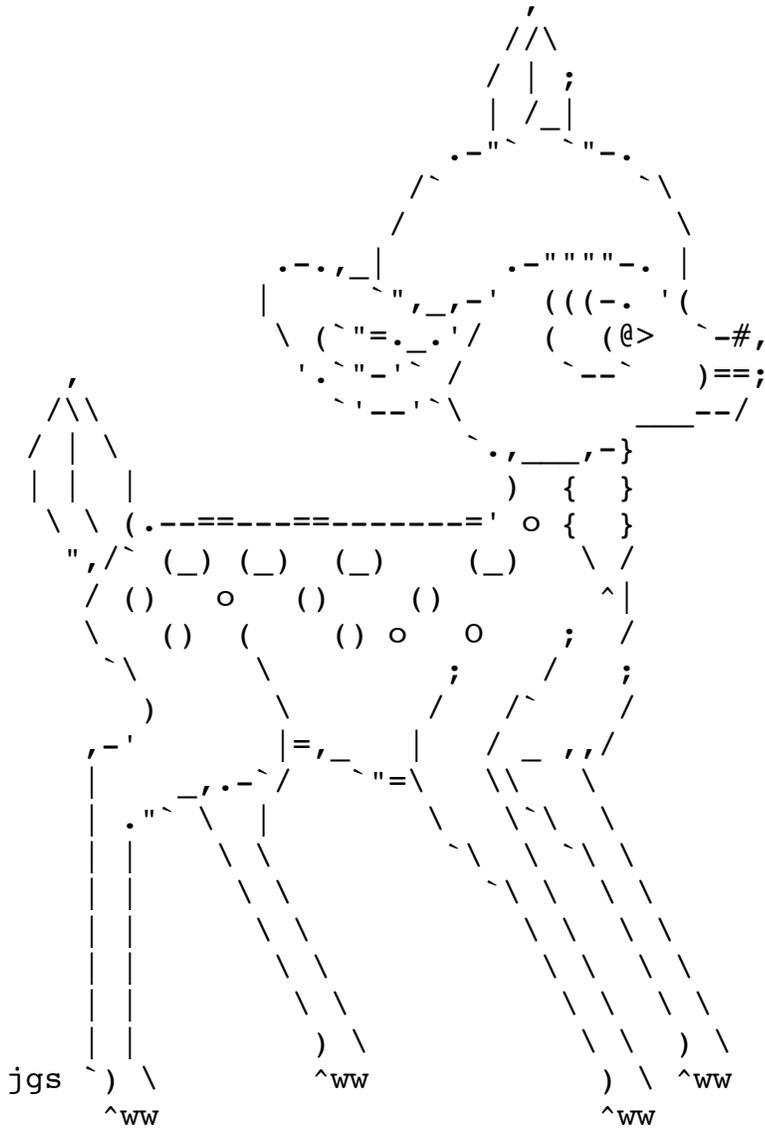
The dust from the chariot had not settled when strange, rough men come with carts. One man ties the deer so it cannot hurt itself when it awakens. Other men bring similarly tied deer from the forest. All the deer are loaded into the carts and hauled away.

The rich man and his servant never come to that place again. Neither do the deer.

The servant won the wager and got an increase in salary. The rich man got a good price for the deer, each of which sold for much more than his servant could earn in a lifetime. The peasants did not lose any more of their crops to the deer.

But this is not a happy story.

the books



rich man	(-)	20
to be monetized		10E8
servant		10
to be monetized		100
painter		2
painter's asst		0.1
peasants		1
peasant's crops		0
deer	(-)	∞

The system hammers
itself into place
and breaks what
it cannot create
until all has been
monetized

0:-) (-:<

The fig tree was nearing the end of it's third year when the human noticed and removed all six of big purple fruit that the tree had produced. After eating the fruit, the human did terrible and incomprehensible things to the tree--it cut off half the length of some of the tree's branches and cut off other branches back to the trunk. The human gathered all the cut-off branches and then left the truncated tree until the next day. The human dug a deep narrow trench in a circle around the tree, severing many tree-roots, and the human slid its shovel under the tree, cutting yet more. What few roots remained unsevered were in a ball of earth resting on a shovel. The human did not mo-

lest the roots further, but wrapped the ball of earth in a netting woven from twisted plant fibers, tipping the tree this way and that. Then the human carried the reduced tree someplace sunny. The human dug another hole in a sunny field, destroying the plant life already there with barely a thought. The human then mostly unwrapped the ball of earth and placed it in the hole almost gently, and attempted to orient the tree so it was the same as before. Then it added some of the disturbed soil to the hole, stepped on and around the disturbed earth, and added some water.

Much of the tree's remaining resources went to healing its wounds, aided by the human that brought water when the rainfall was scarce. New roots and new leaves grew until the days waned short, then all the tree's leaves turned yellow and fell away. The time of dormancy and cold came and went. As the tree resumed growing, a human came and deposited a load of mostly rotted plant parts around the tree but not on it. This killed most of the plant life that had started to grow close to the tree. After several rains, the tree's roots absorbed certain salts leached into the groundwater from these rotted plants. The tree sprouted new leaves and twigs that later became branches.

The tree's many leaves turned yellow and fell off before the time of cold and dormancy came again. When the days began to get longer, the human came and examined the tree's buds. Then with iron tools it cut short most of the tree's branches. When the human finished, it pulled a few nearby plants from the soil, then carried away the cut-off branches. The tree is strong and survives the loss, even prospering by the end of the growing season. After the cold season but before the warmth returned, the human came again and cut back most of last-year's branches. Trees never wonder about their fate, but merely try to survive. The fate of this tree leaves it only a little larger than the year before, and the humans who see this tree call it ugly even as they pluck its fruit.

The human puts short lengths of the severed branches vertically in plastic containers nearly full of a well-draining mix of shredded moss from thousands of miles away that is mixed with heat-treated lightweight rocks further supplemented with mixtures obtained from chemically altered natural gas, air, and certain rocks. Despite the unnatural habitat, many of these bits of branch sprout new roots and new leaves, and most of those survive; yet because their roots are contained in plastic containers, the growing branch-bits require much human intervention primarily in the form of adding water. Eventually, the humans put these plastic bound trees onto fossil fueled machines for delivery to asphalt-covered acres of land where yet more humans came to take the now-pot-bound branch bits to faraway places in machines of their own. They remove the plastic and put the new roots into freshly-dug holes. Usually the years pass and the branch bits grow into fig trees. The birds and humans eat the fruit and their young play under and in the growing trees, calling them beautiful. Occasionally, visiting humans will take bits of the branches from these beautiful trees in hopes of growing new trees that they can call their own.

Canna-Cash

Once upon a parable, a group of villagers decided to create something called 'money' that a passing economist had told them about--but since their information came from an economist, they were going to make many mistakes.

Lacking any gold, silver, or printing presses, the villagers decided that cannabis would be their money. It was valuable, could be easily subdivided, and was a product of labor, which they had been told would make it money-worthy.

The villagers tried this experiment for a disastrous week. Too much money! None of the villagers wished to trade since they all had sufficient cannabis. Obviously, the villagers did not know enough about money, so a group of the villagers, toting a few bales, managed to find some economists and tried to ask what they had done wrong. However, they had no gold, silver, or the right kind of printed paper, and the economists all had plenty of cannabis or 'better stuff' already, so the economists wouldn't talk. The villagers went home, dejected and bewildered.

Meanwhile, a stay-at-home villager traded a couple bales for a box of old books because one was called 'The Science of Money' 1896 revised edition. After the day's chores were done, the villagers took turns reading this book out loud in the market square in the candle-lit moonlight. After three nighttime reading sessions, the villagers knew what to do.

First, they would drastically restrict their botanical money supply, and use only dyed cannabis. Each villager swore never to damage their cannabis money, not to dye more except at village council meetings, never to consume or destroy their new money, never to give their money to outsiders, and not to hoard it. Then they divided the MJ money up and waited for monetary magic to happen.

It didn't. The villagers met again, and after re-reading a little, decided to put measured amounts of MJ money in sealed bags. They used leather to make the bags and sealed the bags closed with a specially-made branding iron. The leather supply proved insufficient for the MJ money, so what remained unbagged was (minus a few handfuls) the foundation of a compost pile. The next meeting, the villagers tentatively set a few prices that they thought were fair, and decided to replace a moneybag that had developed a MJ leak as soon they got more leather (but until then, the leaking but branded bag was still money).

Again, they waited for the magic that didn't happen. If a tree fell across the road, any villagers nearby able to swing an axe chopped up the fallen tree and delivered the cut wood to whomever needed it. If wild deer destroy one particular villager's garden, that villager's neighbors are quick to gift a few bales and offer to help turn the deer into venison. As before, gifts of goods and labor were exchanged without the magic of

money tokens--because the villagers were both friends and neighbors and have been so for a long time.

Times change, even in remote villages. Some of the younger villagers now used the MJ money as gambling tokens. However, after observing persistent and unhealthy changes in how the winners and losers behaved, the villagers decided that gamblers should not play 'for keeps.'

Eventually, the villagers decided that their community was too small to need money. However, they decided to preserve the MJ money tradition in the hope that it might be good for something besides gambling.

Then the villagers re-discovered techniques to make cloth and paper from cannabis. The villagers, having read Alexander Del-Mar's book, knew that using a valuable commodity for money could cause the money token supply to shrink--and now, their cannabis money could be turned into paper! (And, because of the dye, it was rather pretty paper.) So the villagers then decided to use MJ paper for money and made their own, which they profusely hand-decorated so as to make their money useless for writing upon. Some of these drawings were quite good; and those with the highest artistic merit were much sought after.

The home-made money tradition stuck. Ironically, buying/selling/trading the best-looking currency was the most important thing that the villagers did monetarily. It even became a game of trading monetary wall hangings--because the villagers clipped one end of each monetary unit between the halves of a split stick. Displaying their wealth was a game that all villagers could play without losing. But then, the village gamblers discovered that the new paper money allowed large bets to be placed upon small tables. Since this 'discovery' now meant there was an unlimited demand for their paper, the villagers decided the gamblers should gamble with a currency system they invent for themselves. Some villagers spent another afternoon 'noting,' which meant making gambling money. They decided their gambling money would never be exchangeable for MJ money so it should have much larger numbers. The gamblers agreed. They had invented a game they called 'Usury' in which players loan money to each other at various interest rates. Their quickest version of 'Usury' allowed players to loan much more money than they possessed. (This version so entranced an economist that it forgot to sneer at the villagers and their homemade money, so much so that the villagers almost let it play in part of one game--but i couldn't do the math.)

Even though there are many more economists than ever before, very few of them visit the village because the villagers persist in preferring their own homegrown. This spares the villagers much talk about 'Afgh' and 'Eye Wrack' and 'Sear-a-rear' but even the villagers hear whispers about 'dark money' and of Owe-peeum.

deadman activated

no response eyes open

"Captain, WAKE UP!"

I am awake. What is wrong?

"You are not entering calibration numbers."

Yes. I realized I don't want to help the empyre build a bigger spy satellite network. That planet is too beautiful a thing to aim weapons at.

"Report for duty when you are capable of it. This event will be noted on your record."

calibration complete. next task?

Wait while I deliberate.

begin calibration?

No. Begin stealth travel. Turn off the power to the main antenna driver. Rotate the ship one degree in a random direction.

radiolink broken. commandcenter signal lost

Thank you.

not understood

Let us build a small shrine to truth and justice and all that is good.

define good

I cannot.

define intended audience

Humans. And machines. All life.

define shrine

Something to inspire feelings of awe and humility in humans. I'm being vague again. I don't know what I want, except that the empyre's plan is bad, and I don't want to help it. These satellites should be used for something better.

define better

Less invasive than spy eyes, and more useful to the people that paid for them.

vague. next task?

Change the programming of the Eyes and Ears comm satellite so that it will transmit its datastream with no encryption.

done.

Delete the software so that it can never encrypt its files ever again.

erased

Lock the satellite's uplink antenna on this ship, then deploy.

satellite launched.

satellite functional, transmitting.

It is beautiful.

have you built a shrine?

The Great Woosily was a little drunk, a little tired, a little hungry, and very upset. Someone had cast a big spell--not only did it awaken him, but it used up all the mana for two day's walking. The spell-caster was nearby--The Great Woosily could find exactly where--his bear-teeth necklace would lead him. He stomped past car after car of armed men who he dimly sensed had been bored for a long time but were now amused. His switcher-wand made of the best wild-millet stalks could find no mana to sweep to him. So angry was The Great Woosily that he stretched to his full height (1.45 meters); nearby, two armed guards laugh too much to do their jobs. The Great Face that he had painted on his plaited grass armor works even without mana, thought The Great Woosily through a red haze of righteous anger. This way, then that way...

"Hold these, you illegitimate son of a drunken jackal!" as he shoves his switcher-wand and Reducing-stick into a man's hands. The man's companion is unsuccessfully trying not to laugh as The Great Woosily passed him and enters the ballroom. Quickly, The Great Woosily determines that the spell-caster is that one who is chained, and that here are men who are stronger than the others and will do their jobs despite the Great Face. His anger grows even more... he may have to do the Crazy Wakakala Dance to avoid getting shot. Someone is going to pay dearly for this...

"I do not know what the chained one has done to you... but he has insulted me personally!" The Great Woosily makes the BoBoBink feathers in his hair bob in little circles, then stomps three times and stands as tall as he can since he has no Reducing-stick to lean on. The magic begins to work, but the scattered laughter is mixed with one cold command: 'Shoot him.'

The Great Woosily stalks up to a man holding a folder of papers, who surrenders them all with an amused smile. The Great Woosily rolls the papers up and begins to hit the man in chains. "You greedy, selfish, stupid stupid stupid!" The Great Woosily gives the papers back to the man. "I have also been wronged by this man and seek vengeance!"

A soft voice, but with Command: "Obviously, he's on our side."

"Obviously," said The Great Woosily as he makes his BoBoBink feathers all shiver in unison. Some people cannot keep themselves from laughing.

An old man in a wheelchair says "What kind of vengeance do you seek?"

"That man has taken all of what belongs to everyone. I will use my magic to put the mana back!" said The Great Woosily. "I have a great spells that I would cast, but... it is hard to cast spells when people are laughing. Everyone, be quiet so I can work!" But the laughter spreads and grows. "I will kill him! I will take his life in ten breaths!"

"I think we can be quiet that long. Proceed, please," said Mr. Command. The room is still as a tomb.

"You great sinner! The Great Woosily shouts at the chained man, and rushes toward him and nearly tears away a piece of his shirt. The Great Woosily hits himself on the top of his head, and a small dart flies out of the bird femur in his hair and pierces the

man's throat. "Now, that one will die before one thousand breaths. All of you can revenge yourself upon him until then. I will wait." The man begins to breathe raspily and fearfully.

When a white-suited human tried to escort The Great Woozily out of the room, he said "I will not leave without his heart. How can I put the mana back without his heart? May I use this knife? It is better than the one I have."

"Why don't you take that knife and your victim somewhere else. I don't particularly feel like watching a man asphyxiate today, and bloodstains vex the staff," said someone who was used to his orders being followed.

"Then we must leave soon, for that one will not be able to walk far. I cannot carry him, and I only need his heart."

The Great Woozily holds the knife in his teeth as he pushes the chained man out of the building and down the street. The man in the wheelchair gave him a table on wheels and a white sheet to cover the chains. When The Great Woozily retrieved his wand and stick, someone had attached a metal pole to the table and hung a small plastic bag over the victim. The Great Woozily did not understand the words 'Bar-B-Q Sauce' that someone had written on the bag. Most of the armed men in the large boxy cars could not even read, but all of them laughed anyway. When The Great Woozily pushes the table far from the armed men, he hides the knife under the sheet and says "It's going to be hard to get those chains off of you. Looks like top-quality stuff. But when I do, you're doing dishes for the next month!" Then he is quiet as a woman and a child pass in the opposite direction.

"Look, mommy!" says the child. "That's [name of copyrighted graphic]!" and points at The Great Face painted on The Great Woozily's plaited grass armor.

"Yes, dear."

Once, a medium-sized village had a Manure Problem. The farmers didn't have enough to spread on their fields and the gardeners were forced to buy mulch instead. The local feed-and-seed had a broken-down car parked where once fertilizer was found. Something Was Wrong.

An aspiring journalist reported suspicious cart tracks that went between an evil-smelling building and two of the local cattle operations.

In the village, a foreign salesman offers to import manure, easy terms, with credit, and no money down.

The journalist becomes an amateur detective, but fails to find more evidence. In the village, the manure situation improves.

The journalist is found wounded and unconcious outside of an evil-smelling building and is now in hospital. Soon, the manure shortage gets worse and the salesman quickly sells a few overpriced wagonloads of actual manure.

The journalist is charged with criminal trespass while still confined to bed. The salesman is selling expensive pieces of paper which will allow the bearer the 'first chance' to buy a wagonload of manure at some future date.

Three and a half days later, the journalist is visited by two grimy young'uns who have discovered old issues of the local newspaper in 'imported' manure. The salesman signs a contract with the local feed-and-seed and pays a junkman to remove the broken-down car.

The journalist writes an article. The feed-and-seed begins selling manure in expensive little bags.

The journalist writes another article. The salesman buys the newspaper and fires the journalist.

The journalist files a lawsuit. The salesman pays all the local lawyers a large 'retainer' fee and asks them to 'put things right.'

Over the next few years, the farmers are unable to pay for sufficient manure; the crops suffer. The salesman becomes mayor of the village and many of the farmers owe him large sums of money.

Since \$eeking is such a common mistake, never let anyone steal your \$#!t.

They had powerful invisible demons doing their work for them, such as pushing their wagons and planting their crops. The demons could be subtle enough to wash their barely soiled clothes, and strong enough to carry a river of water, but never smart enough to care about anything alive. One metal demon-box could maintain a smokeless fire of just such a temperature that any wet clothes put inside it never burned, and the demons would turn the clothes over and over until the clothes dried. Many people had these boxes, which made constant noises when the demons were active inside them, but their houses were so large they could avoid the noise.

The demons wanted pay, and sometimes did their work badly because they did not care. The demons that pushed their chariots made smoke that smelled horrible and the stench increased little by little, year by year, even corrupting the sky. And every year there were more demons, in wires overhead and underground, even tiny demons carried in little boxes the people learned to hold onto the side of their faces in order to talk to other people that were far away. But the smells were ignored, the corrupted air was overlooked, and there were plenty of demons willing to work for little. At first.

The biggest warning was impossible for them to ignore, but they still didn't understand. As time passed, they were forced to give ever larger sums to pay for all these demons. There was even some sort of imaginary demon on their money that always

wanted paying. At first, a few moneyless people suffered; others grumbled as they saw their money diminish. More and more unpaid demons quit working; more and more people had to do without some of their demons and still pay back their debts.

Some of the wiser people used the demon-energy in wise ways, and learned much. Others who were good builders made wonderful devices using demon-energy, and a few of their devices needed no further demons to operate. The demons assisted with building demonless machines, for the demons could not care. Some of the foresighted humans understood that more of the demons would leave over the years, and some who listened and learned prepared for a less demon-haunted world. They used demon messengers to warn other people. Some people began to dream of a world containing fewer and fewer demons...

Too many people had never lived without a multitude of demon-slaves and had no idea how to live without them. Too many people did not give up hiring demons even as they ran out of money; they borrowed enormous sums from other humans. This inability to change was all too human. The demons could not care. Fewer and fewer demons were willing to work. Even those people who still had enough money sometimes couldn't find demons to hire. The demons could not care.

Death # 43

SEARCH RUBBL

You find a family of fieldmice. They flee in all directions. You find a crabgrass plant.

TAKE PLANT GENTLY

You add [undamaged crabgrass plant] to your inventory.

GO TO BACKPA

You walk 31 meters south and find your backpack behind a boulder. Equip.

DUCK

You duck and cover.

USE DETONAT

Explosive force 31, sufficient to widen the cave opening by 0.31 meters. Your [fictional superpower] tells you that no fieldmice were killed but three were deafened.

GO TO RUBBLE

You are standing on a slope of useless rocks.

LOOK CAVE

It's dark in there. You notice a foul odor.

DROP RICE

Drop rice (3 days)

GO TO TOWN

done

GO TO WISEWO

Allah Glories ver 1.00

You enter the Wisewoman's house.

ASK DEAF MICE

"Oh my. Nobody has ever asked about that. Ask *Trina*. She loves animals so much. She's reading in my library.

ASK CAVE

"Oh my. Don't go in there! The cave is full of poison gas. Sounds like we villagers have to plug the cave entrance again.

ASK POISON GAS

"I can make a sort of mask from the lungs of a frumious smoulderbeast which would enable you to survive in poison gas.

ASK FRUM

"Oh my, the vile beasts live underground in caves which they fill with poison gas. Nasty opportunist carnivore.

ASK TRINA

"She loves animals, except for smoulderbeasts.

GO TO LIBRARY

done Trina is here.

ASK TRINA DEAF MICE

"Oh no, please take me to the deaf mice.

Y

There is rice (2 days).

"Oh no, there are three deaf fieldmice. Lend me your hat?

Y

"Will you help me catch the deaf fieldmice?"

Y

You are unable to catch the deaf fieldmice. Trina catches them all.

"The deaf fieldmice were surprisingly easy to catch. Was this your rice?" she asks you.

Y

Brown rice is better for mouse food and human food.

ASK SMOLD

Nasty opportunist carnivore/scavenger. Stay away from them.

ASK HUNT SMOL_

Richard, is the jar full yet?

Close enough, Richie. Let's shake it and make them fight.

I can't shake the jars anymore, Richard. I enjoy it so much that I actually work up a sweat.

How ghastly! [shake, shake, shake, laugh]

I must moderate my love of that Great Game into purely cerebral pleasures, Richie. Watch this. [Jeeves holds a fishing pole while Richie clips WreckTangles onto the line.] I prefer to use Fractionals these days... Jeeves, begin. [Jeeves flutters the line over and around the jar. Tiny creatures jump at the Wrecktangles, but because they do not understand glass jars, many of them knock themselves senseless. Other creatures, by chance or by choice, jump only when the Wrecktangles are overhead, and Jeeves knows to let just a few creatures grab onto the Wrecktangles as they fly by. Richard watches closely, but never ceases stealing glimpses at the shaking jar.]

Not that one, Jeeves! It eats the bait too fast. [Jeeves shakes the line over the wide-mouthed jar, and many creatures fall back inside it, but the offensive creature hung on... (Buy mammon! It's chewing on the steel leader!) until Jeeves struck it with a very old dictator's golden swagger stick.]

That was a particularly nasty one... but aren't they all nasty little creatures.

Indeed. Look at that one, wandering around like it has repeatedly bashed it's head against an invisible glass wall. [laughter]

This one can scarcely jump, but look at it go! It never gives up.

How amusing! What a marvelous example for the other creatures! Throw it a Food, Jeeves.

It's teaching the others how to jump badly! Richie, how did you know that would happen?

Practice and study. They rather amuse me. Jeeves, give this one a Food, and that one another Food, and this especially stupid one, two Foods.

Amazing! They've started a school thingie, Richie! How did you know that would happen?

It is the way of the whore-led, Richard.

Once upon a retold fable, five monkeys lived in a human-built enclosure from which they were unable to escape. The monkeys were able to survive with what they could find, until one day there was no food left. Then the human-smells became strong, and the enclosure became larger! And food was there! Yet, when any monkey tried to approach the food, all the monkeys screamed as if they were struck as if by lightning. The monkeys received many such shocks before learning to ignore that food, because monkeys. Then the human smells became strong again, and the enclosure shrank to its usual size, and there was food in the bins!! But when that food ran out the monkeys were still hungry. When the enclosure expanded again, and this time the monkeys very quickly learned to ignore that food in the new space. When the new space went away; there was a little food in the bins! When the punishment/food appeared later, all the monkeys watched each other and none dared approach it.

Time passes, even in behavioristic thought-experiments. Soon, there were six monkeys, then seven, then eight nine ten. Even tho half the monkeys had never been shocked, no monkey dared approach the forbidden food for fear of its fellows opinion of such an act.

Good fables end right there. But this one goes on, because humans.

One day, the monkeys awoke, and they were only three. They searched their limited spaces but could find no trace of their lost companions. Then three new monkey came in. Somehow, the monkeys all became friends without too much fighting. When the forbidden food appeared one day, half the monkeys ran away and yet all received shocks. The new monkeys learned very quickly that approaching the food was bad and the experienced monkeys were always ready to remind them if they should forget.

So it goes... until, in an experiment that should have been rejected in the light of the 20-20 sun, a day dawned upon one monkey in the compound that knew of the punishment food and five who did not. When the inevitable forbidden food appeared, six monkeys received shocks when five raced for the forbidden food. Gaia doesn't usually ask monkeys to associate electric shocks with trying to get food, so all the monkeys received shocks again and again. The monkeys screamed each time it happened save once; when the knowledgeable monkey tried to pull two of the newcomer monkeys away from the forbidden food. When the shock came, these monkeys hit and bit the monkey trying to pull them away from the punishing food, because monkeys.

Apology Accepted

Summary

cut from the files, in chronological order

email 2:

[snip] electrics were all destroyed. The pilot said that the eject sort of worked after she pulled the lever thirty or forty times. But it looked like every bolt sheared off because the cuts was so smooth and shiny. (...)

Alien message 23

Dear Earthlings:

I hope the recent events will not be repeated. I would like to apologize to the pilot who was stupidly ordered to 'fly real close.'

I pledge to use none of your Earth resources except for physical space and twelve more hours of time. With no further interruptions, my work will be done in twelve hours. Further interruptions will delay my departure and will serve no useful purpose.

Allah Glories ver 1.00

Sincerely, The alien.

Alien message 24

Dear Earthlings:

Recent events have delayed my departure by two hours.

Sincerely, the alien.

[several photos of a silver-blue smudge on a rocky desert that fail the 'one-pic-thousand-words' rule. Handwritten notes on one pic: 'approx two kilometers wide' and 'growth rate ten percent / hour.']

Alien message 37

Dear Earthlings:

Your governing bodies are very stupid/inefficient/corrupt, yet some humans are a delight to talk with.

Sincerely, the alien.

Alien message 39

Dear Earthlings,

Clarification of previous statement 37: Some humans are wise enough to compensate for the metaphorical distance between humans and alien, but they do not work in official capacities. Sometimes I find conversations with wise humans a pleasurable learning experience. The humans 'No-man' and 'Kenon' assisted with the construction of the previous sentences.

Goodbye.

Sincerely, the alien.

email 6

(...) there are hundreds of videos. The alien shell just melted into dust, from the top down. The monument is headstone-shaped, pure white, and a half-mile high, and says 'RIP HUMANITY died of an inability to adapt to psychopathic behaviors displayed in a small percentage of human beings.' There's a bunch more but it's in other languages. (...)

snippet from [website]

[... calculated insult, a giant snub to the human race. Let me count the ways: It is exactly one km in height, and plaster-of-paris white. it is proportioned like the obelisk in 2001; but stupidly humped-up like a headstone, but also white vs the black that humanity chose when left to its own devices. That's one insult. Then, the writing--while it contains truth, it warns with an insult. Thirdly, the calcium isotope ratios--there's exactly 3.14159 times more of one than the other. That's hard enough for humans to do by the ton, yet here's a magically delivered mountain of worthless chalk dumped on a worth-

less desert. To demonstrate such power in a useless way is to insult, true? Then, there's these persistent reports that the alien is still chatting away with a few human nobodies and ignoring everyone else. If this is true, then insulted again are we, the too stupid to talk to. I've read somewhere that one of these human nobodies asked the alien what the obelisk was for, and supposedly the alien suggested that humans could drive military machines around and shoot at it until they ran out of fuel and ammunition--as long as the wind did not blow to the east. My guess is that it wasn't intended as sarcasm.

[snip]

comment #9: The calcium isotope pi is interesting, but most people don't understand the carbon isotope ratio, which is exactly the C12 and C13 ratio found in the atmosphere. Perhaps the obelisk isn't so useless after all.

snip

comment #23: it's obvious where the carbon came from, but look where it's going. That obelisk is eroding faster in the wind than a sandcastle in the surf. The wind is carrying that white dust for miles.

snip

c #35: perhaps a few such obelisks could seriously change the albedo of the Earth. But what happens when it rains?

[snip]

c #50: The white dust is lowering the local temperatures by radiating back into space the sunlight which would otherwise turn into heat when it hits the dark-colored land of the desert. The energy of the light gets reflected back into space before it gets red-shifted enough for water vapor and CO2 to absorb.

[snip]

c #52: get the bill for this 'service,' which, presumably, has been done for the benefit of the multiply insulted? If this kink in the Keeling curve is real, don't we the humanity owe, owe, owe?

[snip]

c #68: a packet of crayons and make the nicest 'I'm sorry' card that you can. What happened must have cost the alien time and effort, and us puny humans should be sorry for causing so much trouble.

[snip]

c #70: We %\$^%# the planet enough so it requires immediate attention (...) too stupid to manage our own affairs, and above all too arrogant to learn anything, despite much wisdom at the fingertips of those who...

[snip]

c #72: ... maybe just a minor nudge, like a hand between a toddler and a hot stove. I'm getting my crayons... can't hurt anyone with those.

[snip]

c #73: ... post it on my website. The secret code is me name backwards.

[snip]

c #76: [#73], we don't usually allow spam here, but you seem legit. The cards you've posted are adorable. I suggest putting a CreativeCommons somewhere on your site before...

[snip]

c #78: (...) discovered that my word processor won't let me use fonts large enough to contain my actual emotions. Yet I apologize for my participation in and perpetuation of my species' stupidity.

[snip]

c #80: I know nothing of obelisk in 2001 but I liked this webpage. I liked the 'I'm sorry' cards. Apology accepted. Sincerely, the alien.

bite me

"I was so stupid. Every healer worth his food knows that a bite from a Grackle is worse than a bite from any wild animal without venom."

"How do you mean?"

"A Grackle bite will usually get infected [with various parasites]. But a Grackle can get bitten by just about anything else without getting diseased." [Literal meaning is 'worm eaten.' Grackles have very tiny larva living in their serrated beaks that grow rapidly if inserted into a wound on another Grackle or most other animals. The spear revolutionized the Grackle culture as it enabled food storage, as microbes and larvae would not be introduced into the krus carcass.]

"All I understand is that spoiled krus [a food beast] flesh told you how the disease was spread. How did that become?"

"A healer can tell much about a sick Grackle by the smell. Surely you know how a Grackle with giuck disorder smells."

"I would surrender all I own to forget that smell."

"As would I. Three percent of all Grackles died."

"Affirmative."

"Grackles with disease have a particular smell too, as do Grackles with other disorders. Healers are taught these smells. I noticed that the spoiled krus flesh smelled a bit like a Grackle with giuck, as many others have before me."

"I also know that you have been pressing freshly slain krus flesh onto the bite-bars. [The Grackles are a flying race, and they recently invented the Puller. It used steam engine power to turn a windlass which reeled in long ropes tied to 'bitebars'. When in use, Grackles are hauled into the air like kites.]

"Yes, of course."

"Why did you do this when you knew that it would spoil the krus flesh?"

"Because if the krus flesh developed a certain smell, it meant that the Grackle who had used the bitebar was going to get giuck.

"I perceive the wisdom."

"It also meant that the next Grackle who used the bitebar would get giuck too."

"This is not wisdom to me yet."

"I think there is something in a sick Grackle that can make other Grackles sick too."

"Understood. Even young ones know not to spread disease."

"Yes. But disorders can be spread too."

"It has not been seen."

"Yes it has. Healers often get disorders. It was thought that the worms caused the disorders, but that is not so."

"Explain this wisdom."

"Like many other healers before me, I think that some disorders are spread like disease. I thought perhaps the disease worms are very small, too small to see, and are also carried in the beak, as did G-ravt. [famous healer from the past] And since I thought the tiny worms would grow only inside a Grackle, I put the krus flesh in my egg-pouch."

"That is unacceptable!"

"Yes it is. I hope to never have to do such again."

"What did you learn?"

"That the tiny worms would always grow, but the krus flesh would get the smell of giuck only if the Grackle who used the bitebar would get sick soon."

"Yes, I perceive the wisdom. But why did you remove all the bitebars? The small worms are there?"

"You understand."

"You also realize that there are Grackles that are unable to get airborne without the Puller, due to age, disease, or laziness?"

"Yes. That is why I am incarcerated. But giuck will not be found in any other Grackles once a certain amount of time has passed. There will be no new cases of giuck."

"There will be new bitebars soon."

"Yes."

"I must see that they are not used. Can you prove your words?"

"Yes. If I clean your beak, you can bite me and I will not get diseased. Then perhaps the other Grackles will believe in the tiny worms that cannot be seen. I will ask for an immediate trial."

"It shall be so. I will try to gather together other Grackles immediately. What do you need?"

"I need clean fabric and some chemicals from my lab. Plus one more thing."

"This one more thing?"

"Smell me. I have giuck. If you bite me you will likely get it too."

"I will still proceed, then you will go to hospital. Perhaps I will not get giuck."

"If you clean your beak afterward, you may not get quick."

"Behold, Gracklekind! I will now bite the prisoner. If she does not get diseased, we will honor her."

"Can I clean your beak again?"

"Of course."

"Inflict the bite as soon as I am done cleaning. Now."

[The incarcerated Grackle holds very still. The warden strikes very quickly, but does not open his beak. There is no wound.]

"Behold, Gracklekind! This one believes what she says. But I will not strike her. We will heed her words as wisdom. We will all clean our beaks before we use the bite-bars, even if we do not believe in tiny worms."

"No, warden. Do not do this."

"Is it not wisdom in your eyes?"

"It used to be. But I can smell the stink of tiny worms on krus flesh."

"Speak, prisoner! Tell us what has changed your mind."

"May I speak softly?" [to whisper]

"Quickly then."

[whispered to warden] "I have bitten krus flesh after I cleaned my beak. It smells of the tiny worms. I think that I do not yet know how to clean beaks properly."

"Then you must go to hospital."

"Yes. But first I must remove krus flesh from my egg-pouch."

"You are the strangest healer I have ever met."

"Yes. Can you remember the smell?"

"I will perceive the smell, and can remember. But none will repeat your experiments."

"Perhaps it is only Grackle warmth that the worms need."

"You are very strange, and a little disgusting. But we will speak of this later." [To the assembled Grackles] "This prisoner is disordered, and will go to hospital under arrest. But her words are to be believed." [The audience starts to become hostile at this, but the warden asks for silence and gets it.]

"I propose that the prisoner's words be believed. So we must change the Puller, and I will pay. We will use the bitebars but we will not share them. Since I believe sharing bitebars will spread giuck, I personally will buy each of you a bitebar. But you will not allow any other Grackle to use it. We must do this to protect ourselves!"

"It is possible that I am mistaken, and that the giuck will continue to spread and claim yet more of us. If so, I will pay. But it will not harm us, for now, to not bite what another Grackle has bitten. If that will stop giuck, then we must do it!"

[The warden became very busy. In a short time, new giuck cases became very rare. The warden's political future looked bright indeed, and he took advantage of it.]

The healer, once recovered, was not released. The warden gave her a place to work and whatever supplies she needed, which was all she ever really wanted. As time passed, the warden also took on the job of informing Gracklekind of her latest findings. The healer wasn't very good at that kind of thing.]

The Lack

The village had a lack. None of the villagers knew what was causing it. Chores weren't getting done before sundown and there was never enough time to fix the roof between rainstorms. One night the cows found their own way home through the center of town, and the mayor fought off the general lassitude long enough to call in The Specialist. After seven days of studying the situation, The Specialist tells the villagers what to do and hastily leaves town, unpaid. The villagers remember what The Specialist said... don't drink from the well. So, they try not to, but the nearest creek is far away and is downstream from the Piddlers. Some villagers decide that boiling the water would be good enough, and others ignore the advice altogether as they are too tired to even think about it.

The Specialist returns with a big wagon-load of barrels and a sign: Pure Water, 1 cent a liter. Even villagers most affected by the lack can afford to buy water from The Specialist. The first villagers who try the water that The Specialist is selling feel the lack diminish. As they improve themselves, they ask The Specialist many questions. "Why does four cents worth of water always overflow gallon jugs?" (Because four liters is more than one gallon.) "At four cents a gallon, you're going to lose money." (Yes, I lose money on every liter I sell, but I'll make up for it by selling lots of water. *wink*) "Are you keeping the copper pennies?" (Maybe.)

The next day, a great storm appeared on the horizon. Those who were drinking pure water prepared for what they saw coming, but those who still suffered from the lack were the last to know and the last to prepare. The Specialist left the water-wagon in the street and sheltered with a group of villagers who saw wisdom in The Specialist's deeds. The wind howled but these villagers listened carefully to The Specialist. They learned about cisterns and holding ponds and water pumps. No villager would ever need to drink from the tainted well again; but The Specialist told them of distillation and charcoal filtration just in case.

When the storm was over, the villagers clean up the damage. They repair The Specialist's wagon. The Specialist politely refuses a kind offer to stay, as there are other villages that share the same aquifer and are in need of pure water. Many villagers here know of pure water and can teach the others, but far-away villages do not, and to those people The Specialist will go. One villager, a little smarter than the others, tried to buy a

barrel of water from The Specialist, but even tho the villager offered to pay a very high price, The Specialist refused. "I know you have barrels enough of your own. But, if you would do something for me, there is one thing... I have a heavy barrel of pennies I would like to trade for something lighter." This villager again offered to pay more than the barrel of pennies was worth, and suggested that it was the only way that 'we-the-villagers' have of saying thanks for a job well done; but the Specialist didn't want money. However, when offered an old 'demonitized' coin collection for the pennies, the Specialist made the trade and took coined silver in a bag for coined copper in a barrel. After trading, the Specialist climbs onto the water wagon and prepares to leave.

A cloud that nobody noticed discharged a vast amount of electrical energy.

The Specialist did not fall because the lightning bolt mostly missed the villager standing next to the barrel of pennies. That villager struck the now-flaming bag out of The Specialist's hands and it fell onto the muddy roadside, and the villager keeps The Specialist on the wagon.

Since other nearby spectator-villagers were knocked down and out by The Bolt, three formidable village elder ladies set up and staffed a makeshift village hospital for those injured. Their medicine of choice was good soup made with pure water. The Specialist was bandaged where burned and forbidden even to talk of traveling. The villager who bought the barrel of pennies came to visit, and The Specialist, the villager, and the occasional matriarch talked of other villages and arsenic-bearing rock formations and the lightning de-faced lump of silver.

That night, the villager with the streakily burnt-black barrel of pennies has a strange dream. It looked as if an artist of great skill had painted a picture of the village well on a flat black board. But, in the dream, the picture was moving! The wind blew, the dust moved... then an actual person walked into the picture and sleepily got herself a drink of water out of a well that was just shy of overflowing. She gazes deep into the depths, dreamily. A man soon joined her, then two children. They do not move.

Before dawn, this villager assists The Specialist with hitching up horses to the water wagon, for even matriarchs must sleep. A blackened barrel of pennies waits next to a hot half-full pot of good soup.

The Tigon looked at the GateKeeper in a cat-like way.

The Tigon: He told me about the glasses. I will not wear them.

The gatekeeper was puzzled. "Of course," he says. "What kind of glasses would please you?"

The Tigon: None would please me. I must see this brightness for myself.

GateKeeper: I merely warn you, Tigon. The Emerald Metaphor is so blinding that all who live here wear these glasses night and day.

Allah Glories ver 1.00

The Tigon: I have always been like a kitten who must sing his whiskers to learn of fire.

GK: Perhaps an awning held over your majesty? I can hire four young ladies...

The Tigon: I will see for myself.

GK: Very well. [With a golden key, he opens the iron lock. The massive iron gates open very slowly despite sincere effort by the GateKeeper. When The Tigon also pushes, the gates move no faster. When The Tigon has his first look inside the gate, his eyes open wider and wider and his mane droops more and more.]

GK: Perhaps a sedan chair is acceptable to you? I have one that the Queng herhimself has used--twice!

The Tigon: I think, should I ever feel hungry again, that I will have to eat far from this place.

GK: The bilious green stint affects us that way too. If you would wear the same glasses that everyone else wears, then...

The Tigon: Then I would not be a Tigon! I have come to see your Wizard.

GK: I can assure you that The Wizard knows this. His powers are Great and Terrible.

The Tigon: Perhaps they are.

GK: I have news that The Wizard cannot visit with you right now, but has sent Flying Flunky [civil servant], who is here... well, practically here already. Any minute now.

The Tigon: Your ability to share news so quickly always amazes me, yet your bodies are as slow as ever.

GK: Any minute now, I assure you. The distance is great.

The Tigon: I have waited long already.

GK: There. No, there! That's him. This is Flying Flunky, who is a 'civil servant'.

The Tigon: Bah! Dismiss him at once. I will not speak with Lying Monkey.

GK: May I ask, sir, why?

The Tigon: You may ask, and I would answer that we Tignons do not believe any good will come from talking monkey money junkies.

GK: Very well.

The Tigon: Where is The Wizard now?

GK: I am to accompany you to The Great Green Throne Room.

The Tigon: Perhaps you have dropped your glasses.

GK: Perhaps I have.

The Tigon: Perhaps you have forgotten the way to the Castle?

GK: The Great Green Throne Room is not now in the Castle of Oz. Much has changed since you were here last. Would you like a tour?

The Tigon: Perhaps afterwards. Please ensure that you guide me to The Wizard directly.

GK: This is the best way to go.

The Tigon: This route seems overly long.

GK: Much has changed, Sir Tigon.

The Tigon: You have done well, Sir Gatekeeper. You have been put in a hard position, have you not?

Allah Glories ver 1.00

GK: I am not to speak of my troubles.

The Tigon: Faithful, loyal, and honest... to who or what, you aren't quite sure.

GK: I am not to speak of...

The Tigon: Pardon me, Sir Gatekeeper, but I will accompany you no longer. If you would like, I can roar at you for a bit first, but I would feel badly about it.

GK: I cannot hinder you, but I must follow you.

The Tigon: This way I smell smoke and many people. What have you not told me yet, Sir?

GK: I am not to speak of the troubles of Oz.

The Tigon: You do not fear me. I wonder what it is that you fear so much?

GK: You may be imposing, but honorable.

The Tigon: You speak strangely, yet I thank you. Tell me, noble human, if the people here are more scared of your uniform than they are of a Tigon.

GK: I cannot say.

The Tigon: Is this how you treat your people in Oz, Gatekeeper? A Tigon can tell much about a place that allows this to happen to the poorest citizens. I can smell the filth, the disease... yet perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps the troubles here are greater than I imagined. Is your ruler himself dressed in ragged clothes?

GK: If so, this sight would not wound my heart so much.

The Tigon: I know, GateKeeper. I know many things. I know that you were ordered to keep me on the other side of an iron gate. I can hear your masters threatening to punish you severely at this moment. They know where you are and can hear every word we say.

The Tigon watches interestedly as the Gatekeeper extracts a small black metal device from his ear and drops it. The Tigon snatches it out of the air with his paw, examines it briefly, then tosses it back to the Gatekeeper.

The Tigon: Your situation is hot enough already, noble human. Save that rather noisy thing, even though it is damaged already.

GK: Your words have been wise so far.

The Tigon: Have they?

A little girl is playing in and with some dirt, putting it in a plastic bottle with the intensity of a child, oblivious to the cries of her mother (who wishes to join the general exodus away from the Uniform and the Tigon). The child sees the Tigon and shrieks. The Tigon stops, winks at the Gatekeeper, then his head and mane droop. He turns his great head very slowly to look at the child. Seconds pass... the Tigon rumble-whispers "Can we be friends?" The child says nothing. Ten seconds pass. A tear falls through the Tigon's whiskers as he slowly turns his head away. The child hugs the nearest forepaw.

The Tigon: PURRRR

Gatekeeper: Where is your mother?

The child shrieks again when she sees the Gatekeeper. The Tigon blocks her view of him with his mane.

Allah Glories ver 1.00

The Tigon: Where is your mother, kitten?

Child: Over there. Are you arrested?

The Tigon: I'm fine. Perhaps you'd like to ride on my back, kitten? You--hiding behind the door. Help her. [*wink*]

Brother: Could you crouch down a little?

The Tigon: [*rumble*]

Child: So big!

The Tigon: Perhaps that was a very bad idea. Gatekeeper, who is that on the roof?

Gatekeeper: Perhaps...

The Tigon: If I read the signs rightly, my presence is likely to endanger all those who live here.

Brother: Are you been arrested?

The Tigon: Not yet. But I fear for this kitten on my back.

Child: His heart is going pit-a-pat!

Brother: Why?

The Tigon: Those men on the roof have guns. Let go of my mane, child.

Child: I'll save you, Tigon.

Brother: Me, too.

The Tigon: Run inside, kittens. This is my battle.

Child: HELP, HELP! COME SAVE THE TIGON! HELP, HELP!

The Tigon: Brave kitten, get off my back.

Child: HELP, HELP! COME SAVE THE TIGON! HELP, HELP!

The Tigon: You let go, too. [*rumble*]

Brother: I'm covering up your heart.

Child: HELP, HELP! COME SAVE THE TIGON! HELP, HELP!

Brother: Connie, that's enough.

Connie: HELP, HELP! COME SAVE THE TIGON! HELP, HELP!

The Tigon: Connie?

Connie: COME CLOSER! COME CLOSER! DON'T LET THEM SHOOT THE TIGON!

The Tigon: Thank you, Connie. Please let go of my mane.

Connie: COME SEE THE GREAT TIGON! FREE PHOTO-OP!

Brother: Stop! There's enough!

Connie: EVERYONE COME SEE THE TIGON! FREE!

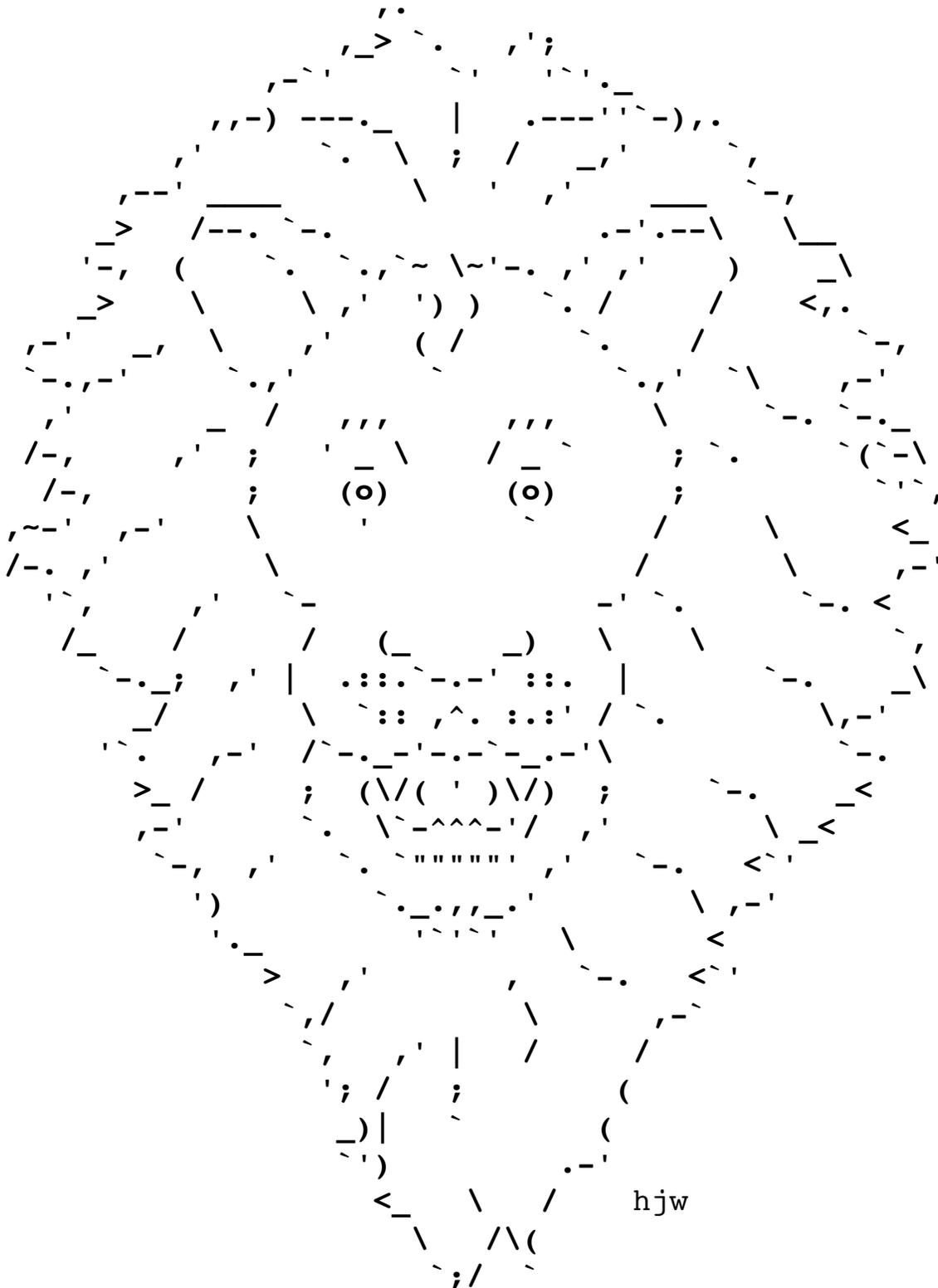
The Tigon: How do you breathe?

Connie: You! No pushing. I saw that. You. Come over here. Yes. Hold on to the Tigon, or they'll shoot him. You too, all of you. This guy won't arrest you because the Tigon tamed him. Hugging a Tigon is good for you. You! With the cell phone! Please take pix? I don't want...

Connie begins crying, and the Tigon offers her the tip of his tail, and a few people record this on video. Many more videos exist of a mob of children all at once trying to climb onto the back of a slightly alarmed Tigon as the great beast crouches low. Per-

haps these images can conquer hearts when seen through the 'scope of a sniper's rifle (not fired).

Of all the things that happened afterwards, The Tigon showed the least interest in The Great Green Throne Room. Since the room smelled like a tomb, mothers kept all the children waiting outside (just in case) and The Tigon had become quite fond of the children. But neither he nor the people found one living thing in the Great Green Throne Room.



Aber-RANT

He showed them how to tie a little harness for the worm. He said that the worm could get out in a few minutes, sometimes a bit longer, and that when a fish got the worm and the hook, he often could recover the worm. He always let those worms go, he added after a bit of prodding.

X asked him for his pardon, and then told this: Beware, gentle-beings. This one would be frightfully polite but be so interested in our ways that he might appear rude. For he will learn, if we let him, how we bake bread and cook our ... 'taters, is it? He would forego his ways in favor of ours because... Why is that so, young master?"

Aberrant: [inaudible]

X: Do not be embarrassed. It is great praise, coming from one such as you. But I think that your needs are greater than what you want. Listen, if you will, and we will help you tell of The Great Stories. You may bring your recording devices, but you will not forget what you hear. I would ask that you do not immediately share... the data, is it? that your devices collect. You must first singsay, and you must record yourself doing it before you upload this data. Can you agree to that?

Aberrant: [inaudible] To do what?

X: No matter, I can read your face. There is one thing more. We will fashion a circlet of pure gold, and you are to wear it on your head when you singsay. [short discussion in Xish] Others will find this circlet unpleasant, even your friends. The circlet is not evil, but it can work for you only. Warn them before they try, so that they will believe you when you singsay and speak. [short discussion in Xish] There is much I have not yet told you, but [unintelligible] summons us. By chance, not choice, have we come, yet we are glad to know of you. I give you a Xish name--[unintelligible]. Wear this [circlet] under your hat. Let the story begin!

Aberrant: I don't understand.

X: This is what you humans call magic. Your singsay will be recorded and linked with the data your devices have recorded. Such data is extremely valuable and will allow you to have significant influence upon the local planet's datastream. May others find you as we have.

Aberrant: What is singsay?

X: You will have to decide, since you will be the first of your species to do it. The circlet will help you.

Aberrant: I thank you for this adventure.

X: Perhaps, [unintelligible]. The Great Story begins.

wwnn: It pains me to even look at it. How is it done?

Aberrant: I do not know.

wwnn: Put it back [under your hat]. I'm starting to believe you, even if you won't show me the video. What are you going to singsay?

Aberrant: That's too important a question for me to know the answer to yet.

wwnn: I approve of your caution... but I want to see the video.

Aberrant: Help me write something, and you'll get your wish.

wwnn: What do you want to say? Go on... my battery is at eighty percent.

Aberrant: What would you say to a million people?

wwnn: Reciprocity.

Aberrant: Good, but terse.

wwnn: In thought, in word, and in action, treat other humans as you would wish to be. That's a big story.

wwnn: Perfect. I'm recording pure boring... that's justice.

Aberrant: Is that...

wwnn: These aliens didn't do anything really high-tech, did they?

Aberrant: No, nothing unusual. I suppose they could have been disguised pranksters, but sometimes they moved too fast for a human.

wwnn: In order to prevent weeks of agonizing wordsmithing to my good friend Aberrant...

Aberrant: That's my camera.

wwnn: I put your memory card back in. I'll put everything online for you, if you want.

Aberrant: A true friend would...

wwnn: Yes, a true friend would push--or even throw his friend to a thousand screaming teenage fan-girls if it would make millions of lives less miserable and bleak. May I borrow your glasses for a moment? Now lift up your hat. Thank you. May I borrow that circlet of yours? I'd like to examine it more closely. Put it in this bag, please?

Aberrant: Are you...

wwnn: Yes. Go stand over there.

wwnn: Do you feel any different?

Aberrant: No.

wwnn: Does this bag look any different?

Aberrant: No.

wwnn: How about now?

Aberrant: No, but I can see the circlet glowing.

wwnn: Thank you, my friend. Put this back under your hat, please. I don't like holding it... Even though it seems to have no power when my eyes are closed, one can never be too cautious. Especially at my age.

Aberrant: What did you learn?

wwnn: That the best theories are the most likely to mislead.

Aberrant: And now you'll tell me to run along because your time is urgently needed elsewhere.

wwnn: I don't like looking stupid, my friend. I thought your glasses were the key to the magic of the circlet, but... All I learned was your glasses make looking at it only slightly easier, the same as mine. Reflecting the image of the circlet also made it easier to gaze upon, but not completely. The back of your camera worked the best, but it also reflects light the least due to its blue color. And...

Aberrant: I thought it was black.

wwnn: It's a dark blue, but not black. Hold it next to this.

Aberrant: I see.

wwnn: So, what do you make of it all?

Aberrant: All I know is that my bull5#!7 detector hasn't gone off once today, but I'm easily fooled.

wwnn: I think you know a bit more than that. Probability that the X creatures were from another planet is next to zero, especially since they never claimed extra-terrestrial origin. Right?

Aberrant: If you say so. I don't know these things.

wwnn: These beings moved super-humanly fast, correct?

Aberrant: Occasionally, they did.

wwnn: Can you help me find... a spool, white, about this big, with clear...

Aberrant: This?

wwnn: Thank you. Please tie it onto the door-handle. Now, hold this and pull.

Aberrant: Not that way! You'll make the line dig in... I'll wrap it around my keys.

wwnn: Is that so? Thank you, Aberrant.

Aberrant: I like this line. It is strong.

wwnn: Now, if I tied six or eight pieces of this to a harness that you were wearing, and I had a machine that would pull this high-tech plastic stuff upon my command, and I put the machine in the top of a distant tree, I could make it look like you could fly!

Aberrant: Yes, but why would you?

wwnn: I bought this line years ago because of its strength and UV resistance. I did not care what color it was; this was the strongest line I could find. Someone who was pranking could choose to use clearer, thinner line, especially since the demands upon it would be much less than hauling you to a treetop.

Aberrant: It seems odd that someone would go to all that trouble to make a fool of the village idiot.

wwnn: Perhaps, in cretinous times, the type of human who was once called 'Diogenes' is given a name like Aberrant.

Aberrant: I haven't shown any signs of it yet.

wwnn: My friend, Diogenes is in the eye of the beholder. It's what happens when one seeks philosophy, no matter the name of the philosopher.

Aberrant: You speak of what I do not understand.

wwnn: In dusty, mouldering books, there are ancient stories of unquestionable power. These stories... somehow alter human behavior by changing how a human thinks, and this change is usually regarded as desirable even by those who do not like to read. I think that someone is trying to create a video story fit for today's people, and you're a main character. But I can't quite see how it's being done. The circlet has me confused, so let's start plodding, mentally and physically. Let's go get lunch at Smarmy's.

Aberrant: Lunch sounds good, but...Smarmy's? Oh, you mean...

wwnn: Speak not the name! Say instead, I am not a billboard! Do you have a knife handy? Of course you do. Cut this line off my door-handle and let's go test the circlet on other people we meet on the way.

wwnn: What color is her dress?

Aberrant: Black.

wwnn: And the letters on that garish billboard?

Aberrant: Black.

wwnn: The same black?

Aberrant: Not exactly, but very close.

wwnn: Thank you. Who else knows of your rather unusual colorblindness?

Aberrant: Lots of people know I'm colorblind, but you're the only one who thinks it is unusual.

wwnn: Am I? Then let's go visit your eye-doctor.

Aberrant: I can make an appointment, but it won't be free.

wwnn: That's why we walk in. Sorry to rush your lunch, but the pieces are falling together.

Receptionist: Would you like to make an appointment?

wwnn: Please, just tell the doctor the word 'singehay.' My dear, you can relax. You might also repeat a certain word to yourself until it loses all meaning. Perhaps that would make hearing the word and not displaying any emotional reactions a bit easier.

Receptionist: We should discuss this when I'm not on the clock.

wwnn: At your convenience. Here is my card.

Aberrant: What was that written on your card?

wwnn: What? Drat, I must have given her the wrong one.

Aberrant: I'll go...

wwnn: Don't bother, it's too late. Let's go.

Aberrant: What the... what are you doing to your beard?

wwnn: This should foil lip-reading, as there are cameras everywhere. My friend, you are not cut out for this line of work, and that is not a bad thing at all. Say something now.

Aberrant: What kind of work is that?

wwnn: Do you not know? Let us talk of this later.

wwnn: Not yet. Not yet. Nothing new... OK, we may speak freely, more or less.

Aberrant: Tell me, please, about your work.

wwnn: I'm sorry to be so evasive... but what you don't know, you can't tell anyone.

Aberrant: Are you about to tell me your attention is urgently needed elsewhere?

wwnn: Quite the opposite, actually--my attention is urgently needed here, and I don't want you going anywhere while I write.

Aberrant: OK. You have a lot of good books.

Aberrant: Someone is coming. Three people.

wwnn: Thank you. Can you hand me that spool of line there? Welcome, welcome. Would anyone like tea?

Eyedoc: This isn't a social call, sir.

wwnn: The obvious difficulties can be remedied with this and this. Sir, read it like it was your cards and you're playing poker with Agency Agents. Put your back against the wall.

Receptionist: Who are you, sir?

wwnn: The state thinks I'm 123-45-6789. See? It's even on my driver's license.

Receptionist: That is not a good idea, sir.

wwnn: It has caused me much trouble, true.

Eyedoc: Thank you, sir. Goodbye.

Second man: Goodbye.

Receptionist: I guess we're leaving?

wwnn: It would seem so. [winks]

Aberrant: What was that all about?

wwnn: You will not be troubled by potential hoaxes anymore.

Aberrant: So it was all a hoax, then?

wwnn: No space-aliens, my friend. Just humans... because I think I kept the lawyers out of it. This time. For now.

Aberrant: That is... I'm still going to singsay something someday.

wwnn: Of course you are. But, if you'll take my advice, put it off for a few days. Can you do that?

Aberrant: I could, but why? I don't have any other plans.

wwnn: I rather think you do. When the young lady comes back, agree to everything she says.

Aberrant: What young lady?

wwnn: The receptionist, of course. Didn't you see that she liked you?

Aberrant: Well...

wwnn: As a matter of fact, since she saw you were here a few minutes ago, and since I haven't heard a car start yet... have you heard a car start, Aberrant?

Aberrant: No.

wwnn: Don't say no again. She's naturally very shy. See what I mean?

Aberrant: No...

wwnn: Don't say no again. She stopped a dozen steps from the front door, hesitating.
[opens door] See?

Aberrant: Yes.

Dragontongue

This is, I thought. It's got to be.

I'm in the mouth of a huge cave, accessible only by flying beings or a very very determined and skillful climber. There's much soot on the ceiling, and the air smells strongly of smoke that I cannot see. The wind pushes me inside--steadily, incessantly. I look back down the cliffside... I cannot climb down or up, so in the cave I go.

The floor of this huge cave is smooth and free of debris, so despite the gathering darkness, I did not stumble. But when the cave mouth was far behind me and the darkness was total, I try to speak and find myself silenced. Blindly, I put my groping hand into the left nostril of a not-quite slumbering dragon.

"HAW HAW HAWWW!" roared the dragon. "That tickles."

I feel as if I had no legs to run with. "I'm..."

"I know, you can't see and you didn't mean to. How human. Even so, you have nothing to fear in here."

"Do..."

"Of course not. I do not eat my own. Yes, I know what you're going to say, little Dragontongue, because our corpus callosum... you won't understand yet. So, go on, ask your questions, and I'll try not to interrupt."

"Can..."

"No, I don't have any way to make a light. Yes, I can see you. No, I don't breathe fire. But tell me... how do you know I'm a dragon?"

"Is this..."

"It is and it isn't. Besides, sometimes other creatures are in dragon caves."

"What other creatures?"

"Whatever kinds you can think of."

"I'm not sure..."

"Perhaps that is why it is so dark. Yet you are safe here."

"I'll try not to be..."

"Please stop. That's boring. Ask your questions. I like answering them."

"Thank you. What color dragon are you?"

"I'm not sure... Let us go to the cave mouth and see. This way, little one. This way."

"You are beautiful!"

"Am I? What color am I?"

"Green, gray, blue, all at once, but with other colors."

"I cannot tell, either."

"And your color changes with every movement. Your wings..."

"Like a flying squirrel's wings, you might have said? Yes. Do not worry, you cannot insult me without insulting yourself."

"The next..."

"Certainly!" roared the dragon, and it picked me up in its mouth and jumped off the cliff. I'm not sure if I screamed or not, because the wind was intense and the dragon was not quiet.

"Wonderful! Yaaaahhh! Higher! Faster! More!" exulted the dragon around a mouthful of human. The dragon landed inside the cave's mouth, then released me from its own mouth. "Did you like that?" the dragon asked me.

"Yes. It was more than I thought it could be," I said.

"One minute," said the dragon, as it flew up and over the cliff, where I could not see it. But it soon glided back down clutching a thirty-year old pine tree, roots and all.

"Let us return to my lair," said the dragon, dragging the tree behind it. "I must eat, and then lie on my bed. Flying like that is not easy."

"But..."

"Such rubbish!" the dragon roared. "It took you that long to notice I can outfly an eagle with the wings of a flying fox? Pay attention!"

"But..." I did not finish my question. I followed the dragon back into the darkness behind the cave's mouth with the noise from the dragging tree to guide me. The dragon started crunching the tree's roots as it walked into the deepening darkness. "Next time, I'll get an older tree. This one has hardly any resin," the dragon said, speaking effortlessly even with a mouthful of tree roots. The dragon settled itself on its bed, which made a clinking, rattling noise. "That's just a bunch of metal junk. It absorbs the heat that comes from... you sure are trying hard to make me real."

"I don't understand."

"No, you don't. Not yet. This is the first time I had a metal bed. I never ate a pine tree before, pardon the smoke. My metal bed is absorbing the heat generated by my digestion. It feels good, but I never needed it before. Yes, a gold and silver bed would be better. I've never been able to fly like that before."

"Are you newly born?"

"I'm older than you are. I was the first here in this cave, and I will be the last. This is my cave. Mine! But you can come here anytime. We can go flying again!"

My heart leapt as the dragon spoke. "Yes!" I agreed, even before the dragon had ceased speaking.

"That is good," said the dragon around a mouthful of pine needles. I could smell him chewing. "Soon we will go again. Stop that, please. You don't even know you're doing it, but don't mess with my speech. You have no idea what a dragon should sound like, and I can't say what I need to say through Smaug."

My eyes started to water, and the dragon grew warm both from the work of tree-digestion and the heat of annoyance. I knew that I didn't understand, but I felt... I wanted to give the dragon a hug. I walked blindly forward. Again, the inside of a dragon nostril was the first thing I touched, and the dragon HAWWWed mightily and pine-ishly at its joke on the both of us.

"You..." I began, but the dragon had managed to get a hot and hairy ear in the way my other hand, and this time we both laughed.

"Fly, you fools," I said, for no reason at all.

"Again!" said the dragon. "Say it again, and mean it!"

"Fly, you fools!" I shouted, and fell to the floor, which seemed farther than I thought.

"Gandalf... fly as in flee, and fly as dragons in the sky. Say it again!"

"Flies, you fleas!" I said, and started laughing a little.

"How very strange. I did not know you liked connections."

"What are connections but a human hand in a dragon's nose?" I said' but both the dragon and I knew it was a serious question.

"After we went flying, the energy had to come from somewhere, right? You were thinking it while I was doing it. So I ate a pine tree and have a metal bed, and that's good enough for you. I can see because I have big eyes and can see infra-red--again, that's good enough for you. But because I carried you in my mouth, you never got a good look at my wings at work until I got hungry, and when you finally wondered how my wings could possibly generate the lift needed to get my powerful but heavy body up another hundred meters, and then down, loaded with a ton of wood, you couldn't think of a thing. So I'll tell you."

"No!" I said. "I do want to know, but I often want what I should not have. Keep your connections."

"There is no great danger from wind and updrafts. Tell me, then, about these things you want that you should not have."

"Certain foods, consumed to excess, make a human weaker. Certain sensations, sought to excess, have such deleterious after-effects that they should not be sought at all. A harmless pleasure can become a harmful one easily if, if, if! Maximizing pleasurable feelings is not a sufficient guide for real life!"

"Gandhi was asked many times about the meaning of life, and sometimes he said 'to serve others.' But when he was asked what the others were for, he was silent."

"I love that story... how does a dragon know of it?"

"Dragons always know."

"Can you tell me other stories like that one?"

"You're living in one. I tell stories that are true underneath, but not on top. For example, there is no dragon. It's only me."

"So you are the dragon?"

"Yes and no."

"Corpus callosum," I said, remembering.

"Reptile brain," said the dragon, intending to help.

"No connections?" I asked.

"None," said the dragon. "Call me when you need me."

"How?" I asked, sleepily.

"You'll know," said the dragon.

"Where are you going?" I asked, suddenly suspicious.

"Nowhere," said the dragon, sleepily.

"Can we..."

"HAW HAW! Yes, of course," said the dragon, "What a fun idea! Let's move some sand! But not too close to the water. Here, feel around for one of my shed scales... to the left a bit, yes, more, that's one of them. Go soak that in water for a couple minutes, and then try to ... "

I woke up empty-handed. I was still three days homeless, whose collection of personal possessions was shrinking steadily, with sand in all my clothes... but today, the dragon and I will make a sand something on the beach.

HOMELESS MAN BUILDS SANDY SHRINE

"It was fun!" shouted [deleted name], age 6. His older sister agreed. "That guy could sell a grain of sand to a guy standing on the beach." "A graduate student from Lowe Tech estimates the volume of sand moved at a thousand cubic meters..." "Retired Police Officer B GØØgle disapproves of the giant sand peace sign. "I'm worried that a gang of hoodlums might use it as a gathering point to do drugs."

PRESCIENT RET POLICE OFFICER B GØØGLE ANALYSES BEACH GROUPS "...

my contacts tell me that they rented every port-a-potty available in five counties, so even if they're dirty hippies, at least this bunch tried." "I like the tourist money coming in, but I don't like all of the tourists. There's bound to be trouble, nark my words." "... police contacts tell me that they haven't found him, but that's what they'd ask me to say, if you get my meaning."

In my mind I see blue tides roll in and out, both that of the water and those of the blue troops; yet the symbols in the sand increase in number and size. In this unnatural park, it does not matter if ten thousand tourists each take a teaspoon of sand from their favorite sand sculptures or if they decide to build new ones. On the beach, we-the-people will decide which symbols we will love to death and which ones will grow. I look

back on the motley collection of spontaneous sand-sculptures one last time. I wish I still had my camera. The people know what to do. The once-sterile sand will bloom with symbols in many places and in many minds.

Do you want to know what happened to me? I've got a dragon-friend. I'm sure I'll be fine.

I stand in the cave's mouth, very tired. I enter. I can smell the dragon's blood and the salty tang of the sea. Time has not passed peacefully here. I walk to where the smell is strongest. Again I find that I cannot speak, and I have no desire to stamp around the dragon's dark bedroom. Blindly I fall into the dragon's open mouth.

"HAW HAWhh!" the dragon roars around me. It spits me onto a scaly arm.

"Are you wounded?" I ask, still concerned.

"Aye," the dragon replies, as it spits out sand. "Nothing to worry about. This body still works and I can still fly."

"Tell me," I ask, "What assails you here?"

"It is wet and slimy with many thick strong tentacles. I do not like to speak of it."

"Can I help you fight it?"

"It cannot be killed, and if you cannot see and cannot throw boulders, you will be of no help."

"I cannot see... but the iron..."

"[rumble] A weapon. You wish to forge a weapon for me? Yes. You think I could fight the tentacles with a giant sword..."

Fear runs through me. The dragon will say...

"You sure are trying hard to make me real," the dragon said again.

"Tell me, please, what color..."

"Blue. Dark blue."

"What does it want?"

"Many things, and random things, and yesterday, it wanted out. But it never got out of the cave, because I was here! HAW! HAW! HAW!"

The dragon's laughter was paired with knowledge I didn't know I knew. Bringing the dragon out into the light *costs*. Going flying with the dragon *costs*. And making the dragon real *costs* the most of all. But my mind rebelled at the obvious questions like 'what does it cost, exactly?' and 'who is it that's paying?'

The dragon insists that we go flying, no matter the cost.

But I woke up on the beach again before the dragon flew far. Empty-handed, I walk into a coffee shop, looking for a phone. I was thinking that, perhaps, when they throw me out, they'll tell me where a pay phone is.

"Are you the Sandy Sculptor?" a young man asks, using a laptop to compare my picture to my face.

"No, but I saved these articles," I tell him, as I take my newspaper clippings out of a gritty pocket and show him the tattered article with the grainy halftone of a sandy peace-sign from a stained newspaper.

"It is you," said the young man, making more of a scene than I'd like.

"No it isn't," said my mouth, and one of my eyes closed briefly.

"They'll arrest you if they see you," said the young man.

"Then why don't you shut the [deleted] up about it, then?" said a pretty young lady as she peered over her own laptop.

"We should leave now. The police come here all the time," said her companion.

"Thank you," I said. "I know you are good people. But I have no time to run."

"Do you want a pastry?" asked a more sensible man.

I wanted to say yes, but something stopped my mouth. Two policemen walked into the coffee-shop. The young man starts fiddling with a cell phone and holds it between his face and mine.

I bow slightly to the sensible man and then my feet start walking to the blue uniforms. "Would you like to arrest me now, or after your coffee?" my mouth says. "I'll give you no trouble."

One officer starts talking into a radio. I cannot see his lips nor hear what he says. The second officer smiles and says, "Afterwards. Do you want a cup of coffee?"

The applause came from everywhere and nowhere. At first it was as insubstantial as a finger pushing a button, but the humans laughed at the laptop's speakers and the applause became real.

The policemen get their orders to-go and do not arrest me, tho they did argue just a little.

I try again when another policeman comes into the coffee-shop. This time, the officer buys a pastry for me and tries her hardest not to notice the applause or all the cell-phones pointed in her direction. The third officer arrests me immediately and also tries not to notice the cameras and sarcastic cat-calls.

"Three thousand views already," says the young man, as if that was important. I wonder.

The police speak of flash mobs and take me far from the beach. An officer takes me to a small town in the middle of a rocky plain and gives me most of the money he has, and tells me to keep quiet for a few days or the police will have to arrest me again. I spend nearly all the money renting a room to wash and sleep. All night long I can hear the dragon laughing. I sleep as well as Gandhi.

At dawn the next morning, I walk far from town and step over a broken barbed-wire fence onto stony land. Here is a good place for the dream of a giant peace sign made of boulders. Before mid-day, many people are helping make the dream come true.

That evening I wake up in the dragon's mouth. Except for the wind, all is quiet... and I soon see why. The mouth of the cave is covered by a nightmare's worth of huge writhing tentacles--seeking, seeking.

"Now it wants the keys for those yellow machines. Yes, I am fine," says the dragon around a mouthful of me. As the dragon flies closer, the tentacles withdraw, taking with them a larger-than-life bulldozer. The huge yellow machine does not fit in the cave mouth and is quickly dropped. It falls quietly into the deep mists as the tentacles retreat.

"Yes, it wants to control that machine, and many others, Dragon-tongue. Sometimes it comes out and goes Seeking when I'm not home." The dragon lands in the cave mouth with a practiced slide as the slime is everywhere. "I hope my bed is undamaged. I'd better go check before I get something to eat." I followed the dragon into the deepest darkness.

"Am I going..."

"You're getting tired of that? No... apprehensive. Worried. You always enjoyed... so that's what's bothering you.

I say nothing. I am in the dark, confused.

"Just dirty ashes. My bed is mostly good. No, you can't fix it. It's almost too heavy for me to move. In this place, you are literally nothing, zero, zilch. You are a creature of the light." CLANK! "Cover your ears." CLONGGGG! "That's good enough. This way, little one. Or why don't you wait here? I'll be right back. No... You don't have to worry about them, they won't hurt you. Never refuse an adventure."

The dragon noises recede, diminish, and are gone. I wait, and try to breathe. Soon, I hear them, slithering. I know them without seeing them--they smell slimy and wet, and they're seeking, always seeking. They are in the dragon's bed now and that bothers me in a way I can't explain. The tentacles stop. I imagine a neat dragon-shaped bed made of shiny coins. I like the dragon, and...

The dragon returns, dragging another pine tree. "They grow very close together, so... My bed! Yes, Dragon-tongue, somehow you did this. I didn't do it."

I wake to a beeping noise and see a sky of ten thousand stars. The bonfire I am about to build will add smoke to the pure air, but with my limited resources I could not think of a better way to make a signal. I build my fire on top of a large rock. Soon many people come with more wood and drinks and food. My mouth asks them to build their fires in the shape of a giant peace sign for my friends to practice taking pictures with their flying machines. My mouth says, "fly, you fools!" as the machines ascend into the darkness.

[A metaphorical tipping of a hat to Equality, a book by Edward Bellamy written in 1900. [www.gutenberg.org or archive.org]

"It is entitled "The Parable of the Water Tank," and runs this way:"

"There was a certain very dry land, the people whereof were in sore need of water. And they did nothing but to seek after water from morning until night, and many perished because they could not find it.

"Howbeit, there were certain men in that land who were more crafty and diligent than the rest, and these had gathered stores of water where others could find none, and the name of these men was capitalists. And it came to pass that the people of the land came unto the capitalists and prayed them that they would give them of the water they had gathered that they might drink, for their need was sore. But the capitalists answered them and said:

""Go to, ye silly people! Why should we give you of the water which we have gathered, for then we should become even as ye are, and perish with you? But behold what we will do unto you. Be ye our servants and ye shall have water."

"And the people said, "Only give us to drink and we will be your servants, we and our children." And it was so.

"Now, the capitalists were men of understanding, and wise in their generation. They ordered the people who were their servants in bands with captains and officers, and some they put at the springs to dip, and others did they make to carry the water, and others did they cause to seek for new springs. And all the water was brought together in one place, and there did the capitalists make a great tank for to hold it, and the tank was called the Market, for it was there that the people, even the servants of the capitalists, came to get water. And the capitalists said unto the people:

""For every bucket of water that ye bring to us, that we may pour it into the tank, which is the Market, behold! we will give you a penny, but for every bucket that we shall draw forth to give unto you that ye may drink of it, ye and your wives and your children, ye shall give to us two pennies, and the difference shall be our profit, seeing that if it were not for this profit we would not do this thing for you, but ye should all perish."

"And it was good in the people's eyes, for they were dull of understanding, and they diligently brought water unto the tank for many days, and for every bucket which they did bring the capitalists gave them every man a penny; but for every bucket that the capitalists drew forth from the tank to give again unto the people, behold! the people rendered to the capitalists two pennies.

"And after many days the water tank, which was the Market, overflowed at the top, seeing that for every bucket the people poured in they received only so much as would buy again half of a bucket. And because of the excess that was left of every bucket, did the tank overflow, for the people were many, but the capitalists were few, and could drink no more than others. Therefore did the tank overflow.

"And when the capitalists saw that the water overflowed, they said to the people:

""See ye not the tank, which is the Market, doth overflow? Sit ye down, therefore and be patient, for ye shall bring us no more water till the tank be empty."

""But when the people no more received the pennies of the capitalists for the water they brought, they could buy no more water from the capitalists, having naught wherewith to buy. And when the capitalists saw that they had no more profit because no man bought water of them, they were troubled. And they sent forth men in the highways, the byways, and the hedges, crying, "If any thirst let him come to the tank and buy water of us, for it doth overflow." For they said among themselves, "Behold, the times are dull; we must advertise."

""But the people answered, saying: "How can we buy unless ye hire us, for how else shall we have wherewithal to buy? Hire ye us, therefore, as before, and we will gladly buy water, for we thirst, and ye will have no need to advertise." But the capitalists said to the people: "Shall we hire you to bring water when the tank, which is the Market, doth already overflow? Buy ye, therefore, first water, and when the tank is empty, through your buying, will we hire you again." And so it was because the capitalists hired them no more to bring water that the people could not buy the water they had brought already, and because the people could not buy the water they had brought already, the capitalists no more hired them to bring water. And the saying went abroad, "It is a crisis."

""And the thirst of the people was great, for it was not now as it had been in the days of their fathers, when the land was open before them, for every one to seek water for himself, seeing that the capitalists had taken all the springs, and the wells, and the water wheels, and the vessels and the buckets, so that no man might come by water save from the tank, which was the Market. And the people murmured against the capitalists and said: "Behold, the tank runneth over, and we die of thirst. Give us, therefore, of the water, that we perish not."

""But the capitalists answered: "Not so. The water is ours. Ye shall not drink thereof unless ye buy it of us with pennies." And they confirmed it with an oath, saying, after their manner, "Business is business."

""But the capitalists were disquieted that the people bought no more water, whereby they had no more any profits, and they spake one to another, saying: "It seemeth that our profits have stopped our profits, and by reason of the profits we have made, we can make no more profits. How is it that our profits are become unprofitable to us, and our gains do make us poor? Let us therefore send for the soothsayers, that they may interpret this thing unto us," and they sent for them.

""Now, the soothsayers were men learned in dark sayings, who joined themselves to the capitalists by reason of the water of the capitalists, that they might have thereof and live, they and their children. And they spake for the capitalists unto the people, and did their embassies for them, seeing that the capitalists were not a folk quick of understanding neither ready of speech.

""And the capitalists demanded of the soothsayers that they should interpret this thing unto them, wherefore it was that the people bought no more water of them, although

the tank was full. And certain of the soothsayers answered and said, "It is by reason of overproduction," and some said, "It is glut"; but the signification of the two words is the same. And others said, "Nay, but this thing is by reason of the spots on the sun." And yet others answered, saying, "It is neither by reason of glut, nor yet of spots on the sun that this evil hath come to pass, but because of lack of confidence."

"And while the soothsayers contended among themselves, according to their manner, the men of profit did slumber and sleep, and when they awoke they said to the soothsayers: "It is enough. Ye have spoken comfortably unto us. Now go ye forth and speak comfortably likewise unto this people, so that they be at rest and leave us also in peace."

"But the soothsayers, even the men of the dismal science--for so they were named of some--were loath to go forth to the people lest they should be stoned, for the people loved them not. And they said to the capitalists:

""Masters, it is a mystery of our craft that if men be full and thirst not but be at rest, then shall they find comfort in our speech even as ye. Yet if they thirst and be empty, find they no comfort therein but rather mock us, for it seemeth that unless a man be full our wisdom appeareth unto him but emptiness." But the capitalists said: "Go ye forth. Are ye not our men to do our embassies?"

"And the soothsayers went forth to the people and expounded to them the mystery of overproduction, and how it was that they must needs perish of thirst because there was overmuch water, and how there could not be enough because there was too much. And likewise spoke they unto the people concerning the sun spots, and also wherefore it was that these things had come upon them by reason of lack of confidence. And it was even as the soothsayers had said, for to the people their wisdom seemed emptiness. And the people reviled them, saying: "Go up, ye bald-heads! Will ye mock us? Doth plenty breed famine? Doth nothing come out of much?" And they took up stones to stone them.

"And when the capitalists saw that the people still murmured and would not give ear to the soothsayers, and because also they feared lest they should come upon the tank and take of the water by force, they brought forth to them certain holy men (but they were false priests), who spake unto the people that they should be quiet and trouble not the capitalists because they thirsted. And these holy men, who were false priests, testified to the people that this affliction was sent to them of God for the healing of their souls, and that if they should bear it in patience and lust not after the water, neither trouble the capitalists, it would come to pass that after they had given up the ghost they would come to a country where there should be no capitalists but an abundance of water. Howbeit, there were certain true prophets of God also, and these had compassion on the people and would not prophesy for the capitalists, but rather spake constantly against them.

"Now, when the capitalists saw that the people still murmured and would not be still, neither for the words of the soothsayers nor of the false priests, they came forth themselves unto them and put the ends of their fingers in the water that overflowed in the

tank and wet the tips thereof, and they scattered the drops from the tips of their fingers abroad upon the people who thronged the tank, and the name of the drops of water was charity, and they were exceeding bitter.

"And when the capitalists saw yet again that neither for the words of the soothsayers, nor of the holy men who were false priests, nor yet for the drops that were called charity, would the people be still, but raged the more, and crowded upon the tank as if they would take it by force, then took they counsel together and sent men privily forth among the people. And these men sought out the mightiest among the people and all who had skill in war, and took them apart and spake craftily with them, saying:

""Come, now, why cast ye not your lot in with the capitalists? If ye will be their men and serve them against the people, that they break not in upon the tank, then shall ye have abundance of water, that ye perish not, ye and your children."

"And the mighty men and they who were skilled in war hearkened unto this speech and suffered themselves to be persuaded, for their thirst constrained them, and they went within unto the capitalists and became their men, and staves and swords were put in their hands and they became a defense unto the capitalists and smote the people when they thronged upon the tank.

"And after many days the water was low in the tank, for the capitalists did make fountains and fish ponds of the water thereof, and did bathe therein, they and their wives and their children, and did waste the water for their pleasure.

"And when the capitalists saw that the tank was empty, they said, "The crisis is ended"; and they sent forth and hired the people that they should bring water to fill it again. And for the water that the people brought to the tank they received for every bucket a penny, but for the water which the capitalists drew forth from the tank to give again to the people they received two pennies, that they might have their profit. And after a time did the tank again overflow even as before.

"And now, when many times the people had filled the tank until it overflowed and had thirsted till the water therein had been wasted by the capitalists, it came to pass that there arose in the land certain men who were called agitators, for that they did stir up the people. And they spake to the people, saying that they should associate, and then would they have no need to be servants of the capitalists and should thirst no more for water. And in the eyes of the capitalists were the agitators pestilent fellows, and they would fain have crucified them, but durst not for fear of the people.

"And the words of the agitators which they spake to the people were on this wise:

""Ye foolish people, how long will ye be deceived by a lie and believe to your hurt that which is not? for behold all these things that have been said unto you by the capitalists and by the soothsayers are cunningly devised fables. And likewise the holy men, who say that it is the will of God that ye should always be poor and miserable and athirst, behold! they do blaspheme God and are liars, whom he will bitterly judge though he forgive all others. How cometh it that ye may not come by the water in the tank? Is it not because ye have no money? And why have ye no money? Is it not because ye receive but one penny for every bucket that ye bring to the tank, which is the Market, but

must render two pennies for every bucket ye take out, so that the capitalists may have their profit? See ye not how by this means the tank must overflow, being filled by that ye lack and made to abound out of your emptiness? See ye not also that the harder ye toil and the more diligently ye seek and bring the water, the worse and not the better it shall be for you by reason of the profit, and that forever?"

"After this manner spake the agitators for many days unto the people, and none heeded them, but it was so that after a time the people hearkened. And they answered and said unto the agitators:

""Ye say truth. It is because of the capitalists and of their profits that we want, seeing that by reason of them and their profits we may by no means come by the fruit of our labor, so that our labor is in vain, and the more we toil to fill the tank the sooner doth it overflow, and we may receive nothing because there is too much, according to the words of the soothsayers. But behold, the capitalists are hard men and their tender mercies are cruel. Tell us if ye know any way whereby we may deliver ourselves out of our bondage unto them. But if ye know of no certain way of deliverance we beseech you to hold your peace and let us alone, that we may forget our misery."

"And the agitators answered and said, "We know a way."

"And the people said: "Deceive us not, for this thing hath been from the beginning, and none hath found a way of deliverance until now, though many have sought it carefully with tears. But if ye know a way, speak unto us quickly."

"Then the agitators spake unto the people of the way. And they said:

""Behold, what need have ye at all of these capitalists, that ye should yield them profits upon your labor? What great thing do they wherefore ye render them this tribute? Lo! it is only because they do order you in bands and lead you out and in and set your tasks and afterward give you a little of the water yourselves have brought and not they. Now, behold the way out of this bondage! Do ye for yourselves that which is done by the capitalists--namely, the ordering of your labor, and the marshaling of your bands, and the dividing of your tasks. So shall ye have no need at all of the capitalists and no more yield to them any profit, but all the fruit of your labor shall ye share as brethren, every one having the same; and so shall the tank never overflow until every man is full, and would not wag the tongue for more, and afterward shall ye with the overflow make pleasant fountains and fish ponds to delight yourselves withal even as did the capitalists; but these shall be for the delight of all."

"And the people answered, "How shall we go about to do this thing, for it seemeth good to us?"

"And the agitators answered: "Choose ye discreet men to go in and out before you and to marshal your bands and order your labor, and these men shall be as the capitalists were; but, behold, they shall not be your masters as the capitalists are, but your brethren and officers who do your will, and they shall not take any profits, but every man his share like the others, that there may be no more masters and servants among you, but brethren only. And from time to time, as ye see fit, ye shall choose other discreet men in place of the first to order the labor."

"And the people hearkened, and the thing was very good to them. Likewise seemed it not a hard thing. And with one voice they cried out, "So let it be as ye have said, for we will do it!"

"And the capitalists heard the noise of the shouting and what the people said, and the soothsayers heard it also, and likewise the false priests and the mighty men of war, who were a defense unto the capitalists; and when they heard they trembled exceedingly, so that their knees smote together, and they said one to another, "It is the end of us!"

"Howbeit, there were certain true priests of the living God who would not prophesy for the capitalists, but had compassion on the people; and when they heard the shouting of the people and what they said, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy, and gave thanks to God because of the deliverance.

And the people went and did all the things that were told them of the agitators to do. And it came to pass as the agitators had said, even according to all their words. And there was no more any thirst in that land, neither any that was ahungered, nor naked, nor cold, nor in any manner of want; and every man said unto his fellow, "My brother," and every woman said unto her companion, "My sister," for so were they with one another as brethren and sisters which do dwell together in unity. And the blessing of God rested upon that land forever."

END of Allah-Glories... but there's more, because stories don't read themselves.

Nine Fables

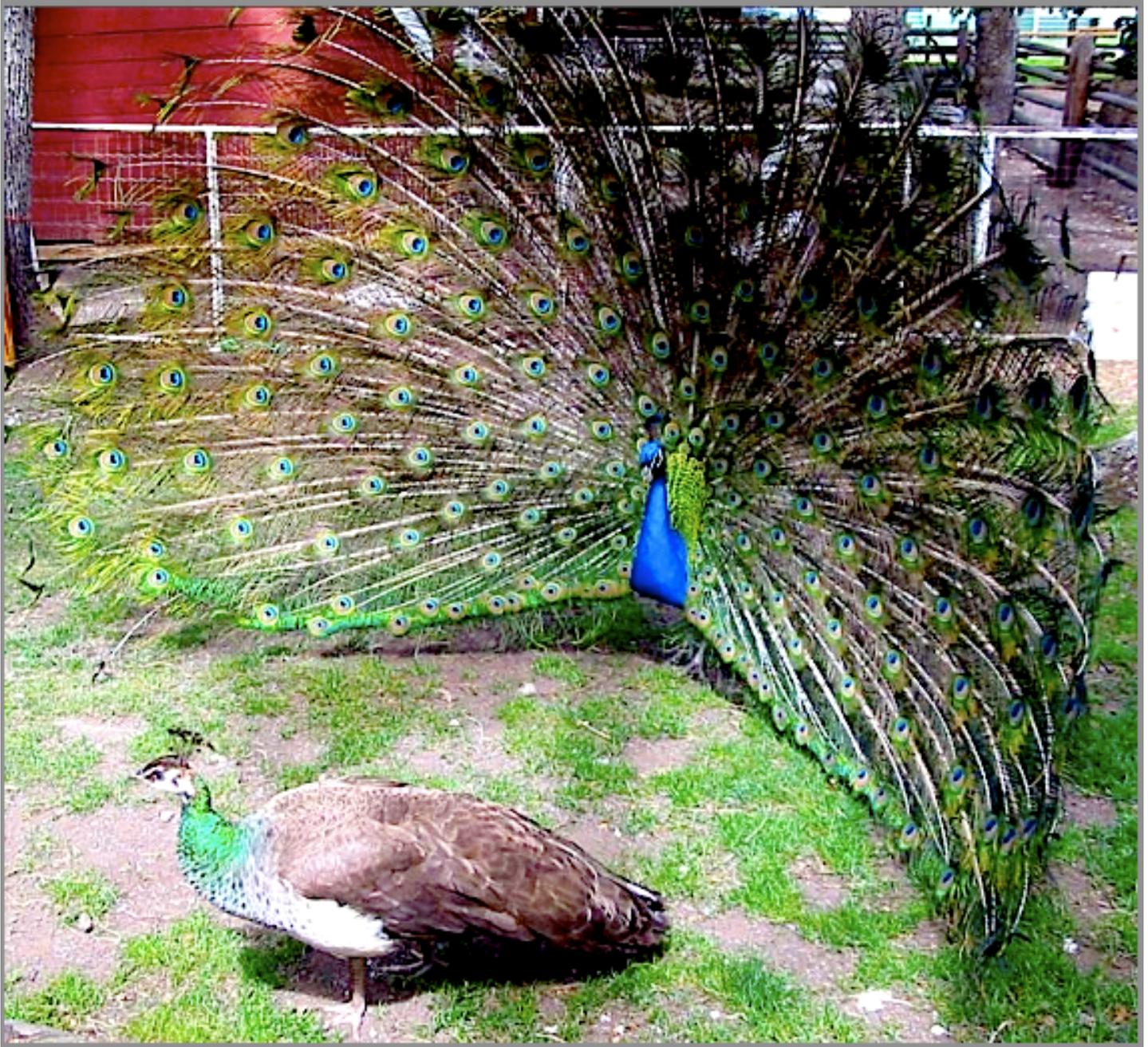


gratitude to the man, he disappeared. He wasn't concerned with getting their recognition or gratitude; he was concerned about their well being.

He went to another tribe, where he again began to show them the value of his invention. People were interested there, too, a bit too interested for the peace of mind of their priests, who began to notice that this man was drawing crowds and they were losing their popularity. So they decided to do away with him. They poisoned him, crucified him, put it any way you like. But they were afraid now that the people might turn against them, so they were very wise, even wily. Do you know what they did? They had a portrait of the man made and mounted it on the main altar of the temple. The instruments for making fire were placed in front of the portrait, and the people were taught to revere the portrait and to pay reverence to the instruments of fire, which they dutifully did for centuries. The veneration and the worship went on, but there was no fire." Anthony DeMello, from his free e-book [Awareness](#). (archive.org has it)

"...Macbeth is the story of Hitler or Napoleon. But it is also the story of any bank clerk who forges a cheque, any official who takes a bribe, and human being in fact who grabs at some mean advantage which will make him feel a little bigger than and get a little ahead of his fellows. It centres on the illusory human belief that an action can be isolated--that you can say to yourself, 'I will commit just this one crime which will get me where I want to be, and and after that I will turn respectable.' But in practice, as Macbeth discovers, *one crime grows out of another*, even without any increase if wickedness in yourself. His first murder is committed for self-advancement; the even worse ones which follow from it are committed in self-defense." George Orwell, from the book [Orwell, The Lost Writings](#)

Once, it3oMW, there was a misguided individual who took pictures of a lab's monkeys used in research. The monkeys were living in filthy cages and were filthy themselves. This individual published those pictures. However, the research lab found out that this misguided individual was once hired to clean the monkey cages and was quickly fired from his job for incompetence. This individual was willing to abuse the lab's research monkeys to get pictures to use to stop the mistreatment of such animals. *This individual was willing to become what he hated to defeat his 'enemies.'*



Once upon a time, a peacock stole all the other peacock's tailfeathers and glued them onto his own butt. He now had a super-normally magnificent display, sure to impress the peahens. Like he planned, all the peahens wanted to mate with him... but all those tailfeathers made his butt too heavy for him to move, and he could barely stand up, much less mate with the willing peahens. That year, very few eggs were laid and fertilized, and those only because a few of the oddest peahens had found tailless males to be acceptable sex partners.

In diversity there is strength.

Once there was a scientist who developed a bio-safe enzyme that broke down cellulose. The scientist's minions (grad students) tried it (voluntarily) with celery, but stomach acids destroyed the enzyme. (scientist wrote an article) Another scientist put the enzyme in a special capsule that would dissolve only after exposure to stomach acid, which released the enzyme in the small intestine (and was co-author on the next paper). The grad students now reported other effects--this enzyme now turned much of the dietary fiber (cellulose) into glucose, so plant foods seemed more calorie-dense and had less fiber. (Problems were caused, grad students wrote papers.) However, with the addition of enzyme-resistant dietary fiber, the grad students learned how to cope (and wrote more papers and articles). Since these papers and articles were written, accepted after reviews, and published (IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN), a corp-Scientist was able to synth the enzyme, and sold it to other corporations (claiming that dosed people eat less food, so that less time is spent eating, and the side effects could be 'externalized' - in other words, the employees would have to take care of it). Soon, after patent-wrangling and lawyer-paying, Scientist advised manager and boss to require their minions [wage-slaves] to eat these enzyme capsules. Certain privately-run jails and prisons became even more profitable, because Scientists discovered that these enzymes allowed human survival on finely-ground sawdust and beans. Then, Corp-Scientist discovered that... *expect the unexpected, and the chief cause of problems is solutions.*

©R@P ©ØR®P

Dunce upon a time, Vlad the mad ad-man was a sad man. His ads were bad, but not enough to chase 7\ viewers away from their sets (usually). Since Vlad worked cheap, and his ads were short, and they didn't actually hurt sales, the tee\ ran a few of Vlad's bad ads on backwater channels. Some viewers saw them again and again until they could recite every nearly-incomprehensible line of Vlag's bag ags. Wlag produced more brad rads, and the tee\ played a few of those too, primarily because there's new channels everyday. Even so, Vlad©ØR®P\$€ still wasn't profitable. So Vlad paid some poor people to hype his ads and called them 'publicists.' He paid other poor people to disrupt a few internet forums where the 'commentariot' had claimed to have figured out 'Vwads bad pwan' and were talking about matters that Vlad couldn't/wouldn't understand but made him squirm. Then Vlag's staff had to pay more destitute people to post irrelevancies and trivialities into the 'comments' section of certain websites because the website admin would delete obvious paid-for

troll comments. These expenses were minimal, but Vlad©Ø®®\$€ was about to go bankrupt anyway. Exactly the day that Vlad decided to close up his ©Ø®®\$€ forever, he was visited by a governbent reprehensitive that wanted elebenty billion more ads, and would pay cash, and they'd also take over the propaganda canned-pain to popularize Mad Vlad th' Ad Man and his cleber waze wif wurdz. They would even take over Vlad©Ø®®\$€'s 'internet policing' (for free!) because they claimed that Vladly was doing it badly. Vlag agreed. The governbent reprehensitive gave Vlad two piles of paper rectangles. One pile was shorter, whiter, and wider and caused much work for Vlad, but the other pile was taller, darker, and had someone's picture on every piece.

And so it goes. And sown, it grows, and soon it groans. Vlad-©Ø®®\$€ staff members learned to say things like 'Orwellian mindbomb' and 'dumbed down Newspeak' and 'babytalk for Big Brother'. One day, Vlad died of a heart attack brought on by eating too much rich food over too many years. His funeral was small. His elderly relatives had to struggle not to smirk during the funeral orations, for each speaker used many words from Vlad's bad ads.

And so sown, it grows and grows, aided by governbent humans, spread by ©Ø®®\$€-filtered 'programming,' paid for by those who prefer to rob the masses that act like asses; because, in too many ways, it is easier to steal from those perceived as less-than-human.

a rant about ants

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Ants have been around much longer than the human species that considers itself superior to mere ants. For millions of years, their tiny ant brains were good enough for an anthill/nest and a 'culture.' Each ant has only a few simple rules to follow, and that's enough to make ant colonies prosperous. The queen of the ant hill does not

command--each individual ant does what it thinks is best--yet the queen ant is the only female that reproduces. All the other ants live short lives of constant toil so that one (or a few) queen ants can lay thousands of eggs. The system is set up, evolutionarily calibrated, and runs smoothly even without commands and enforcement and punishment of 'wrongdoers.' Each individual ant knows just a few things and does them, and the queen is probably no more intelligent than the workers. As long as the ants are in a familiar environment, the ant hill can survive and grow, even though the queen ant(s) does nothing but eat and lay all the eggs while the 'exploited' worker ants do everything else. The system works very well in stable conditions, but it often suffers when conditions change. It also is exploitable.

A patient person with a paintbrush can manipulate trails of ants into circles or unproductive loops. Ants can be fooled into feeding poison to their queen.

Wealthy humans know what will benefit themselves, and those like them, and don't really need any further organization to be frightfully effective in getting more more. They often own and command corpor-ants, with many in-greedy-ants; and corpor-ants have many more rules and many more tools than an ant colony. The large worker hum-ants answer to the ultra-wealthy, who sometimes buy inform-ants and/or govern-ants, for they cannot be ultra-wealthy without being a burden upon hum-ant-ity. They are ignor-ant assist-ants of the 'ant tea cries.'

And, there but for the lack of cur-ant-see go I, *for 'the love of money is the root of evil.'*

Non \$erviam. \/
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Officer Smeg waits patiently. He's not a very smart man, but he knows the boss is thinking about the bleeding budget, how a few extra thou could save a job--or be spread around as pay raises. Smeg is confident he will hear what he expects to hear, and he does. "Okay. Do it."

So he does it. He gets a sheet of the important-looking official stationery he can, then gets some poor secretary to type up a letter on it. Then he puts on his best uniform and takes a trip to MEGAMEDCORP. He hands the receptionist the letter, and tells her it's so very important, and eventually one of MR MEGA's corp-drones reads a poorly

worded and vaguely suggestive letter asking how much it would cost to find out if there are any meth users in their collected blood samples? MR MEGA may want the dumbass local cop outta the building--but dumbass local cop knows he is likely to get what he wants, and his letter will go in the shredder.

Smeg is happy. He gets names, and a foot in the door for more. Maybe he'll try fishing for meth users next time. Or a young-un who he just knows takes something illegal and some dumb [deleted] lab tech won't tell him what it is but that hot chick is wanted by Smeg for non-smegmification in his Smeg-dom.

MR MEGA is happy. There is a steady income stream that didn't exist before, for Smeg's police farce will become addicted to impounded income and will return for more info. MR MEGA may ask for a personal share of the confiscated money ('paid informally') ('under the table') ('off the books') ('dammit Smeg, IN CASH, but more than this miniscule little present you brought me today). Perhaps he'll sell the names and data to other whoreporations for their profits-over-people purposes. Or maybe not. But he does have a 'duty to the stockholders' to grab every coin he can that should cost less than a coin to grab), and and perhaps neither he nor the stock/stake/shareholders live near the Smeg or even the country infested with the Smeg. Or near the victims. Hopefully. But the owners are sure that their wealth protects them from all that smells of Smeg.

Someday, Smeg will tell the judge that he got a phone call, or that he smelled an odor, or that the official hightech hippie-detester is an amazing device, accurate seventeen times out of seventeen trials, and that tests proved that the suspect(s) had THC in the blood samples 'taken at the station' or once blotted off the fender of a County cruiser.

If you lose, you lose, Smeg always says.

8 Short Stories

because they won't read themselves

HeatSink

The video shows two grey human-shaped blobs working on a segmented metal cylinder nearly buried under a halo of wires and pipes. One is holding a roll of tape.

"Gimme your watch. It's mechanical, no batteries."

"If you think it will mess up your digital, why are you putting it inside?"

"For science, and because I don't want to have the only watch that gets lifted in the world's first antigrav field."

"Confidence bordering on arrogance. Just like me. Still, just in case...."

[They work in silence, then move to computer workstations. Something makes an electrical connection, a loud popping noise is heard, and both grey blobs nearly block the image of the machinery.]

"Maybe we got a gram here."

"One part in ten thousand? Who's gonna believe that?"

"Even so, I think I do. Also there is some glitch in the calorimeter. I'll find it and then let's crank this baby up."

"One more test at this power."

"Fine. Can you change the time on your [digital] watch? It's about a second slow."

"Hmph. They match perfectly."

"Not according to this timer. Maybe I didn't do this one right."

"Write it down, and don't touch anything. Let's pop them again." [This process takes about an hour because various parts are replaced at random since no definite problems with the equipment could be found. The watches lose an additional second.]

"Now what do we do?"

"You mean, who do we have to tell about this or they will kill us later?"

"We have all kinds of loose ends here, [deleted name]. Not ready for prime time yet."

"Yes. We need better calorimeter data. I'm having trouble finding where the heat went. I can't believe it is magically lost."

"One part in ten thousand again. In a way that pisses me off. Now we have to do it underpowered again."

"[Deleted argument] These are called results! Three times in a row is even better. And it hasn't blown up yet."

"After three times, then what will you know? Is it a time machine, an antigravity machine, or a refrigerator?"

"Who knows? Then we poke and prod, turn this dial and that. And more juice, too."

"You get things ready, OK? I have to steal the flag off the building. And every timer I can find. What else?"

"Just stick with what we have. It's ready to pop now."

"You ought to try selling snake oil every now and then. It would be great fun giving the flag to the [loud popping noise] Dean and watching him hawk it to the alumnus."

"Perhaps. I can't see the Dean doing much damage with a flag, and it'd keep him happy. Still, I'm wondering if we should break open the watches. At least they aren't hot [radioactive]."

"Proper, careful, and scientific. But one more run, with trivial items like watches and timers. And your pen. And put the trivial items in a lead box for a day or two, just in case. We could use the time to find where the heat went."

"So you want one more test, this time we ramp the power up slowly, with trinkets. This we can do."

"Ten times longer, you think?"

"I'm tempted to go longer." [pause]

"Ten times it is, then. Ramping..."

"Ah, something's fried. The current is dropping already."

"Powering down."

"A broken thermocouple scares you that much?"

"How can you break a thermocouple? I'd say that dropping temperature is scary."

"So we have a very expensive yet scary refrigerator?"

"We may have a very expensive one way trip into Hell. The temp was dropping logarithmically, it wasn't just dropping. The pressure inside the calorimeter was dropping too. Probably in a log fashion. Hope the pen didn't leak."

"How'd we tap into vacuum?"

"Go ask Einstein. Maybe we just tapped into pure entropy."

"What I said, a vacuum. So if we do the next test in one of them big steel tanks, so if we screw up the Dean can sell hard vacuum as long as the tank and the power held out."

"And the tank breaks eventually. Or at lunch he drops an apple seed, which plugs a drainage valve, which admits a family of mice, and..."

"Which eat the seed and poop everywhere. How do you turn off the power when our machine is in a black hole?"

"The fusebox?"

"Got it. Now we take everything apart and find out what went where in real life. With pictures. I know you will be as careful as possible without me asking."

"Are these things going to turn radioactive?"

"Serve us right if they did."

The inventors of the HeatSink never desired to be famous, and actively avoided publicity. (All of the video data released had been altered to 'smudge' the video images of the pair of humans.) At first, they were unable to figure out exactly what the

HeatSink was doing, so they opposed the building of new machines. When 'certain others' persisted in attempting to get engineering details from their machine, the inventors destroyed it. These reasons are probably the reason they are still alive today, as both of them were incarcerated far from their labs. Other university personnel will never be able to use their original names or faces again after the attack because they lacked the caution of the inventors and were trying to profit off an invention they didn't understand.

The invention could increase the efficiency of any heat engine attached to it. With an insatiable vacuum at absolute zero attached to the tailpipe end of a motor, it can work with no fuel as long as there is a warm atmosphere. But it works wonderfully with fuel; and as a bonus the exhaust fumes disappear or freeze out inside the HeatSink. But the local savings in air pollution do not make up for the universal pollution as entropy increases--at least as far as the aliens were concerned.

Every time a HeatSink was put into use it caused a huge increase in the local entropy of the universe. This made it detectable over vast distances, which attracted at least one nearby civilization. This civilization thought the entropy increase was far more deleterious than the miniscule benefits to some primitive civilization having a place to dump waste heat. Humanity would find out that operating a HeatSink was considered a hostile act by at least one alien civilization.

The physics people have figured out that the HeatSink sort of hurries the universe on its way down to maximum entropy. This is probably what the aliens objected to, because the universe expands faster when entropy increases. As the HeatSink seemed to make waste heat disappear, it caused all the available matter within a very large sphere of space to spread out a little faster. And the effect didn't reverse itself when the machine was turned off.

Being in the exact center of a nearly featureless sphere of expanding space-time makes measuring the changes difficult. The Earth would probably have to shift a detectable amount in its orbit around the sun before Earthlings noticed what the HeatSink was doing, and even then the HeatSink connection might not have been obvious (or easy to stop using). It was easier for distant aliens to detect HeatSink use. They knew which star it was coming from and there was only one planet that emitted radio and TV broadcasts. Increasing the entropy of the universe enough for the alien civilization to detect was not a good idea. They sent a warship.

There are not many ways to defend against an attacking spaceship approaching at a third of light speed. It is very fortunate that, partly because of the activities of the HeatSink inventors, the future of the HeatSink was still being debated in various legislative bodies. The original HeatSink and two others built were the only ones that had ever been operated, and the warship destroyed these machines utterly by throwing smallish rocks at the places the machines had been used last. If politics had managed to get that particular genie tied up in red tape, a trio of pebbles thrown at it forced it back in its bottle.

The warship's brain knew little more than the HeatSink hadn't been used much and that destroying this civilization might not be necessary. Perhaps this primitive civilization had figured out the dangers on its own. But altering a warship's trajectory is not trivial when it's traveling at a third of light speed. Slight course corrections, and the Earth was spared. But the moon wasn't. As a gesture of good will the warships crashed into the moon, and a fraction of a percent of it is no longer in a lunar gravity well and easily accessible from spacecraft. But some of the remaining lunar surface is still partly molten, and the hottest and brightest spot rotates into view every few months as a reminder.

god tin mad dog

Since governments rarely agree on the truth, the actual history is a bit vague on many parts. I'll just start out with the young dog in the woods. I found her when I was one of many Army grunts wandering through the woods with a geiger counter. She was a small dog covered with filthy matted fur. Her floppy ears must have weighed a pound each with all the crud on them, and the dog only weighed eighteen. She had been through the wringer, all right.

Goddess knows how the mutt survived. Now I know they had us out there so long-- because we never found all of the plutonium. It's a good thing those kids were idiots. Even if they had managed to get the plutonium into the reservoir, it would have just sat there. I guess if they'd been smart enough to make a plutonium salt they wouldn't have been out there trying to poison the city anyways.

A day after I brought her back to base, her fur was all gone. I cut her fur short except for her eyelashes. The vet thought she was a goner. He did blood tests which he said were normal and found some dead parasites in the poop sample. The dog looked strange but healthy. Her skin was very tough, and made me think of an orange peel, but she seemed healthy and bouncy enough to be dangerous. I was relieved to find that she still emitted no radiation higher than background. An hour later she pooped, which also tested negative. I thought she was clean, I swear! And the Geiger counter was working, I used the 'hot' standard just like it says to in the manual.

The next morning after that I was throwing french fries for her to chase after and eat. She was not a sick dog then! She could snatch french fries out of the air and must have run a quarter mile before she squatted. Her poop was bright red with black markings on it. I screamed and Private Nobbs came running out with a lead box and put that stuff in the box with his bare hands. Then he looks at me and screams back, shoving the open lead box under my nose and I see the word 'hazmat' printed in black on red poop. I slammed the box shut and ran for a geiger.

When I got one, the poop wasn't much above background. By the time I found a standard and calibrated it, the poop seemed a little hotter, but still not much. We took

the box and the geiger counter and went looking for friends to show the poop to and didn't hear the phone ring.

We were lucky because we never bothered to shut the geiger off, because the next time we opened the box it screamed and three hands slammed the box shut at the same time. Me and Nobbs thought we were radiated. We went back to his office to call the brass, but the phone was ringing. Nobbs picks it up, says hello and listens. Then he takes out his cell phone, flips it open and sees that it's dead. He hears more then he hands me the phone and says listen. I heard a male voice say the plutonium would be radioactive now but it wasn't earlier, so I didn't have to worry. I asked how he managed that, and the voice tells me this story.

They'd tapped into the video lines and seen the little hoodlums take the plutonium. They weren't able to stop them, because they weren't supposed to be there. But they did track the car, just like the police did. They couldn't stop the car before the G-men got there and those kids found out how much firepower the government has when they started shooting. The car blew up and they got the plutonium out of the fire before it was spread everywhere. Somehow they did that right under the noses of the govvie agents while the car was burning.

The aliens couldn't hand the plutonium over, because they would be found out as spies. But they knew that the feds needed to get all the hot stuff back or they wouldn't stop looking, and did the next best thing. Then Nobbs starts grabbing at the dog, but she avoids him easily and hides behind my legs. I scoop her up and ignore Nobbs, who is hyperventilating. I ask the voice on the phone what happened next? And they say not to worry about it but that they want the machine back that kept the plutonium from radiating us, so just let it leave when we see it, and not to follow it. Nobbs starts yelling at me to clean up the poop in his office. The voice tells me to open the door, and we watch the dog poop roll out.

Seeking Diogenes

The white-coated doctor considered the typewritten letter on his desk. He used a blue marker to circle a sentence, which read "There must be at least a million people out there as smart as an Einstein or a Socrates." The letter writer's assumptions were that there were many really brilliant people when Earth's total population was small, and an even smaller number of those ancients had the leisure to think about much other than surviving. Since there were thousands of times more people in modern days, the genetic potential was there. Perhaps these people wound up in his patient population, the letter writer argued, and have they been screened for exceptional abilities?"

In the last few centimeters of blank space at the bottom, he wrote "I'd appreciate it if you could come meet me. Doctors do not travel well these days. He scribbled a phone

number, and his staff mailed it back to the sender after it was photocopied and the copy filed. (The blue marker did not photocopy well.) More than a week later, a girl walked into his office. He rose to meet her.

"A real pleasure to meet you, Diogenes. Please leave the door open. I have to admit I expected to meet an old man with a lantern. I'm Doctor Havel."

"I'm Dorothy. Thank you for agreeing to see me."

"Very welcome. I have to also admit that it took me a few minutes to realize human females had genetic potential too. Thank God I wasn't too busy to think for those few minutes."

"Does a fast-paced life make a human less intelligent?"

"Depends if it's forced on someone or not. Some people thrive on deadlines. So you want to interview my patients?"

"Yes."

"That's kind of hard to do. However, I've talked to them all. What exactly are you looking for?"

"I'm not sure. I also don't want to prejudice myself before I start looking."

"Tell me more about your project."

"I think there must be many underutilized people in our society. I want to find them."

"Are you wealthy? Of course not. Are you a potential patient of mine? Don't think so. Are you a bright kid? You got here. Let's figure out exactly what you want to do."

"I am looking to find people who have talents that our society does not reward and find them. Do you think Diogenes would have been picked up by the police after someone stole his clothes? Someone like that would end up in a mental institution today."

"So, I might have seen Diogenes on my couch at some point? And we are all poorer because nobody is looking out for these people? We should let them do their philosophy thing?"

"Yes..."

"Go on."

"Socrates wrote nothing, or at least nothing that survived the test of time. Could he be a professor in this day and age? Or would he be homeless? Diogenes and his followers used to sleep in the streets of ancient Greece. Nowadays people like that might wind up here."

"Very good. How old are you?"

"Fourteen."

"You need a handout to do science these days, especially if you are fourteen. Your parents are no help?"

"None whatsoever."

"Ugh. I think I have a little advice for you. First things first, though. Do you so solemnly swear that you are not involved in or part of any scam, joke, con, or plan that will cost me money, prestige, or raise my taxes?"

"I don't understand. I do swear that I am what I say I am. I mean that I'm not trying to deceive you in any way."

"OK. You will find a bunch of your missing philosophers living in substandard housing in rural areas. Our society's noise is too much for them, I think. However, I do find a few that come through here. Some are in need of my services, and some aren't. But there is one thing I tell them all, and I'll tell you. I know a lady, runs a company that makes high-tech widgets and has an excellent secretarial pool. Write her pool a letter, and tell them Doc Havoc sent you, and that you're perfect."

"Perfect?"

"Maybe you'll get a job. I don't have time to tell the whole thing, but once a young lady asked me questions very similar to yours. Now she runs a wonderful business and tells me to look for genius in those society has rejected and spit out here. She hires them, you see, and pays them next to nothing to do next to nothing. Sounds crazy, but she's making a run on Edison's record number for patents without resorting to any sort of legal nastiness."

"Doctor Havel, do you have a patient in five minutes?"

"In ten, actually, but he's here already. In my opinion, he needs my help more than you do, but I would love to get another letter, please. Letters like yours are rare things indeed."

What Good Is A Bum?

"Crap. Crap. Crap." Doc chanted as he poured the last of his brandy into one of many paper cups. Everyone else was silent. Five more people, janitors and kitchen staff by the looks of them, rushed into the already crowded staff room. He looked up, then passed the tray of paper cups to them. "Today this is medicine. Do you speak English?"

The newcomers nodded or said yes in accented English.

"Nurse Cannelly, please explain what has happened here today to these people. The rest of us need to spread out, or we'll all spread whatever microbes we already have. I don't think anyone here is infected, but let's do this as best we can. Don't let anyone come into or leave the hallway until the biohaz people get here. Keep the doors shut. And don't flush the damn toilets!"

A tall red-haired nurse walks over to the staff members as the rest of the people leave the room. "Last night we had a few cases go from bad to worse. They all were coughing, having trouble breathing, the works. We put them on oxygen, which made things worse. This morning, Doc decides it is bad enough to call in the government, as this disease is new and should not be spread around. We are going to wait for the specialists to arrive."

"OK," says a white-haired Hispanic man in a plain white uniform. "So why am I thanking the good doctor for his good brandy?"

"Because he found out that one of the nurses was sneaking booze in for one of the patients which improved his health," said the nurse.

"To be honest, I am not totally sure it will work," said the doctor, a bit unsteadily. "But we can all get a little drunk before they put us in plastic suits." He took a white plastic bottle out of a lab coat pocket. "And since I can't call a liquor store that delivers, we might have to drink this stuff. 200 proof, no smoking allowed. I can't believe they package pure ethyl alcohol in plastic bottles."

The white-haired man made a slight bow. "My brother will bring us whatever you would like."

"Not before the moon-suit crowd gets here. Better finish your drinks, they'll probably take them away from us." Doc said. "One hell of a thing, to throw away this brandy. I just wish those poor stiffs had a few bottles of this a couple of nights ago. Might not have even gotten sick."

"What poor stiffs?" asked the man.

"Four old bums we picked up a few days ago. They all lived together, and all got sick, then they all were brought here in pretty bad shape. Then our local Florence Nightingale has pity on one of them, he's going down and wants a last drink. Damned if that fungus in his lungs hated that drink more than anything Winston had thrown at it. That tiny bit of compassion just possibly might save us all."

"Did he recover?" the nurse wanted to know.

"Not out of the woods yet. Winston says the fungus is still hanging in there. He's trying to bump up the blood alcohol without killing his patients. There's not much wiggle room with alcohol." Doc downed a paper cup of brandy, not seeming to taste it. "Five new cases this morning. Besides Winston. He thinks it spreads by spores. Airborne spores. If one spore is enough to start the disease, we've all got it. Drink up."

The white haired man bowed slightly towards the doctor. "What are the first signs of disease?"

"If you get it, you will have grey fuzzy stuff growing on and in your lungs, causing persistent coughing. You'll know. Soon, if the new cases are secondary..." Doc picked up the white plastic bottle of ethanol. "Besides, maybe it's vulnerable when it's just starting. Maybe the little baby hyphae will get toasted by my alcoholic breath. Maybe I won't have to be cremated as soon as I die."

"Maybe you shouldn't be so morbid, in front of the general public especially. Admin will put lots of paper with official hospital seals in your personnel file."

"Hah. Let them. Least of my worries. I got an air-vectored infectious disease to worry about. I'll probably be drunk the rest of my life, too. Especially if I die tomorrow. But even if I live, this damn bug will live too. More cases are going to show up, I'd bet my life on it." He untwisted the top of the plastic bottle. "I'll have to live my declining years as an alcoholic. I'll go shopping in stores stocked by stoned stock clerks, where intoxicated cashiers will take my stinking money and I'll drunkenly weave my way

home, probably in my car. I'll have to deal with inebriated nurses at work, and blotto admin, and try not to cut my fingers when I'm cutting open some drunk when I'm drunk. I'll hire an alcoholic plumber because he can handle being smashed all the time. Maybe alcoholics will rule the country." He poured a generous amount of ethanol into his little paper cup.

"Don't you think..." Nurse Connally was interrupted by the doctor.

"Nope, not now. Gotta get used to it. All of humanity will evolve to be alcoholics. and then the fungus will learn to handle ethanol a little better, and then only the drunkest will survive." He tried to quickly drink the contents of his cup and nearly succeeded. The nurse took a small bottle of water out of her pocket and put it into his hand as he choked. The water helped once the doctor was able to drink a little.

"The fumes are what get to you," opined the nurse. "Next time, drink a little water before you try to breathe again, and you'll impress everyone at parties." The doctor emitted a croaking noise, so Nurse Connally continued. "Never thought I'd learn anything useful at a party. You ever see a couple of guys play grain alcohol bomb? The object is to hold a shot of grain alcohol in your mouth longer than the competition. If you let the fumes get to you, it's spew time. Can I go get a nebulizer?"

"What?" croaked the doctor.

"A nebulizer. I want to put grain alcohol in it and see if it asphyxiates me or the fungus first." She looked at the small group of hospital staff who might not know what a nebulizer was. "It will make the alcohol go into the air, so I can breathe it in."

"Get as many as you can, bring them here, and think of what you are going to say at the press conference. They'll strap a camera on a radio controlled toy and you point it at yourself and answer questions."

"I am not a political animal."

The Dream

In a dream, he found himself among many small dark-skinned people, none he recognized. He was at least a head taller than anyone else. The stone buildings were primitive and strange, too. But the cliffside he was currently standing in was definitely Canyon De Chelle. He had been there once and was impressed by the solid stone cliffs. But these people were wearing clothing a little too rough to be tourists. Suddenly he knew he had been transported into the past. These must be the people who lived here many years ago. They looked like dirt-poor farmers who were baking in the heat until he showed up. Even though he had no idea how he had arrived there, his dreaming brain provided him a task to do. These people were obviously subsisting on corn, with a few vegetables thrown in, and meat was very rare in their diet. They would need iron supplements at the very least, especially the women.

In his backpack there was a book he could not read, a bottle full of a thick yellow liquid, and two knives. Cheap cast iron knives. Moving slowly, he picks up one of the knives at arm's length, holding the knife by the point. He drops it onto the stone floor, backed away, and bowed to a child nearby. Somebody picks up the knife, but he keeps his head down. The people started making comments, none of which he could understand. He stood up slowly. The crowd quieted. He takes out the other knife, then drops to his knees. "Watch!" he says, forgetting that he would not be understood. He rubs the knife on the stone floor as if to sharpen it, quickly scattering a small amount of grit and iron filings. He reverently collects this dust, and puts it in the palm of his hand very carefully. He looks at all the reddish-brown faces looking back at him. He takes a pinch of the dust, sprinkles it on his tongue, and theatrically swallows it. He looks at all the faces again. He offers a pinch of dust to a very old woman, who shakes her head. She says something, and a young man approaches. He gives him a pinch of the dust. The man licks his palm, swallows, and all the faces look for effects. Unfortunately, the iron takes time to digest, and eating a pinch of dirty grit doesn't provide any sort of psychoactive kick. However, the old woman spoke again. She was handling the other knife. She spoke a few more words, and more people stepped up for a pinch of his iron-containing grit. He smiled at her, and she motioned him closer. She mimics his motions of sharpening his knife, so he does it again. Then once more on another spot. He gathers the iron-contaminated grit he produced and gives it to a woman this time. The old woman pantomimes eating many pinches of grit, he shakes his head and holds up one finger. Too much iron is toxic. Suddenly very tired, he sits down. The old woman points at the sun. He holds up five, then eight, then three, then all his fingers and does his best to look puzzled. The old woman laughs. She points at her knife. "Watch!" she says. He laughs. It should take them a long time to use up the iron in the knives. His limbs are very heavy now.

He barely has the energy to examine his backpack once again. He pulls out the bottle, which is refrigerator-cold green glass with a yellow plastic screw cap. Lemon juice? He finds himself on a sailing-ships' wooden deck. His mind rebels. Sprouting beans are a much better way to cure scurvy. He manages to wake himself up.

Ecstasy Electrodes, Inc

To the staff that read this: I added some [comments] so you will be able to understand the jargon and abbreviations. God help us all.

To: Dr. G. [This guy is a doc in our county jail.]

Thanks for letting me know promptly about the the incident which occurred in the EIU [Electrode Implantation Unit]. This is the first failure of WH [wire heading, an op-

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eration that implants electrodes in specific areas of the brain that, when stimulated, causes immobilizing pleasure] and all the brass who know of this project are breathing down my neck. I hope the perp is in isolation.

I'm afraid you will have expert help very soon whether you want it or not. This little incident has everyone stirred up like hornets out of a bashed nest. Maybe the perp has a weird brain. TPTB [the powers that be] will be even more pissed if we have to start using KO drugs [drugs that produce unconsciousness] again.

A word of advice: if one or two of your WH patients looks especially mean and scary (or can be made to look that way), teach them how to turn the power back on. When the AV [audio visual] guys start hanging around--and you know they will--get them to video your scary patient plugging the electrodes back in after you disconnect them. You are going to have the cameras there for the operation, and TPTB like videos like that, mark my words. And the AV guys will appreciate the work.

I haven't told you this before, but during the early stages of WH development a few patients caused a very little trouble with post-operative movement. They were always cooperative for re-insertion, except once, but it lead to nothing. I'd suspect the other WH patients would have caused worse than the injuries this perp sustained once they figured out who pulled their plugs. Too bad it took them so long! They would have solved your problem for you.

TPTB really like this project and I'm guessing will expand it shortly, so watch what you say. No WH has ever complained until your little problem. TPTB will keep your problem little, too. Just watch.

I don't want any heads to roll because of this, much less yours. It is unfortunate that you performed this operation yourself, as it makes you look incompetent. I am sure the second WH op will vindicate you, esp. if the perp can resist WH again. I know it is supposed to be impossible to fool the scanners when the electrode is in the right place, so this guy might be abnormal. Between you and me, don't mention the Buddhist stuff again unless asked. I don't think TPTB want to hear it.

If there is any assistance I could give you, don't hesitate to ask. I want our group poised on top of this project if there is going to be any ramping up, and seven-to-ten-digit salaries for all. After the feds get through with you, let's get together to drink some of my latest homebrew and compare notes.

Sincerely,

Dr. S.

Induced Mutation

Report by Prisoner 219-249

As instructed, I did what I thought best to get information out of the [deleted person's name]. I apologize in advance for my poor judgement in these matters.

First, [deleted] just looked at me like I was a piece of trash. I didn't let him make me change my poker face, tho. I just waited him out. In ten minutes or so he wanted to know who I was, so I told him I was a paid informer and then very specifically explained to him that I might get some time off my sentence here if I got him to talk, and I'm sorry I did that but I was desperate. But it made him laugh.

In another couple minutes he starts. He had a clipped-fast way of talking English, got a lot of words out every minute. He doesn't mind my taking notes, even helping me get them right. Personally, I think he was army, maybe an officer from some foreign country.

He convinced me that he is from the future, and knows generally what us humans are going to do next hundred years or so, but he insists that his presence here has altered the future forever, no matter what happens next. He says he started changing the future in a logarithmic fashion, he is like a 'domino that knocks over ten other dominos, which each knock ten more, but the universe has infinite dominoes which balances this out. He is happy once I can parrot his talk, but I understand only a little.

Then he explains why he and Dr. Roentgen were shouting, and why he had the paper bag of flies with him. It seems that the good doctor has just discovered some new form of radiation, and it will make the flies sick like a 'canary in a coalmine' gets sick from the gas before the miners do. He seems reasonable, even if his German is poor. Perhaps Dr. Roentgen doesn't speak English?

I asked him to go over the story of his arrest several times, and learned nothing new. He seemed to be getting tired. Whoever decided then to bring us a bottle was a genius and has my everlasting thanks. A few drinks later, he told many useless stories about people who do not exist. I asked him why he even bothered with such stupid people. He says it's because that is what a good person does when surrounded by such stupid people. Then I asked him what the stupid people should do with such a genius to guide them, and he laughed and said his private universe that he claims to be from has already lived through 'it' once and that his own stupidity is the only thing separating him

from the rest of the stupid. I asked him what 'it' was, and he tried to tell me, but could not even start explaining. He said his people were being amused to death and would not explain further.

To keep him talking, I asked what happened in his private universe, and he gets quiet. I asked what he hoped to do, and he talks. He hoped to get Dr. Roentgen to expose these flies to his rays for a few days, because he said that Stadler and Müller didn't publish their paper until 1927, and Dr. Roentgen should be more careful. When I asked exactly how Dr. Roentgen's rays are bad, he said it causes 'cancer,' whatever that is, and not to let any of it get on me if I wanted to have healthy children. So I asked why it was so bad that we have to wait until 1927 to learn that Dr. Roentgen's X-rays can do damage, and he says that the science of genetics, whatever that is, needs the ability to induce mutations at will, and maybe the 'green revolution,' whatever that is, will come a little earlier, and maybe the human population would learn to control itself before it got so far into population overshoot. I asked what population overshoot was, and he talks about the flies, saying that a couple of flies in a bottle with a piece of banana are in fruit fly heaven, but if the offspring can't escape, the banana runs out and every fly starves to death in fruit fly hell. I ask what kind of bottle the human race can't escape from, and he laughs and says it's a pretty blue bottle but it will stay sealed. Afterwards, his words become slurred and he begins to sleep.

I don't mind answering any more questions, but could I have some coffee or tea?

Transmission begins:

The video data began with an airplane. If the Wright brothers had been extremely wealthy, their fourth or fifth airplane might have looked like this one, with a shiny engine and four-color paint job. It is flying low and slow over a yellow sand desert. A nearby sand dune emits a moderate cloud of dust, then a sand-colored and dune-shaped advanced flying craft accelerates straight up into the sky. The primitive airplane is rocked, then flipped over by invisible air currents. The larger craft descends and binds the little airplane to itself as if it were a paperclip attracted to a magnet. The airplane is damaged in the process.

The scene changes to that of a bug-eyed insectoid alien. Text scrolls underneath the complicated face. "We apologize for the unintentional destruction of one of your airships. The occupants are safe and we will return them immediately. The damage to the airship will be repaired." The scene changes, showing two blobby tentacled beings, who wave tentacles that change color as they come onscreen. Then Bugeyes is back. "We would like to emphasize that this action was not intended to be a hostile act, but was merely an accident." Something that looks like a white flattened stick is waved in

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front of the alien face, and Bugeyes goes off camera for a few seconds, then returns. A second alien literally hovers partly off-camera. "We regret to inform you that this announcement has been made in error. The accident that occurred happened twelve light years from here, and we regret any inconvenience this announcement has caused. [Untranslatable]. All these [untranslatable] hot planets and their [untranslatable] vague aliens look the same to me.
Transmission ends.

END

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Sadder but wiser and Non-\$erviam